

Prospects of Cooperation of Russia and Japan in the Asia Pacific Region

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Abstract

In the article by M. Sharko "Prospects of cooperation of Russia and Japan in the Asia Pacific Region" analyzes the prospects of Russian-Japanese relations in terms of the current trends in the Asia-Pacific region. The author explores new trends and conjunctural factors in Japanese foreign policy towards Russia.

Keywords: Russia, Japan, the Asia-Pacific region, Japan-US alliance and foreign policy

At the moment there is no gainsaying the fact that the Asia-Pacific region is one of the most promising in the geo-economic area in the world. In an era of accelerating dynamics developing and newly emerging economies, concentrating in the Asia-Pacific region and around it, and low rates of Western countries come here almost all the main events in world politics and economics, or at least somehow extrapolated geopolitically in East Asian and part of the whole Eurasian APR. For example, against the background of the Ukrainian crisis, unfolding with the encouragement and support of the EU and NATO along Russia's western border, the U.S. rush to take advantage of the vulnerability factors geopolitical region along the borders of Russian Far East, as evidenced by Barack Obama's Asian tour carried out from 23rd to 29th April 2014. In the midst of the American hysteria over the return of the Crimea to Russia Barack Obama visited precisely those East Asian countries (Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines), which have territorial conflicts with either Russia or China although the visit to Tokyo, in particular, was planned for autumn. However, in analyzing the outcome of the Japanese-American documents signed during the spring visit, it is easy to gather the impression that their contents bear traces of current events, caused by the aggravation of the situation in Ukraine.

The Asia-Pacific region may be one of the most dynamic in the world in geopolitical terms, in the present circumstances, and especially in the future. This transformation of the modern world order conditions when the entire U.S. strategy is aimed at maintaining global domination of the only superpower spearheaded by the United States in all spheres, including the economic blockade, military threats to the extent of direct use of force. The purpose of such measures against the opponents of America (North Korea, Iraq, Libya, Syria and currently Russia and Iraq anew, etc.) is either in their comprehensive global isolation or in an unconditional submission to their complete destruction.

The peaceful annexing of the Crimea to Russia, however, has proved the failure of attempts by the United States to single-handedly control the geopolitical dynamics of the modern world. Impending changes on the Korean Peninsula, as well as the gradual ripening integration processes makes the Taiwan issue, as in itself, can significantly transform the geopolitical landscape of the region, a clear articulation of the geo-strategic leadership of the AP region. It is no coincidence point of application of its global efforts to target the U.S. return to Asia strategy selected ATP as a consequence of withdrawal of U.S. troops and NATO forces from Afghanistan.

However, in the region under the influence of external challenges including those prompted by the West led by the U.S., the formation of new trends, fundamental for the development prospects of ambiguous strategic situation in East Asia. The Ukrainian crisis unpredictably projected on the situation in East Asia, gaining unexpected relevance exclusively for all geopolitical players in the region. In the face of this the different players can be associated with new historical analogies (eg Crimea - Taiwan as a celebration of historical justice to reunite separated people) and the ambiguous parallels during the "Cold War" ("China - United States" instead of "USSR – USA") and revived at a higher, and therefore more sophisticated and unpredictable level stereotyped modes of action of American hegemony.

The Joint Japan-American Statement

It is no secret that East Asia, where pulsing vital interests of Japan, Russia, China and other countries, to a large extent influenced by major world powers, playing on the contradictions and inconsistencies of East Asian countries. In our opinion, the essence of the new geopolitical intrigue of the U.S. in East Asia most fully reflects the Japan-US joint statement under the symbolic title "The United States and Japan: Shaping the Future of the Asia-Pacific region and beyond"ⁱ. As it is well known, Barack Obama and Shinzo Abe signed it on 25th April, 2014.

