

INDO-PACIFIC CONSTRUCT EMERGING ARCHITECTURE

Today in Russia we can observe serious discussions about the future of the Indo-Pacific region. The reason for this is clear – it is obvious that the process of creation of Indo-Pacific Construct acts as the defining core of the entire changing system of international relations in the Pacific and Indo-Pacific Asia. There is no doubt that the ongoing changes open up new opportunities for the countries of the region but also create some new threats. Today it is not yet clear what will prevail – new opportunities or new threats. Everything will depend on how and in what direction the events will develop. The problem is that the main driver for Indo-Pacific integration are the United States. From the burden of problems and serious challenges to their interests in the Asia-Pacific region, the Americans found a surprisingly simple way out: they placed the APR in another, even larger geographical area - the so-called Indo-Pacific region. In this new configuration, as they suppose, the overall situation and the alignment of forces would be completely different - China is on its periphery, and the United States planned to have India in the center as an ally, comparable to China in terms of population and economic growth rates. Thus, the confrontation with China in Asia would enter a completely different phase, in which the US position looks significantly more preferable than in the old APR configuration.

But the problem is that in Washington they plan to build the Indo-Pacific project as a kind of a military bloc. They expect to draw India into this bloc. For example, Iskander Rehman, who worked in one of the most authoritative research centers of the United States – The Brookings Institution, also dwells on the role of India and even tries to paint a picture of what, in his opinion, will look like US–Indian cooperation in ITR. In the event of “a Sino-American conflict that could erupt in the Western Pacific, India, he warns, could eventually be called upon to provide a stabilizing flanking presence West of the Strait of Malacca, securing Maritime communications, while American naval forces would be concentrated elsewhere. It is thanks to such a possible scenario, he believes, based on perceived threats, the strategic partnership between India and the United States will reveal its true potential”¹.

Another American condition – is strict restriction for participants of future IPC – they must necessarily be democratic countries. It is clear that this condition was introduced in order to prevent the possibility of Chinese participation in the future Indo-Pacific Construct. If we look at the boundaries of the Indo-Pacific region marked by the Americans, we find that these boundaries almost completely coincide with the areas of responsibility of the Pacific Command of the USA. This confirms that military objectives were key in the development of the plan for the formation of the Indo-Pacific region.

As about Russia we can see that the whole territories of Northeast Asia remain outside the borders of the Indo-Pacific Construct. Thus, Russia is outside the Indo-Pacific political map and under the threat that its considerable achievements in the development of cooperation with the countries of the region and its presence there in various spheres are under real threat.

Among some Russian experts voices are being heard that the project “open and free” IPC is not suitable for us, that it also undermines such a global Russian project as the concept of Greater Eurasia. Greater Eurasia is the idea to form a kind of global space around Russia with more or less general rules in trade and investment from the European Union to ASEAN, that is, from Western Europe to Southeast Asia. The political foundation of the project will be the principles of peace, stability, justices and mutual trust that are very close to our partners in India and ASEAN countries. It also includes the principle of connectivity as the vital part of the politics in Asia when no one dictates values for the connected countries. Today ASEAN countries propose to put the principle of connectivity into the basis of the entire Indo-Pacific construct. Russia fully supports this proposition but it is clear that the US are unlikely to support this initiative, because their goal is to promote their interests and their values in the region. But despite this opposition the fight for fulfillment of connectivity principle at least partially is a noble task that will undoubtedly receive support from Russia that has long and close cooperation with India, and the conception of connectivity is as close to it as to India and ASEAN countries.

Today we can say that the Emerging Architecture in Indo-Pacific is one of the most important problems for the future of regional and global security. One can see two mostly different alternatives for the future of this vast region. I mean American vision on the one side and vision of India and ASEAN countries that are very close to each other on the other side. How these two visions will interact in the future is not en-

tirely clear. There is a possibility that as new participants emerge in the Indo-Pacific project, there will be a process of forming a common vision in which the proposals of India and ASEAN countries would occupy an important place. But there may be a situation when the United States will impose its vision on all other participants of this project. Naturally, out of these two projects, Russia is ready to support the Indian vision of the future, as it is as close as possible to Moscow vision of the future of Asia. We believe that the voice of India should be particularly weighty as it is clear that the Americans will never be able to build an Indo-Pacific construct without the participation of India.

