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Regional Strategies and Military Buildup in East Asia and Indo-Pacific: A Russian perspective

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As the center of world economic growth and world politics is shifting to East Asia, the region is undergoing a strategic transformation due to the ongoing power shift. As a result, major regional powers, namely the USA, China, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia and South East Asian states are building up their military potential, in particular naval forces, amid aggravating regional security problems and escalation of maritime disputes. This paper aims to assess regional strategies and military buildup in the Indo-Pacific. With the USA seeking to preserve dominance in the region, China trying to realign the regional power dynamics in its favor, Japan aiming to preserve its place as one of the regional leaders, India and Russia with their goals to become independent powers, and middle and small powers searching for an adequate answer to regional challenges, East Asia and the Indo-Pacific are clearly showing a complex dynamics of competing regional strategies and visions of regional order.

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Introduction

Asia as a whole and the East Asian region in particular is playing an increasingly important role in world politics as the center of economic growth (both industrial and partly high-tech) is shifting. It is East Asia that has the greatest potential to define the future world system, as it includes powers with great – and growing – economic and political clout. First and foremost, these are great Asian powers, namely China, Japan and India, of which the former enjoys the greatest potential to overtake the USA and become the next dominant power in both the region and the world. The strategic character of East Asia is underpinned by the US President Obama's administration "Pivot to Asia" policy, designed to ensure the preservation of America's dominant status in Asia. Apart from these powers, Russia is increasingly re-establishing itself as a Euro-Pacific power, as its own Asian pivot is gaining momentum in an attempt to diversify its political and economic ties and foster the development of Siberia and the Russian Far East (RFE), strengthened against the background of strained relations with the west as a result of the Ukrainian crisis.

The concept of the Indo-Pacific as an integrated geo-political and geo-economical space connecting the Pacific and the Indian oceans has emerged recently and is widely discussed among experts.¹ As the focus of this article is on an intensifying military buildup by major regional powers against the backdrop of aggravating security situation and regional conflict escalation, particularly in maritime domain, the Indo-Pacific framework can be deemed appropriate to analyze maritime aspects of regional military buildup.

Military Buildup in East Asia and Indo-Pacific

The changes in the strategic environment and power shift in East Asia and South Asia have resulted in major players expanding military capabilities in the region, particularly in the maritime dimension. Notably, China, India, Japan, South Korea, Australia and many of the South-East Asian states have experienced substantial growth in their maritime power.

For most of the post-war period, the USA enjoyed absolute military superiority in the Asia-Pacific, which was largely secured by the system of military-political alliances established during the Cold War. It is often described as the system of "hub-and-spokes" due to the central role played by the USA, which provides security guarantees

to the states of the region in respect of military confrontation with other countries. The USA is also the architect of the post-war liberal economic order, under which many East Asian countries were able to achieve huge economic success known as the East Asian economic miracle. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and other “Asian Tigers” – despite their rapid economic growth and a gradual strengthening of their military capabilities – were not considered by the USA potential military rivals, because their development was based on the existing regional order and they did not seek to realign or reshape it.² Moreover, the USA has always played a significant role as a military power in the Indian Ocean. The region’s importance is underpinned by its critical geostrategic position as a space connecting the Middle East, Africa and East Asia with Europe and the Americas. As most East Asian states are dependent on energy supplies going through the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Malacca, maintaining the freedom of navigation and enjoying control of the Ocean’s waters are of strategic importance to the USA, in its quest for sustained leadership in the world system.³

China’s rise is without doubt the major factor of power shift in East Asia. One of the key characteristic of China’s rise has been its increasing military capabilities, as its booming economic growth has been accompanied by an increase in defense spending for over 30 years now. At the same time, China’s desire to realign the regional order under its own auspices, from the standpoint of being the dominant power, creates objective preconditions for conflicts with the states that support the status quo. It also primarily determines the Sino-American geopolitical struggle for influence, as the USA and its allies are the ones most interested in preserving America-led regional order.⁴

The buildup of military capabilities in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific began to take shape, first of all, as a buildup of naval forces by the largest Asian countries – China, Japan and India – that consider it the key source of their military power and their influence in Asia.⁵ Modernization of the naval forces in Asia-Pacific countries began in the 1980s in parallel with an increase in defense spending, from an 11% share of the global total in the mid-1980s to a 20% share in 1995. Asia-Pacific defense spending now accounts for 24% of all defense spending globally. The successful economic development of the region has led to Asia-Pacific countries being able to build up their military potential in parallel with economic growth and modernization of their naval forces. So, the region in fact is seeing a competitive modernization of the navies in the Asia-Pacific, and since 2011, according to the