Based on this joint document, a special role in the new geopolitical conditions, the U.S. East Asian strategy is removed, based on the new configuration laid coordinated strategic relations between Asian countries. In the complex architecture of American geopolitical hegemony defined global rivals - primarily Russia, followed by China. Relations to a new level in the Japanese-American alliance also clarifies and global allies, the key of which is traditionally a strong foundation as Japan's military-political presence in Asia Pacific. Under a new level of relations meant not alignment problem of so-called "weight categories" members of the Japanese-American alliance, and the problem of improving the role and status of the alliance in the new global balance of power. In addition to coordinating bilateral Japan-US alliance is declared the need to "expand trilateral coordination"ⁱⁱ by carefully balanced strategic triangles such as the U.S. - Japan - Republic of Korea; U.S. - Japan - Australia and the United States - Japan - India.

Besides the United States and Japan as "sea powers with global trade relations on whom the conservation of marine order depends"ⁱⁱⁱ will continue bilateral coordination for Security and Cooperation with countries belonging to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Particular attention will be paid to the content of the above-mentioned Japan-American statement, the so-called "sea countries" of East Asia, "adhering to the principles of international law"^{iv} as Shinzo Abe outlined in his speech at The IISS Asia Security Summit^v a month later, thus 30th May 2014. The first and foremost is the Philippines, with whom Barack Obama has agreed to sign a new alliance treaty, and Shinzo Abe to provide ten new patrol vessels free of charge. Then Indonesia to whom Japan will provide three new patrol vessels. The number of such vessels for Vietnam is yet to be determined. Singapore as a state is in 24-hour combat alertness due to incidents of maritime piracy. In the same speech Shinzo Abe stressed the fact that "recently, Japan has formulated new principles governing the cases in which defence equipment and technology can be transferred to other countries. We are now able to send out Japan's superb defence equipment, such as for rescue, transportation, vigilance, surveillance, and minesweeping, in cases in which appropriate control can be ensured, on the basis of a strict examination"^{vi}. Earlier Shinzo Abe said the US could avail Japan of similar monitoring.

Consequently, according to the latest Japan-American statement, the new geostrategic pattern of the alignment of international forces through close alliance with Japan, the U.S. plans to control the future of not only APR, but also the geopolitical space stretching far beyond its boundaries.

Taking a critical look at the joint statement, the following is easy to identify. First of all, this statement is a formal appeal of two longtime strategic partners, the U.S. and Japan, to the international community, which, based on a common vision of the rules of international order are determined to express a common position on the future of Asia-Pacific region and the future there beyond. To this end, the U.S. and Japan emphasize the "need for coordinated action to uphold regional and global rules and norms"^{vii} which are being violated by other states. With regard to Russia, in particular, it is stated that "in concert with our G-7 partners, the United States and Japan have condemned Russia over its illegal attempt to annex Crimea and are consulting closely on further measures against Russia over its deplorable conduct, while strongly urging Russia to deescalate tensions in Ukraine"^{viii}.

Secondly, it is in the APR, here and now, as Obama believes it is time to revisit and revive the old frozen earlier trends as a number of outstanding issues, particularly, territorial claims of East Asian countries against one another (Japan against Russia and South Korea, China against Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines and even India and other countries against China, etc.), which the US brokered can easily degenerate into new tension zones. It is by no means unselfish, but in exchange for Japanese sanctions against Russia which the current U.S. president promises unequivocal support for Japan in the long-standing Japan-China territorial dispute over the ownership of the Senkaku Islands (Chinese - Diaoyu), which is also recorded in this statement and widely discussed in Japanese media.

It is spelt out in this document that "The United States has deployed its most advanced military assets to Japan and provides all necessary capabilities to meet its commitments under the US-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. These commitments extend to all the territories under the administration of Japan, including the Senkaku Islands"^{ix}. As it follows from the context of the joint statement, it can be concluded that the military nature of such support from the United States for Japan against possible unilateral action from China relating to Senkaku and attempts to assert Chinese demands in the East China and South China Seas. Besides, these promises are confirmed by the United States with two earlier torpedo-boats given to the Japanese military authorities for self-defence from the U.S. ally. The rigidity of the current US outburst against China is explained not only by Washington's intention together with Japan, so to speak, to "discipline" China for her solidarity with Russia, but also to deter her from any unpredictable actions against Taiwan, whose annexation may be regarded by the Chinese as attainment of a noble ambition of unification, but to America it will be tantamount to a major geostrategic challenge.