It should also be said that for Moscow is very important that the potential IPC participants, and first of all India, do not see the reasons why Russia cannot participate in this project. Thus, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, regarding the prospects for the development of IPC, stated: “India does not consider the Indo-Pacific region as a closed club with a limited number of members ... it includes all countries within this geography, as well as other countries, who are interested in this”². A vice-president of the Indian Observer Research Foundation, Unnikrishnan Nandan, said that “in our country, we do not believe that the concept of” open and free “IPR is aimed at deterring anyone”. “The Indo-Pacific format, he said, was proposed on a geographical basis, which does not exclude Russia”. Moreover, in his opinion, “IPR cannot exist without Greater Eurasia, therefore, he suggested even finding a new term for this project that would not frighten other countries”. He also pointed out that “problems around IPR arose after Trump actively supported this concept”³. As we see, among the potential Indo-Pacific Construct member countries there is an obvious request for Russia's possible participation in this project. It is clear that they are thus hoping to get an ally in the struggle to reformat the American project from the military bloc into the broad unification of the countries of the Indo-Pacific region as part of global economic integration. I think that Russia should respond to this request and put her “weight” in favor of Indian and ASEAN countries’ visions that suits Russian vision to the maximum extent.

It should also be noted that an important element of the emerging architecture of international relations in the Indo-Pacific region is the proximity of the positions of India and ASEAN countries about the future developments. They are clearly in favour of “turning international competition into international cooperation”⁴. Moreover, the key principles of the organization and functioning of ASEAN - sovereign equality, non-interference, non-use of force, mutual support, a central role in

Asian politics – are very weakly coincide with aggressiveness, rigidity, unambiguity in approaches with the primacy of ideology – that is, just that, which is the foundation for American plans. ASEAN countries, which at the meeting in Bangkok in June 2019 approved their joint vision of this project, are completely in solidarity with the position of India regarding the future format in which integration should be the main idea. The Geostrategic Concept of the Indo-Pacific Region, adopted by them, states that ASEAN countries confirm their “centrality, inclusiveness, complementarity, order based on rules and international law, and commitment to promote economic cooperation in the region”. They also stated that “ASEAN-led mechanisms can serve as a platform for dialogue and cooperation”⁵. This statement meets the interests of Russia, extremely preoccupied with preserving mechanisms in which our country participates in the Asia-Pacific region.

As we can see, India and the ASEAN countries are forming such an agenda that generally meets both Russia's current and long-term interests. If their plan is adopted, Russia will be able to preserve all the best that has been developed over the years of cooperation and move further along the path of deepening our relations in new even more global integration projects aimed at maintaining peace and balance of interests in Asia.

But in fact one can see that there is no clarity on so many issues, in emerging architecture of Indo-Pacific Construct. In what direction will the project of “open and free” Indo-Pacific develop, will it turn into a full-fledged military or political-economic union, will it remain in the format of a “democratic” four, or will other Asian countries gradually join it – all these are questions on which answers still not given. Potential participants in this project are still facing long and complex negotiations, which do not necessarily end with a certain agreement or compromise. Moreover, during the political consultations, much can change both in the international arena and in the internal political situation in the countries of Asia and especially in the USA. Due to this uncertainty there is also a fairly common opinion in Russia that we should not participate in any activities related to the Indo-Pacific project at all. Among Russian experts, the general opinion prevails as to why it was created and in which direction will it move. To put it all briefly, it was created against the growing influence of China and could possibly develop in the anti-Chinese and anti-Russian direction, more likely as a military-political alliance. But I believe that another point of view, also very common in the expert community, will prevail – Moscow should strong-

ly support the Indian vision of the future and the vision of the ASEAN countries regarding the Indo-Pacific project. Such cooperation will lead to the strengthening of our relations, to a greater awareness of common positions and, quite possibly, to the search for an interface between the Indo-Pacific Construct and Greater Eurasia. I think that if Washington is seriously planning to build a new configuration of alliances in Asia then they will need to negotiate and compromise precisely with the ASEAN countries. By the way, there is a feeling that they are already preparing for a possible compromise, in terms of developing a common vision for the future of engineering that suits everyone. Recently, the United States has somewhat changed the key vector regarding the future of the Indo-Pacific space. Now there, under the influence of both ASEAN and Indian approaches to the construction of Indo-Pacific Construct they began to talk more about economics and, large infrastructure projects and plans.

Before our eyes, international politics has changed significantly, it is becoming increasingly dependent on subjective opinions on the prevailing trends in the information field, formed by competing international influence groups. In this situation, trust, support and equality that we can observe in Russia's relations with India and ASEAN countries may be the only points for moving forward in Asia and Indo-Pacific spaces.

¹ I. Rehman, "Air Sea Battle and its Indo-Pacific Future," Analysis (ORF), March 13, 2012, <http://www.orfonline.org/cms/sites/orfonline/modules/96>

² <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/20657>

³ <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/5820629>

⁴ <https://regnum.ru/news/2506669.html>

⁵ АСЕАН утвердила перспективы в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе с ведущей ролью блока в нем / ТАСС, 23.06.2019, URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/6582260>