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## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RUSSIA–INDIA–CHINA–ASEAN COOPERATION MECHANISM FOR A NEW WORLD ORDER

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**Abstract:** The article explores the potential of the Russia — India — China — ASEAN (RIC + ASEAN) cooperation mechanism as a transformative force in the international arena. Positioned as a pragmatic and far-sighted association, synergy between the actors can have a positive impact on regional integration, economic development and strategic stability. The author emphasizes the primary role of the Global South in the context of the transformation of the world order, compares the concept of Greater Eurasia with the Indo-Pacific vision of the United States, evaluates the importance of the RIC+ASEAN cooperation mechanism, and propose actual areas of interaction.

**Keywords:** *Russia, India, China, ASEAN, the United States, Quad, Global South, Greater Eurasia*

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Научная статья. Исторические науки

## ЗНАЧЕНИЕ ЧЕТВЕРКИ РОССИЯ – ИНДИЯ – КИТАЙ – АСЕАН ДЛЯ НОВОГО МИРОПОРЯДКА

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**Аннотация:** В статье исследуется потенциал формата сотрудничества Россия — Индия — Китай — АСЕАН (РИК+АСЕАН) как преобразующей силы на международной арене. Позиционируемое как прагматичное и дальновидное объединение, синергия между странами четверки может положительно отразиться на региональной интеграции, экономическом развитии и стратегической стабильно-

сти. Автор подчеркивает первостепенную роль Глобального Юга в условиях трансформации миропорядка, сравнивает концепцию Большой Евразии с Индо-Тихоокеанским видением Соединенных Штатов, оценивает важность механизма сотрудничества РИК+АСЕАН, а также приводит актуальные направления взаимодействия.

**Ключевые слова:** Россия, Индия, Китай, АСЕАН, США, Quad, Глобальный Юг, Большая Евразия

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## Global South and the Shifting Geopolitical Landscape

The world order is undergoing profound changes. The Global South is becoming a key player in this transformational era. It is becoming increasingly clear that the trajectory of the world order is inextricably linked to the actions and decisions of developing countries. The Global South is a fulcrum on which the balance of global power is maintained.

Analyzing successful cooperation formats, the important role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) immediately comes to mind. It has managed to become a successful mechanism for resolving regional issues and maintaining stability.

BRICS also gives scale to foreign policy. After the extension, the BRICS+ will account for almost 29% of global GDP, its share in daily oil production will grow from 20.4% to 43.1%, and the share of the world population will amount to 46.7%<sup>1</sup>. Nowadays, more than 40 more states want to join the association. Of these, 22 have already submitted official applications, and the procedure for their mission was finalized at the summit in Johannesburg in 2023<sup>2</sup>.

The world is currently undergoing a reconfiguration of geopolitical alliances. Against this background, it seems necessary to develop more and more new options for cooperation. The article proposes to consider the format of Russia — India — China — ASEAN cooperation, which has great potential to change the geopolitical landscape. It also appears to be a pragmatic and visionary association. Synergy between Russia, India, China and ASEAN could become a driving force for regional integration, economic development and strategic stability.

## **Greater Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific Vision of the United States': A Comparative Analysis**

In the ever-changing geopolitical landscape, the importance of regional institutions and cooperation mechanisms is becoming increasingly apparent. The changing world order has attracted even more attention to them, but the United States and its partners do not give up trying to blur their status. This does not go unnoticed. Many countries interpret the actions of the United States as a manifestation of a desire to preserve the status quo, a familiar and beneficial world order, for Washington.

A striking example is the difference between the goals of Greater Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific (with the United States' specifics). Although Washington advocates a "free and open" Indo-Pacific, there are concerns that this approach is inherently selective. Moreover, the Indo-Pacific concept with the U.S. specifics initially contains a deliberately confrontational element, which cannot become the basis for building a new world order.

In stark contrast, Russia has taken a firm stand against attempts by the United States to destabilize existing multilateral structures. The commitment to supporting institutions such as ASEAN and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) underlines the commitment to preserving the principles of cooperation and joint development. The concept of Greater Eurasia, followed by Russia, reflects a vision that goes beyond unilateral interests and aims to form a just multipolar world order. Greater Eurasia implies the presence of several poles of power at once.

### **Quad and the U.S. Attempts to Maintain the Status Quo in Indo-Pacific**

The U.S. attempts to maintain the status quo turned into discussions about the emergence of an "Asian NATO". A contender for its role is called the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which includes the United States, Australia, India and Japan. The intensification of cooperation within the framework of this alliance is a direct expression of the intensified rivalry of the great and middle powers.

For a long time, cooperation within the Quad was built on a military-defense basis. This is confirmed by the increased number of exercises and naval rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. However, in 2021, the Quad expanded the range of issues of multilateral cooperation. Now the agenda includes issues of vaccine diplomacy, climate change, technological cooperation, maritime security, cybersecurity and the provision of external humanitarian assistance<sup>3</sup>.