Thus, the tactics of the U.S. in Japan is, first of all, to brainwash Japan against China and Russia, and then compelling Japan to defend its interests in territorial disputes through military means. Thus, according to Washington, Japan can meet its growing political ambitions, and this will be quite sufficient for her. The mobility and American pragmatism tactics in Japan culminated in the factors that account for Japanese in government: exit of the democratic government and return of the liberal-democratic government after three-year break, the main foreign policy objectives which have been and remain the relationship with the United States. This apart, Shinzo Abe's coming to power is regarded by America as Japan's new generation of leaders who will be more determined to defend their country's interests, as they are result-oriented. According to the first official document that defines Shinzo Abe's policy statement, Japan pursued the course of "restore a reliable Japan-US alliance and carry out "proactive diplomacy that defends our national interests." In order to firmly defend the people's lives, property, our territory, territorial waters, and airspace, we will strive to establish a Council on National Security as well as engage in strengthening the appropriate development and management of remote islands on the national border and the patrol of territorial waters, among other measures"^x. It is, now, mainly Japan's national interests intertwined with the geopolitical needs of the state and directly related to territorial issues. The United States, considering the fact that Shinzo Abe himself, famous for his tough stance toward neighboring countries, in particular China, especially on the issue of the Senkaku Islands, is an adherent of the new Japanese geopolitics. From the standpoint of the theory of canonical paradigms of the American school of political realism, movement towards active geopolitical trends fueled by strategic thinking, are being highlighted by the military aspects of the possibilities and prospects of territorial policy issues. Therefore, in East Asia, where there are well-known territorial disputes among States can further be interpreted as ruling elites to protect national interests, new geopolitical challenges it is likely that is perhaps the main strategic threat to security for the Asia-Pacific region. The United States, however, habitually ignore the new trends that are beginning to ripen in Japanese foreign policy, as will be discussed below.

Thirdly, Washington believes that through adjustment in the pattern of strategic relations between Asian nations, America will be able to cope with their global objectives in the new geopolitical situation. However, this situation has dramatically changed, and most radically right before the very eyes of the international community, largely because of the consequences of the Ukrainian factor. Neither Western geo-politicians, Russian officials nor the representatives of Ukrainian authorities themselves could even imagine that it would be the same factor Ukrainian trigger which will change the geopolitical balance of power in the Eurasian part of the APR through the annexing of Crimea to Russia, and, consequently, in the world as a whole.

However, the U.S. strategic goal, despite the factors indicative of changes in the global balance of power, remains the same - to undo the tight knot of contradictions in the APR. But recently the U.S. strategic game in the region was based on the already running process of the arms race by increasing international competition in the military-technological segments of the global economy, generating fabulous profits for America herself as well for her Western partners. The essence of the American tactics was imperceptible shift of priority from expanding economic cooperation of East Asian countries to the military sphere. Then the secret ambition of US geopolitical maneuvers as per the above statement, in addition to the aforementioned, is to cause new tensions in East Asia thereby increasing the number of and worsen old territorial disputes among East Asian countries as early as possible.

The new strategic game can be labeled winning on contradictions, stoking up military rivalries and inciting territorial discords among neighboring countries: Russia and Japan, China and Japan, China and Taiwan, the two Koreas, possibly to link up Mongolia, gravitating towards Russia and recently to China, and more – some countries in Southeast and South Asia.

From one hand, there is nothing hypothetical in the strategic game of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region. On the contrary, as international practice and the real policy of double standards of the West shows, especially in one or the other U.S. strategic games not considering the consequences of their actions reveals, is the crux of U.S. global hegemony, which manages democracy in all regions and on every continent in the world.

