

## KEY TENDENCIES IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE US INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

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**Abstract.** *The article is aimed at finding current key trends shaping the development of the United States' Indo-Pacific strategy. The author dwells in detail on the changing nature of US relations with its traditional allies and other countries in the region, noting that the dominant paradigm driving this relationship is the US intention to keep containing the People's Republic of China. The analysis of the trends also reveals some of the obstacles that limit the development of a more comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy.*

**Keywords:** *Indo-Pacific region, US strategy, containment of China, traditional allies, regional security architecture, People's Republic of China, world community.*

As is commonly known, today's transforming international system is witnessing a shift in the United States' position in the world in several areas: the economy, military power, soft and institutional power. Budget deficit, increasing national debt, downward trend of the economy, gradual loss of competitive advantage in technology due to globalization, slight decrease of military spending, deteriorating image of the US and rising status of many developing countries in international organizations all show the US' decreasing influence in the world.

At the same time, China's role in the international system is changing. Beijing's weight is gradually increasing, which is reflected in its more active participation in international organizations, its growing role in building global security and the rapid development of its military capabilities. China is moving towards creating a new international mechanism, seeking to displace the United States in Indo-Pacific, expand the scale of its economic model, and change the regional order in its favour [6].

This altering reality has pushed the American agenda to contain the Chinese, which has now shifted to the Indo-Pacific region. The world can observe the ever-growing role of the region in economic, political, and security spheres, so that the region is naturally turning into an arena of cooperation and confrontation between the great powers. In this region, Washington intends to maintain the status

quo, and the US Indo-Pacific strategy has become a tool to promote American interests.

Earlier, the "strategic pivot" to Asia began under Barack Obama; it followed the US costly wars in the Middle East. The 45th US President Donald Trump's administration issued a separate strategy for United States' conduct in the region, atypical to the US foreign policy documents. Today, the development of this strategy has been continued by the Democratic administration of the new President Joe Biden. The strategy begins with the recognition that "the future of ... the world depends on a free and open Indo-Pacific" and the following statement: "the Indo-Pacific faces mounting challenges, particularly from the PRC" [3].

The first paragraph of the strategy acknowledges the importance of the region to the U.S. and the world in the following terms: "the region ... is home to more than half of the world's people, nearly two-thirds of the world's economy, and seven of the world's largest militaries" [3]. Having analysed the strategy, the author has identified several key trends in its development:

- Widening of US fields of regional activity.
- Continuing loss of US influence in the region.
- Further China containment policy with distinctive features.
- Enhancing relations with certain partners and allies in the region.

- Recession in relations with traditional US regional allies.
- Search for approaches to new local partners.
- Potential changes in US North Korean policy.
- Growing importance of the Quad.
- Uncertain prospects for South-East Asian countries.

As for widening of US' regional activity fields, it concerns the following areas: climate cooperation, infrastructure development, technological innovation, digitalization, combating COVID-19 [2].

A defining trend for the region will remain the changing role of the US in relation to China. In addition to this, Beijing has recently greatly enhanced its economic power over local countries, including through the Belt and Road Initiative, in contrast to which the US is developing a Build Back Better World initiative [1].

This means that the already outlined US policy of containing China will continue, but it will also involve cooperation in limited areas of common interest such as ecology and non-proliferation. China's rise has forced the US closer to most traditional allies like Japan and South Korea.

This is confirmed by the reaffirmed US support for Japan, the promise of intensified cooperation on the basis of the U.S.-Japanese Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security [5] and the close attention to the Senkaku Islands (the new administration promises China to retaliate in case of encroachment on these territories). In the case of South Korea, the new administration's decision to lift range restrictions on Seoul's missiles [7] is a converging step, which simultaneously targets Beijing and Pyongyang.

Relations with other allies (the Philippines and Thailand) have become tenser. In the first case, it was due to "interference" in Manila's

internal affairs. In the second case, the distancing began with US sanctions after Thailand's military coup in 2014. The two countries now favour China on certain issues (military procurement [8], conflict resolution over disputed territories [4]).

To the "non-aligned ones" (Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore), Washington is working out new approaches, even though some of them gravitate more towards China. As for the North Korean threat, the approach is also likely to change. The goal remains the total denuclearisation of the peninsula, but Biden, as the representative of a democratic administration, incorporates the human rights factor into the orbit of pressure on North Korea. The priority is still diplomacy, however, based on strict containment jointly with allies.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with India, Japan, Australia and the U.S. has also gained momentum. Its scope has now expanded from mitigating natural disasters to a variety of other areas, of which security is gradually becoming the focus. The new US administration's decision to increase the frequency of summit meetings confirms its growing importance.

However, the US Indo-Pacific strategy leaves room for uncertainty about Southeast Asian economies. The presence of some conservative establishment elites in the region may explain it. This may be due to the fact that some countries refuse to choose between the US and China, and a strategy for interaction with them has not yet been indicated.

The United States, however, has low regard for this reluctance to choose between the two sides, and this is one of the shortcomings of the modern IPS. These developments also disclose another drawback of the strategy. It limits the freedom to make external policy choices for local states, potentially leading to discontent with U.S. actions.

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## **КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ В ЭВОЛЮЦИИ ИНДО-ТИХООКЕАНСКОЙ СТРАТЕГИИ США**

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***Аннотация.** Статья направлена на выявление современных ключевых тенденций, формирующих развитие стратегии США в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе. Автор подробно останавливается на меняющемся характере отношений США с их традиционными союзниками и другими странами региона, отмечая, что доминирующей парадигмой этих отношений является намерение США и дальше сдерживать Китайскую Народную Республику. Анализ тенденций также выявляет некоторые препятствия, которые ограничивают разработку более всеобъемлющей Индо-Тихоокеанской стратегии.*

***Ключевые слова:** Индо-Тихоокеанский регион, стратегия США, сдерживание Китая, традиционные союзники, архитектура региональной безопасности, Китайская Народная Республика, мировое сообщество.*