International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Asian countries have now begun to spend more on defense than European ones.⁶

US as a Dominant Power in Asia-Pacific

The “Pivot to Asia” or “rebalancing to Asia” policy, adopted in 2011 by the administration of US President Barack Obama, reflects the desire of the world’s strongest power to retain preponderance in this strategically high-priority region. The US absence from regional matters could result in a situation when the region would be shaped according to the interests of regional powers, with China at the head. This in turn would inevitably deteriorate the US-led regional order and US leadership both in the region and in the world. As China’s military capabilities were increasing and its behavior became more assertive in 2009–2010, especially with regard to maritime disputes escalating, the US pivot was designed to advance US interests, ensure freedom of navigation in the Asia-Pacific and to assure its allies in the region, of its commitments and security guarantees.⁷

Pivot or rebalance to Asia policy implies strengthening of US military capabilities and forces in the region (primarily those based in Guam, Australia and Singapore), relocation of 60% of the US Navy to the Asia-Pacific, closer cooperation with allies and alliance adaptation to the new strategic environment, economic integration under the auspices of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), increased cooperation with the ASEAN states and enhanced participation in multilateral fora, the East Asia Summit in particular. The USA aims not to forge new alliances in the region, but rather train to use existing military infrastructure of their allies in order to enhance its regional capabilities.⁸ In 2010, the US Air Force and Navy suggested the Air–Sea Battle (ASB) concept, which implies combined actions in all operational domains (air, sea, land, space, cyberspace) to “counter growing challenges to U.S. freedom of action.” The new US military doctrine adopted in 2012, titled “Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense,” attaches great importance to the Asia-Pacific with reference to strengthening military capabilities in the region while cutting back on overall defense spending.⁹

It is noteworthy that the USA possesses the most powerful military capabilities in the region and a large number of military bases in allied countries. The US military budget is the largest in the world (\$600.4 billion in 2013 according to IISS, and \$640 billion according to SIPRI), making it several times larger than all of the defense

spending in East Asian countries combined. The military personnel from the USA are presently based in the following countries: Japan – 55,039; South Korea – 28,500; the island of Guam – 5886 (a number that is expected to be increased by 4500 due to the withdrawal of troops from Japan); Australia – 1100 (planned to increase up to 2500 in the city of Darwin by 2016); Singapore – 311; the Philippines – 1154; and Thailand – 366.¹⁰

Experts suggest that the USA seeks to preserve its ability to deliver a powerful nuclear missile strike against China. With this purpose in mind, eight of the 14 strategic US submarines are stationed in the Asia-Pacific, and massive anti-missile defense capabilities are deployed here. Of the 26 ships in the US Navy equipped with Aegis systems with SM Block 1A interceptor missiles, 16 ships are currently located in this region. Japan, an ally of the USA, has four such destroyers, and another of its allies, South Korea, is planning to build six. The USA is building up its anti-missile defense system in Japan and South Korea (where Patriot-3 anti-missile systems are already in service), in the Pacific Ocean, Alaska and California, under the pretext of protection against North Korean missiles. However, according to many experts, the objective of the American anti-missile defense system is actually protection from China.¹¹

The US pivot or rebalance was warmly welcomed by its allies and favorably appreciated by ASEAN states, at the same time frequently drawing implicit or explicit criticism from China on the grounds of being designed to counter-balance China's influence and preserve American dominance over the region.¹² At the same time, the implementation of the US pivot or rebalance to Asia has resulted in heightened US–China tensions, aggravating regional security and previously latent conflicts, as notified by the example of the South China Sea maritime dispute escalation.