On the other hand, however, in the Asia-Pacific region the new trend is increasing approved as opposed to the situation in Western Europe. Washington in East Asia, despite some advances, for example, in the long term with the Philippines, has difficulty with the conclusion of new bilateral alliance agreements, and even more new strategic multilateral alliances aimed at containing China, North Korea, Russia and other potential U.S. rivals. So, Barack Obama cannot resolve the problems between Japan and the Republic of Korea as historical, contractual, territorial and other American close allies. Potential U.S. allies in East Asia are scared by her readiness to resort to threat of force on the slightest occasion. The main reason for the new trends in the Asia-Pacific region is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the US to convince East Asian countries in the face of threat from China or Russia, since the vector of East Asian geopolitics defines economic integration processes. Therefore, market factors not so much political as economic begin to play an increasingly important, if not decisive role in the strategy of relations among East Asian countries.

Strategic Relations and Current Political Situations

In the context of the new trends in Japanese foreign policy, we can mention the fact that Japan intends to implement a new quality strategic relations with Russia. The first attempts to establish more or less normal relations with Russia hoped to retake Yukio Hatoyama as the leader of the Democratic Party of Japan, which came to replace the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in September, 2009 for more than half a century. However, in the first months of his successor and party fellow Naoto Khan's ruling Russian-Japanese relations soured because of Japan's territorial claims, which led to the temporary call of the Japanese ambassador from Russia. Owing to lack of transparent verification strategy, even Japanese business representatives rebelled against Russia. As it became known, the head of the business association "Keizai Doyukai", Masamitsu Sakurai reproached the government of Naoto Khan for complication of relations with the Russian government and urged him to find the right course of action: "In our country, especially with the current administration, diplomatic strategy is underexploited. Differently put, it is very scanty. Japan-Russian relationship is a relationship of energy and raw materials. In economic relations, in particular respects, our interests are closely intertwined. Japan should clearly state its position, but consider that the relations between the two big countries cover the economy, and define a clear-cut means of action"^{si}. It is well known that a new impetus to Russian-Japanese relations was given by the visit of the current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Moscow in April, 2013 at the invitation of President Vladimir Putin.

Currently, Japan has committed itself to dialogue with Russia. How steady the talk will develop especially the tendency to sustain the strategic dialogue in Russian-Japanese relations, depends on multiple interwoven factors. The main factors are still Chinese and American.

If we analyze the most important international events in the context of the influence of situational factors on the strategy of Japan's relations with Russia, the most effective are not U.S. plans to shape the future of Asia-Pacific region by mainstreaming Japan-US alliance, but rather the Russian-Chinese gas mega-contract. Apparently, it is backed up by opportunistic reasons, first and foremost - Japanese parliamentarians' offers accelerated construction of a gas pipeline from Russia to Japan to connect south of Sakhalin with the Island of Hokkaido. Shinzo Abe intends to discuss the gas project with V.V. Putin this very autumn during the Russian president's visit to Tokyo.

Japanese politicians are becoming aware of the time factor. Indeed, Japan urgently needs to find the right ways of business cooperation with Russia since the diversification of energy supply routes is becoming a growing concern for all players in the world market. In this respect, Europe must not think of sanctions against Russia, but rather about the stability of gas supplies.

Considering time factor, the following can be said: Japan is clearly lagging in her attitude to relations with Russia as compared with China which is striving ahead, as well as with South Korea, which has already switch over to visa-free regime with Russia, and even in comparison with North Korea, which has quite recently entered into the ruble zone after Russia wrote off part of her debts. Japan lags behind not just for months, as it may appear at first glance, not even for years, but rather for a whole decade. Surprisingly talks about gas-pipeline along the bed of the Pacific Ocean and the importation of Russian gas were initiated by Japanese business representatives at the beginning of the first decade of the new century.

Secondly, under the influence of the timely Chinese factor Japan is worried about the balance of power in the region. Judging by the opinion of the famous political scientist Kazuhiko Togo, widespread in the Russian media, Japan rejects Russia's leading role in the regional balance of power on the Eurasian continent.