Quad infrastructure diplomacy is also a new area of interaction. In August 2017, the Foreign Ministers of the Quad countries stated the need for high-quality infrastructure development in order to ensure freedom and openness of sea routes, as well as improve intraregional relations. November 12, 2018 A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia, aimed at implementing major infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific<sup>4</sup>. And on November 15, 2018, the growing debt of the Belt and Road Initiative's (BRI) member countries was not spared during Quad official meeting in Singapore.

There is no doubt that integration initiatives, including the BRI, are perceived by the Quad countries as the main factor in expanding the economic and political influence of China. At the same time, the combination of economic and defence competition imposed on Beijing by Washington, as well as most Quad parties' desire to form a balance of power in the Indo-Pacific actually testifies to the "anti-China" character of the Quad. In fact, Quad is perceived as an instrument of rivalry, which makes its concept unsuitable for building a new world order. It's no secret that the United States is interested in the possible creation of an Asian NATO. However, Washington is still far from realizing this idea.

### **RIC+ASEAN and Quad: Navigating the New Geopolitical Landscape**

In the era of the transformation of the world order, the role of Southeast Asia has also increased. ASEAN is becoming more and more important in the international arena. It's not for nothing that the Association is called an "oasis of stability", because its participants manage not only to avoid serious shocks, but also to play a central role in shaping regional dynamics.

RIC (Russia — India — China) mechanism also emphasizes the importance of regional cooperation. The inclusion of ASEAN in this partnership promises to strengthen the association and bring it in line with the changing realities of the world stage. RIC+ASEAN cooperation has the potential to create a reliable and dynamic group of countries capable of solving regional issues and making a significant contribution to building multipolar world.

What distinguishes the proposed RIC — ASEAN mechanism? It includes countries with sovereign policies. Moreover, it is aimed not at competition but at creation, as it is interested in the development of its own re-

gion. RIC — ASEAN also appears to be economically more promising and resistant to external pressure.

On the one hand, this mechanism may seem complicated and ponderous. However, it has serious potential to move away from a vision that serves the interests of only one power. It's less ideologized and more responsive to the needs of the region, which represents a step towards a more inclusive and balanced world order.

It is important to note Russia's role in this emerging geopolitical scenario. Moscow has made serious efforts to establish contacts between Beijing and New Delhi after the escalation of the situation in Ladakh in May 2020. At that time, against the background of growing tensions between India and China, Russia became one of the few countries that actively promoted dialogue, and did not try to push the two countries in favor of their interests, as the United States and its partners did. Moreover, Russia's support for India's permanent membership in the UN Security Council underscores its commitment to a more equitable and representative global governance structure.

### **Unlocking Potential: Russia — India — China — ASEAN Cooperation in Relevant Areas**

The format of Russia — India — China — ASEAN cooperation will help strengthen the building of a new multipolar world order. The changing geopolitical landscape requires innovative mechanisms to enhance interaction and solve emerging issues with the participation of truly sovereign and independent actors.

There are already many different platforms where each of the states can interact in the spheres of economy, humanitarian policy and security. Nevertheless, the region still needs to step up strategic initiatives. Against this background, it seems necessary to identify a number of formats in which the actors could successfully interact.

- Given the growing importance of digital technologies, a special summit on cybersecurity could contribute to the development of joint efforts for sustainable development, the implementation of artificial intelligence (AI), as well as the prevention of cyber threats;
- Equally important is the collective solution of environmental problems and the promotion of green technologies. Russian companies, for example, have knowledge that could be successfully applied in this industry by partner countries;

- A regional connectivity forum would enhance dialogue in the fields of infrastructure, telecommunications and freer movement of goods, contributing to further harmonization of trade;
- Space cooperation (joint missions, satellite projects, etc.) would contribute to the peaceful exploration of outer space;
- Agriculture is a particularly important sector for cooperation within the framework of the quartet. The parties will be able to discuss sustainable farming methods, joint development of agricultural technologies, and ensuring food security on a regular basis. As a result, this will make food systems more sustainable;
- Increased cooperation in the fields of culture and education would contribute to greater mutual understanding and strong ties between the peoples of the Global South through joint projects in the fields of art and research;
- Sports events will also promote cultural exchange and friendship;
- Based on the COVID-19 pandemic factor, RIC+ASEAN would also benefit from their own public health innovation forum that will focus on improving health systems, developing vaccines and preventing diseases.

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As the world faces a divergent vision of the future and attempts by the former hegemon to maintain the status quo in the Indo-Pacific, it is important to promote open dialogue and seek common ground.

Regional institutions should be recognized as the most important building blocks of a stable and just world order, where diversity of opinion contributes to the richness of global discourse. It is by adhering to these principles that countries can collectively navigate the changing trends of geopolitics and pave the way for a more harmonious future.

The Russia—India—China—ASEAN Quartet can become a promising beacon that will illuminate the way to deal with the complexities of the changing geopolitical landscape. Emphasizing sovereign decision-making, the presence of several poles of power and the willingness to promote equitable economic development, this cooperation structure represents a significant step towards strengthening stability, inclusivity and mutual respect in the international arena. All this signal a collective step towards a multipolar future.

ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ОБ АВТОРЕ

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