As the Russian leading scholar on China, the Dean of the School of Political Affairs and World Politics at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-University), the MFA of Russia, Dr. Alexei Voskressenski convincingly argues, we are not witnessing worsening ties with the U.S. or the replacement of strong links with the U.S., with those with China. Albeit developing economic cooperation with PRC, no U.S. ally (Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore or Australia) regards China as an alternative political and security replacement for the U.S., 'hedging' from China with their security guarantees. It is the U.S. that is viewed as the only state capable of balancing China's growing influence and preventing China from becoming a dominant power.¹³

The Challenge of Rising China

China's grand strategy since the establishment of PRC has been the restoration of its great power status, lost during the Opium wars in the 19th century. Since 1978, China's strategic goal entails economic development and modernization in cooperation with Western countries, while securing CCP rule and sovereignty (so-called "core interests"). A peaceful rise as a regional power has been an integral part of this strategy, with the task of enhancing its capabilities in all dimensions, including military might.¹⁴ This strategy has recently been epitomized in a "Chinese dream" course, introduced in 2013 by the PRC President Xi Jinping, entailing "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" and its role in the world.

As China's comprehensive power has increased substantially over the course of decades-long development, many experts point that its strategic goal is to become a dominant power in East Asia, exercise control over its littoral periphery, prevent any anti-Chinese coalitions and settle existing maritime disputes as well as Taiwan Strait conflict in its favor.¹⁵ According to many experts, an important development of China's policy along with its growing assertiveness since 2009–2010¹⁶ is that not only are Tibet, Xinjiang and Taiwan now regarded as "core interests," but also disputed islands in the East Asia Sea (Senkaku/Diaoyu/Tiaooyutai islands) and the South Asia Sea (the Spratly and the Paracel islands), although it has never been officially confirmed. Including maritime claims into core interests, which can be characterized as issues of utmost importance where no concessions or compromises are possible and where a state can resort to coercive measures, clearly represents the growing importance of maritime domain according to the strategy of establishing itself as a "maritime power," adopted in 2013 and stressing China's "maritime rights and interests."¹⁷

Paradoxically, historically China has been more of a continental rather than a maritime power, despite its more than 11,000 miles of coastline and more than 6000 islands. The sea domain was viewed mostly as a source of a threat or aggression from the outside, a stance that has fundamentally been altered in the past few decades. Counting on integrating into the world economy, China has become dependent on the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) for both import (especially as far as energy resources are concerned) and export. Since 1993, the role of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has grown substantially and it was described as a "strategic service" by 2008. In 2004, among historical missions, named by PRC's President Hu

Jintao, was the responsibility to safeguard expanding national interests, including maritime security and non-traditional security problems.¹⁸ The increasing priority of maritime dimension can be explained by the fact that many border problems with continental neighbors have successfully been settled (with Russia and Central Asian states) and at present most of China's sovereignty concerns lie in the maritime area. First and foremost, it is the Taiwan issue, maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas and SLOCs across the Indian Ocean, endangered by piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Securing maritime trade and energy flows also attaches importance to maritime security.¹⁹ To meet this aim, China is developing "green water" capabilities (to exercise in regional waters) and aims to acquire longer-range "blue water" capabilities as well.

As noted earlier, one of the key components of China's rise has been military buildup. The active modernization of the Chinese armed forces, the largest in the world (2.3 million service personnel), represents a challenge for US military capacity in the future. China's military budget has increased by more than 10% per year, and in the 2000s it grew by about 14.2%. According to SIPRI, China's defense spending increased by 750%, from US\$18 billion to US\$157 billion, from 1989 to 2012. It should be noted that SIPRI adds about 50% to the size of China's official military budget, because the latter does not include a large amount of actual expenditures, in particular those for research and development. In 2013, according to SIPRI, China's military budget was \$188 billion.²⁰

According to the assessment of many military experts, which is based on the opinion of the US Department of Defense, the main purpose of the active modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is to achieve the capability to bar access to and block off any zone from the armed forces of a potential enemy (anti-access/area-denial strategy, A2/AD). The main idea of this strategy is to destroy or incapacitate the enemy's military assets from afar using pinpoint ground attack and anti-ship missiles, a growing fleet of modern submarines and cyber and anti-satellite weapons. The strategy of the PLA of China is currently directed towards these weapon components, as well as towards the construction of aircraft carriers, which happen to be the main means used by the USA to dominate the seas. Not having the possibility to build up its military capabilities to anything close to those of the USA, China is banking on the development of "asymmetric capabilities," especially in terms of its Air Force and Navy. These new capabilities are designed to weaken the ability of the USA to project its power in the region. This should serve the general strategic