Let us try to analytically comment on the thought of K. Togo, current Director of the HII Institute of World Problems at the Institute of Industry in Kyoto and former Japanese diplomat, as his point of view largely corresponds to the current official position of the Japanese government. It is also important that his position most characteristically confirms the tendency that Japan is changing her attitude to Russia while reshaping her attitude toward the West. Kazuhiko Togo assigns two obstacles hindering Japan in her talks Russia - the West and the territorial issue. The West prevents Japan from holding talks with Russians. K. Togo unequivocally addresses this issue, not in Japanese, before the United States and European countries belonging to the "Group of Seven", as follows: "You do as you deem fit, but we have our own dialogue with Russia, and we will promote it. Do not dare to prevent us from dialoguing with Russian"^{xii}. In other words, the Japanese must distinguish between Japan's problems and the problems of the West. K. Togo's main criticism of the West is that European countries are harassing Russia regardless of the global power balance. He predicts adverse geopolitical consequences of the sanctions against Russia, not only for Japan but also the West, adding China – Russia axis may emerge on the Eurasian continent. In addition, China is actively striving establish a new world order with its world-wide center in Beijing.

In his opinion, territorial issues are also cause for worry to Japan. Kazuhiko Togo suggests territorial issues be moved to the background, putting it in the rear-guard, that is behind the dialogue with Russia. Literally, the Japanese expert says as follows: "The territorial issue should be left to the end. Its solution should be the result, and not an end. The real value for Japan is an opportunity to conduct a comprehensive dialogue with Russia on all issues of the modern world"^{xiii}. In Japan, however, there are those who call for the speedy and non-alternative resolution of the territorial issue with Russia.

In summary, it is important to note that Japan is set to a long-term relation with Russia. It is the Russian market, full of immense technological, investment, energy, technological and space, infrastructural and other features to fully meet the needs of the revival of the Japanese economy, which, unlike in the West, had to go through as many as three financial and economic crises. It is the Russian market, unlike any other one, which is capable of providing the Japanese economy with the wide range of services from supply of energy, natural resource security to expansion of Japanese geo-economic space integration expanses of the Eurasian continent, as Japan had dreamt of since the dawn of their national development and its early emergence in the world scene at the onset of the first century.

Time is, however, running out. Conditions for international competition are getting tougher. In the dynamic game, market and geopolitical forces in the Asia-Pacific region and the world at large, rates keep growing. Russia and Japan ought to make their own strategic choices by establishing complex parameters of joint development for decades to come.

Note

ⁱ U.S.-Japan Joint Statement: The United States and Japan: Shaping the Future of the Asia-Pacific and Beyond. April 25, 2014. – http://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page24e_000045.html

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Abe Shinzo. The 13th IISS Asian Security Summit -The Shangri-La Dialogue-Keynote Address by Shinzo ABE, Prime Minister, Japan. "Peace and prosperity in Asia, forevermore Japan for the rule of law Asia for the rule of law and the rule of law for all of us". May 30, 2014. – http://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page4e_000086.html

^vThe IISS Asia Security Summit: The Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) is a "Track One" inter-governmental security forum held annually by an independent think tank, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) which is attended by defense ministers, permanent heads of ministries and military chiefs of 28 Asia-Pacific states. The forum gets its name from the Shangri-La Hotel in Singapore where it has been held since 2002.

^{vi} Abe Shinzo. The 13th IISS Asian Security Summit -The Shangri-La Dialogue-Keynote Address by Shinzo ABE, Prime Minister, Japan. "Peace and prosperity in Asia, forevermore Japan for the rule of law Asia for the rule of law and the rule of law for all of us". May 30, 2014. – http://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page4e_000086.html

^{vii} U.S.-Japan Joint Statement: The United States and Japan: Shaping the Future of the Asia-Pacific and Beyond. April 25, 2014. – http://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page24e_000045.html

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Basic Policy. Cabinet Decision. December 26, 2012. –

http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/decisions/2012/1226kihonhousin_e.html

^{xi} Масамицу Сакураи. Интервью главы бизнес-объединения «Кэйдзай доюкай». Японии нужно найти более успешный способ взаимодействия с РФ. Токио. 2 ноября 2010. – <http://ria.ru/economy/20101102/291787489.html>

^{xii} Кадзухико Того: Япония должна объяснить Западу позицию России по Крыму. 19.06.2014. – <http://ria.ru/world/20140619/1012641555.html>

^{xiii} Ibid.