objectives of China (the preservation of its territorial integrity, national unity and the provision of maritime security as well as protection of the country's interests in the surrounding seas), as well as give it a chance to perform combat missions in the Taiwan area and the territories adjacent to China where other countries' naval forces (primarily those of the USA and Japan) already operate. Experts say that the ultimate goal of this strategy is to hinder the ability of the USA to project its power and to make it more risky and costly, so that America's allies can no longer rely on assistance from the USA in repelling aggression or opposition to other forms of coercion. In the final reckoning, this strategy could weaken the confidence of the Asia-Pacific countries in the USA as the guarantor of regional security.²¹ *Liaoning*, the nation's first aircraft carrier (produced in the Soviet Union and purchased from Ukraine), was commissioned into the Chinese navy in 2012, and the construction and commissioning of four more indigenous carriers by 2020 is planned.

With regard to the assessment of Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments and RAND Corporation, China will enjoy the opportunity to realize A2/AD strategy in the perimeter of the so-called "first island chain," a perimeter running from the Aleutians in the north to Taiwan, the Philippines and Borneo and including disputed islands in the East China Sea and South China Sea, by 2020.²² According to Japan's military experts, China has the potential to enjoy preponderance in the perimeter of the so-called "second island chain" by 2040 (stretching from the Japanese islands through Guam island to Papua New Guinea). This in turn will enable China to block the US ability to project power in a much broader perimeter including Japanese Okinawa and Taiwan, and can lead to Taiwan's absorption by PRC and creating a greater challenge to Japan's security.²³

The second maritime priority for China is the Indian Ocean, which also bears strategic importance due to formidable US and Indian military presence in the region. Its economic and energy interests here are based on a vast flow of maritime trade and import of resources through this area, as China became the top net importer of oil in 2013 and 80% of imported oil passes through the Indian Ocean and Malacca Strait (so-called "Malacca dilemma"). China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean was labeled by American experts as the "String of Pearls" strategy. Starting from the Chinese Naval Base on Hainan Island, it is described to encompass a number of strategic "nodes" in Bangladesh, Sri-Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand and Pakistan. These are not military bases (China does not have any military bases overseas), but rather maritime ports frequently used though commercially (supported by credit lines for

trade or infrastructure projects), staff training programs, technological cooperation and joint development projects. The main aim of this strategy is said to protect Chinese energy and security interests in the region. Though the military component of this strategy has mostly not been present, the strategy itself, the potential of China's using "dual-use docking facilities" and its expanding naval capabilities have caused serious security concern in India. Not only is it perceived as a policy aimed at India's encirclement, but also China's potential naval buildup in the Indian Ocean (either in forms of permanent naval presence, regular PLAN exercises or power-projection capabilities such as carriers or nuclear submarines) is regarded to have serious consequences for the balance of power in the region.²⁴

A new concept put forward by China in October 2013 was the "Maritime silk road," following a "new silk road" proposal to Central Asian states. The "Maritime silk road" was originally aimed at enhancing a "maritime partnership" and cooperation in diplomatic and economic dimensions with ASEAN countries (including investment into maritime infrastructure to build up economic cooperation as a "win-win situation") to mitigate security tensions in the South China Sea. This was later suggested to South Asian states, overlooking the Indian Ocean. An important goal is to portray China as a peacefully rising regional state, which can foster convergent economic development. While the strategy received mixed response from the ASEAN states, with Singapore and Cambodia being positive, amidst other South East Asian states' reluctance to embrace the strategy straightaway, some South Asian states including Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh favorably view this as an opportunity to develop their port infrastructure. Foreign policy analysts point out that the "silk road" (both land and maritime dimensions) has the implicit but important strategic goal of consolidating China's periphery through economic means with China as a dominant power, stressing historic ties and economic benefits to all the participants. Being primarily an economic strategy, it obviously possesses strategic implications as China employs primarily civilian and paramilitary vessels to substantiate its territorial claims in both the East and South China Seas. As the Director of National Maritime Foundation based in New Delhi Dr. Vijay Sakhuja noted, Indian strategic community believes that "maritime silk road" can "potentially help China consolidate its naval/maritime strategy of access and basing in the Indian Ocean in support of PLA Navy's future operations." The "Maritime silk road" concept is also considered a Chinese ploy to dismiss "string of pearls" concerns, dispel the "Chinese threat" in the Indian Ocean and provide a foundation for China's

increasing engagement in maritime infrastructure projects in the region. On the other hand, India's interest in Chinese investment increases the cost of possible non-participation in the project, especially taking into consideration US\$20 billion worth of investment deals, which were signed during the visit of PRC President Xi Jinping to India in September 2014.²⁵

In general, the military capabilities of China are still far behind those of the USA. In addition to the four-fold difference in the size of the military budgets and considerable technological gap between the two nations, China's military spending as a percentage of its GDP over all these years has remained at a level of 2%, whereas in the USA, this figure has been 4.5%.²⁶ At the same time, the modernization of China's military capabilities is perceived with concern by Asia-Pacific countries as well as India, because China occupies a central geo-strategic position in the region.²⁷ As leading scholar on China Dr. David Shambaugh argues, 2009–2010 saw the worsening of China's image in Asia-Pacific due to military modernization and its growing assertiveness, which can be more accurately explained through analyzing China's domestic discourse on its model of development and role in the world.²⁸

According to estimates by IISS, although the USA currently spends more than four times than China on defense, if the high rates of economic growth in China are maintained, its military spending will surpass the military budget of the USA after 2035. In view of the ongoing modernization of China's military, this will mean a fundamentally different alignment of forces in the region. According to an estimate by *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, China will be spending more on defense than the UK, France and Germany combined by 2015.²⁹

Security in East Asia and Military Buildup by Asian Powers and India

Of late, the Asia-Pacific region has witnessed the aggravation of territorial disputes in the East China and South China Seas as well as the Sea of Japan. In addition, there have been the traditionally strained relations within the following pairs of nations: China–Japan, China–India, South Korea–North Korea and Japan–North Korea. Add to that the recently strained relations between China and some South East Asian countries involved in maritime disputes, and it is easy to see why the region is seeing a competitive modernization of military capabilities in almost every nation. What is going on in the region is not an arms race, but rather a military buildup with a wary eye on one's neighbors, fuelled by growing nationalist sentiments. The highest

priority spheres are those that enable countries to successfully control the maritime space, that is, their naval and air forces. According to an estimate by *IHS Jane's*, attempts to change the status quo in East Asia are related primarily to the actions of China as the geopolitical center of the region. At the same time, the rest of the region (Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and leading ASEAN countries) is also becoming increasingly less satisfied with the current situation and policies of China, which in turn forces them to build up their own military capabilities in response. All this together results in an exacerbation of long-standing regional conflicts (for example, that on the Korean Peninsula) and territorial disputes, and heightens the tension.³⁰

Japan, India, South Korea and Australia can be called the most significant powers in the region, with the exception of the USA and China. All of these countries are now actively modernizing their armed forces, especially their naval potential.

For example, Japan, perceiving an aggravation of the territorial dispute with China in the East China Sea as a threat to its security, has started to build up its military capabilities in the southeastern direction. In response to the strengthening of the military capabilities of China and the aggravation of the situation concerning the disputed islands, Japan in August 2013 launched the helicopter-carrying destroyer *Izumo*, which was the largest ship commissioned by Japan since World War II.³¹ Japan possesses a large fleet of modern ships, including destroyers, which makes its Navy the most powerful in Asia (with the exception of the USA). Despite the fact that Japan does not have an aircraft carrier and China's military capabilities quantitatively exceed Japan's, its vast fleet of deep-water destroyers and helicopter carrying destroyers, experts believe, gives it a significant advantage over China, which is only just beginning to develop in this sector.³²

In December 2012, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe proposed creating a "security diamond" including Australia, India, Japan and the USA (the island of Guam – thus shaping a diamond), which are all democratic states respecting the rule of law and human rights "to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific." A special reference to support for "universal values" as a pillar of this alliance is one of the main features of Abe's policies with a goal to "hedge" from China in security dimension while enjoying extensive economic cooperation.³³

In 2013, for the first time in the last 10 years, Japan's defense budget has seen an increase to US\$48.13 billion (SIPRI). The strategy of Shinzo Abe's cabinet, which has proclaimed "proactive contribution to peace" as their goal on adopting new National

Security Strategy in December 2013,³⁴ is aimed at making Japan a “normal country” and includes steps such as strengthening its own defense capabilities, the reinterpretation of the right to collective self-defense and the overall strengthening of the US–Japan alliance. Furthermore, October 2013 saw the announcement of a revision of the Guidelines for Defense Cooperation between Japan and the USA, by the end of 2014.

While US–Japan security alliance is a key pillar of Japan’s foreign policy, as US security guarantees are of particular importance given strained relations with China, Japan at the same time aims to preserve its status as one of the region’s leaders and major powers, developing cooperation with ASEAN, India, Australia – states that also seek to find an adequate answer to the challenges presented by China’s rise. In a keynote address at Shangri-La Dialogue in May 2014, Prime Minister Abe endorsed the rule of law as a foundation of a rule-based order in Asia, with a special mention to the rule of law at sea and Japan’s “proactive contribution to peace” aimed to strengthen it. His speech contained criticism against countries not supporting the rule of law, which was a clear reference to China. Abe also announced that Japan will enhance security cooperation with Philippines and Vietnam, involved in a maritime dispute in South China Sea, and Indonesia and provide new patrol vessels to them.³⁵

On July 1, 2014, Japan altered the interpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution concerning the right to collective self-defense, thereby giving Japan the right to use self-defense forces to protect allies in other countries and effectively allowing it to use military force abroad, alongside other national militaries. It is the Chinese factor that is crucial for Japan’s security and is seen as the main reason for Cabinet’s decision, since PRC’s increased activity in the waters around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and China’s announcement of Air Defense Identification Zone in November 2013 in the area, are seen by Japan as major security challenges. In such circumstances, there is an urgent need for a more efficient cooperation with Japan’s key ally – the USA – as well as other regional partners, including among others Australia, Vietnam and Philippines, with the latter two involved in territorial dispute with China in the South China Sea.³⁶ After the adoption of the relevant legislation, Japan can use self-defense forces to protect US Navy ships in Japanese waters, as the Japan–US alliance is considered a key pillar of Japan’s own security. In addition, SDF can be deployed to evacuate Japanese citizens fleeing a war zone, as well as to intercept and inspect vessels suspected of transporting weapons to third countries hostile to the US, if the war could potentially spill over into Japanese territory. SDF may also be

used to intercept ballistic missiles against US targets passing through Japanese airspace, conduct minesweeping operations without formal cessation of conflict and to protect UN peacekeepers abroad.³⁷

What is of utmost importance, Japan, along with the USA, supports the status quo in East Asia. Japan's right to collective self-defense raises the stakes in the event of a regional confrontation. In particular, an armed conflict on the Korean Peninsula or over Taiwan would involve Japan. That would greatly increase the risks for the warring parties, and hence, makes such conflicts less likely. Japan's involvement in regional contingencies will definitely make the costs of challenging regional order more explicit. This reflects the policy of Abe's Cabinet to contribute to deterrence stability in the region. However, the fears of Japan's neighbors could mean that, instead of having the desired deterrent effect, the changes may actually aggravate the security dilemma and increase the likelihood of a regional political or military confrontation that draws in Japan.³⁸ At the same time, the need to find an adequate and frictionless response to the challenge of China's rise significantly determines Japan's ability to act as a regional leader. Regional responses to Japan's decision seem mixed, with USA and Australia supporting it, ASEAN countries embracing without any criticism, China actively condemning and South Korea and Russia expressing their concern.

India (with a defense budget of \$47.39 billion in 2013, according to SIPRI), which perceives China as its strategic rival in the struggle for regional leadership in Asia, is also on a path of expanding its own navy in defensive cooperation with Western countries and Russia. India's naval buildup in the Indian Ocean is regarded as a priority according to India's Maritime Military Strategy adopted in 2007, as securing control and influence in the Indian Ocean is India's strategic objective. India also aims to project its power around the key points of the Straits of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca. In the 2000s, India, which procured most of its weapons from other countries (Russia, France, the UK, Germany and the USA), began to rely on the development of its own military technology in key areas, including the development of its own nuclear submarines and an aircraft carrier. In August 2013, India showcased *Vikrant*, the aircraft carrier it had produced (developed through cooperation with Russian, French and Italian partners), which after testing should be commissioned into the Indian Navy by 2016. *Vikramaditya* (*Admiral Gorshkov*), the aircraft carrier produced in Russia, was handed over to India in November 2013 and was commissioned into the Indian Navy in January 2014. Thus, India plans to have three aircraft carriers, one of which will be under repair or in the process of

modernization. India also possesses a significant number of warships including destroyers equipped with BrahMos cruise missiles (co-produced with Russia), fighters and helicopters. These moves make India's military capabilities comparable with those of the other great powers in East Asia, although still inferior to them.³⁹ The current naval balance of China and India shows an advantage for China in most categories, including submarine forces, destroyers and frigates.⁴⁰

India's bid to become a great Asian power and one of the powerhouses in the forming polycentric world order has its manifestation in the "Look East Policy" conducted since 1990s and aimed at developing political, economic and security relations with East Asian countries, par excellence ASEAN, Japan and South Korea. This strategy is in part directed at counterbalancing China's influence and preventing its becoming dominant power in the region as well as fostering energetic economic relations with this actively developing region of the world. In other words, India seeks to present itself as an independent power in the emerging polycentric regional order of the expanding region.⁴¹

South Korea, with a 2013 defense budget of US\$33.97 billion (SIPRI), also has a significant naval potential and is actively modernizing it. Just like China, South Korea is actively building up amphibious capabilities, which Japan has only recently started to do. Furthermore, South Korea has begun to develop a strategy for a pre-emptive strike on North Korea in the event of unpredictable actions on the part of the latter (including use of its nuclear and missile capabilities) in the form of the so-called "kill chain" system. South Korea already possesses a fairly large amount of ballistic missiles for these purposes and is developing the Korean Air and Missile Defense System to intercept ballistic missiles from North Korea at low altitudes.⁴²

Australia, with a 2013 defense budget of US\$23.96 billion (SIPRI), is now striving to be more involved in regional issues by strengthening its military-political alliance with the USA and its other allies (especially Japan). Its partnership with Japan is considered "closest and most mature in the region" by Australians and "special" by Japanese side.⁴³ July 2014 saw the signing of an unprecedented agreement concerning the transfer of defense equipment and technology, which sets a legal framework for such cooperation and will enable Japan to contribute to Australia submarine program that it strives to build.⁴⁴ The concept of giving priority to the Indo-Pacific region for the development and security of the state, which was put forward by Australia in 2013, underlines the importance of this direction for its foreign and defense policy in the future.⁴⁵

Conclusion

To summarize the issue of East Asian and Indo-Pacific military buildup, we can say that all the key countries in Asia-Pacific are actively expanding their military capabilities that could be used in the event of any confrontation or escalation of tensions in case of a regional conflicts, especially in maritime areas. At the same time, the share of defense spending in GDP remains quite low throughout the region (China – 2%, Japan – 1%, South Korea – 2.8%, India – 2.5%, Australia – 1.6%, Taiwan – 2.2%, Indonesia – 0.9%, Vietnam – 2.3% and the Philippines – 1.3%) or has changed only slightly. This relatively low level of defense spending suggests that when there are fears about any military buildup in other countries, the countries in the region generally do not resort to an overt military balancing act against each other.⁴⁶ However, the active military buildup is already beginning to give rise to a security dilemma for countries in the region, as improvements in military potential of a state amidst uncertainty about its intentions are often perceived by its neighbors as creating anxiety and suspicion. This is especially noticeable in the example of China and Japan. This security dilemma could ultimately undermine the dynamics of economic development in the region, especially if it leads to military confrontation. It is of outmost importance, as the regional strategies of major powers seem more to be competitive than convergent and the visions of regional order clearly differ in case of the USA and its allies and China. However, as all the regional powers regard economic development as their primary objective, there is a hope that the worst-case scenario of military confrontation can be avoided.

As Russia's Asian pivot is gaining momentum, it is increasingly concerned with security tensions in East Asia and Indo-Pacific. In spite of China being Russia's major partner in the region in political, security and economic dimensions, Russia also enjoys strategic partnerships with India and Vietnam, and develops military-technical cooperation with them as well as with other South East Asian countries. Actively developing economic relations with Japan and South Korea are viewed as extremely important as they have the potential to contribute to the modernization and development of Russian regions of Siberia and the Far East, the ultimate goal of Russia's East Asian policy. Hence, Russia takes a neutral stance in regional maritime disputes as best serving its national interests.⁴⁷ A desire to establish itself as an independent great power in the region and an urgent need for development of the RFE facilities compels Russia to diversify its relations in the region and foster regional

peace and stability. With the Ukrainian crisis likely to facilitate Russia's Asian pivot, Russia's increasing involvement in East Asia has the potential to promote the creation of a polycentric regional order, which is more just and stable.

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Notes

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