

**第二届**  
**“亚太地区的安全与合作”**  
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**in the Asia-Pacific Region**

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# Maritime Security and Cooperation in Asia-Pacific: Russia's Perspective

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Along with unprecedented geopolitical changes the present world is encountering, Russia's turn to Asia-Pacific has become irreversible. Given the maritime nature of the region, for Russia to establish itself as an influential maritime power that makes tangible contribution to Asia-Pacific maritime security and cooperation becomes an urgent necessity.

This task is especially timely as Asia-Pacific maritime security is facing hard times. Security challenges are evolving at a faster pace than mechanisms and institutions aimed to keep them within manageable bounds. Given that Asia-Pacific economy, politics and security are closely intertwined with global developments, Russia, an established global power, can play a special role in fostering cooperative trends in maritime Asia-Pacific.

The paper is divided into three parts. Part One gives insights into the current trends of Asia-Pacific maritime security with a special emphasis on Sino-US contradictions. Part Two focuses upon main limitations of multilateral dialogue on maritime security issues. Part Three outlines Russia's potential and existing policy options. The conclusion summarizes the foregoing analysis.

## **New Shifts in Asia-Pacific Maritime Security**

At present, security in Asia-Pacific maritime domain has been much in the news. That is not surprising given an escalation of maritime contradictions owing to convergence of several important factors.

First, the re-nationalization of domestic and foreign policies in many





states is on the rise. At the current stage of their modernization, these countries have to respond to numerous domestic socio-economic and political challenges. The key are to improve economic efficiency, develop innovative sectors, reform the system of social welfare, rectify income imbalances, demographic transformations and disproportions, to mention just a few. At this complicated juncture, the elites use the factor of “manageable nationalism” in order to degrade internal conflicts and score the points inside their countries. Recent B. Aquino’s comparison of China’s policy in the South China Sea with German’s annexation of Sudetenland prior to the invasion of Czechoslovakia falls within this logics.

At the grass-root level, however, nationalism often oversteps manageable boundaries, which is exemplified by recent anti-Chinese riots in Vietnam after China dispatched an oil rig near the Paracel islands.

Second, the geopolitical rivalry between China and the US is unfolding. The main case in point is the South China Sea. Since the Obama administration came to power, the essence of the South China Sea contradictions has shifted from the Sino-ASEAN level to the Sino-US relationship. At present, three main lines of contradictions may be distinguished.

The first relates to the admissibility to violate the provisions of Declaration on Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC). Article 4 of DOC stipulates that “The Parties concerned undertake to resolve their territorial and jurisdictional disputes ... by sovereign states directly concerned”<sup>①</sup>. In China’s view, this removes the US from the legal framework of conflict resolution and makes its involvement in the situation contrary to the DOC letter and spirit. Progress in moving from DOC to COC, stresses Beijing, can be achieved only in case the existing (*italics added*) legal basis for conflict resolution is respected<sup>②</sup>. On its part,

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① Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.// <http://www.asean.org/asean/external-relations/chinaitemdeclaration-on-the-conduct-of-parties-in-the-south-china-sea>

② China to promote maritime cooperation with ASEAN countries. People’s Daily Online. 16 September 2013. // <http://english.people.com.cn/90883/8401271.html>



the US emphasizes that DOC is an interim (*italics added*) agreement, and its current provisions shouldn't be overemphasized. Given that importance of the South China Sea for global trade is constantly rising, the international community should increase its influence upon the situation in this maritime area and mitigate contradictions between the claimants to the South China Sea territories.

The second line has to do with freedom of navigation discourse. In the context of Sino-American relations, this should be understood as freedom of military navigation conducted by the US in the waters covered by the Law on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone of the People's Republic of China. Contradictions—which started in March 2009 and since have been developing—concentrate upon admissibility of the US intelligence gathering activities in China's territorial sea and exclusive economic zones.

In specific terms, China sees US activities as the violation of articles 19, 25 and 30 of UNCLOS. Those articles define innocent passage of foreign ships in territorial seas of coastal states. This assessment is based on the activity of the US ship the *Impeccable* in March 2009, which, in China's opinion, was intelligence gathering and therefore, prejudicial to the peace, good order or security of China. In the same vein, China interpreted the monitoring of China's aircraft carrier *Liaoning* by the US guided missile cruiser *Cowpens* in December 2013. On this, Washington retorts that the PRC's Territorial sea and Exclusive Economic Zone are limited by twelve and two hundred nautical miles respectively from the mainland and Hainan island. The remaining area of the South China Sea falls within international waters.

The third line has to do with the exploration of resources of the South China Sea. China says: according to the PRC's Law on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone adopted in February 1992, almost all the South China Sea falls within Chinese internal waters. Consequently, outside actors, be they states or corporations, have to obtain China's permission in developing the resources of the area. And the terms of these works are to be set by China. The US retorts that the South China Sea and its resources are part of the global commons. If so, they can be exploited by



any interested party—be it oil companies or fishermen of littoral states.

In broader terms, the South China Sea has become part of Sino-American unfolding geostrategic competition in maritime Asia-Pacific. This manifested itself in a clash between China's Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) strategic doctrine and the US' Air-Sea Battle concept.

An increasing pace of PLA Navy modernization and China's growing geopolitical ambitions generated A2/AD doctrine aimed at undermining the US' supremacy and hampering its freedom of action in maritime Asia-Pacific, or at least make these actions highly risky and prohibitively costly. In its turn, the US stepped up efforts aimed at countering China's improved naval capabilities. The most conspicuous step has been Air-Sea Battle concept designated to integrate "operations across all five domains (air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace) to create advantage"<sup>①</sup>. China takes this as the US' attempt to preserve American predominant positions in maritime Asia-Pacific and consequently, to undermine PLA Navy top priority of moving beyond the first and the second island chains as part of China's regional and global ambitions.

In this context, the most disturbing for Beijing is another factor: the Air-Sea Battle is a supporting component of the US Joint Operational Access Concept. Part of the latter is Gain and Maintain Access Concept aimed, among other things, at improving the US' capabilities for actions on land. As one political commentator shrewdly observes, to analyze only Air-Sea Battle Concept "... is like talking about only the back two wheels of a tricycle. What's missing is the front wheel—land power—an essential element for achieving a decisive effect. Most battles at sea, and in the air, take place close to or over land... There is a fundamental interdependence between naval and land warfare, and it is virtually impossible for naval power to win a war on its own"<sup>②</sup>.

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① Air-Sea Battle Concept. 2013. Air-Sea Battle Office. May. // <http://www.defense.gov/pubsASB-ConceptImplementation-Summary-May-2013.pdf>

② Dean P. J. Air-Sea Battle and the Utility of Land Power in the Asia Pacific. East Asia Forum. 5 October 2012 // <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/10/05/air-sea-battle-and-the-utility-of-land-power-in-the-asia-pacific/>



Third, Asia-Pacific “middle powers” are strengthening security ties, including those between the navies. The key reason stems from the aforementioned Sino-American contradictions, rising territorial disputes and the strategic uncertainty all this entails<sup>①</sup>. This emerging “Asia-Pacific power network” has resulted in a rising regional militarization, including its naval dimension<sup>②</sup>.

In sum, the situation in Asia-Pacific maritime domain is developing on a complicating trajectory. Owing to rising Sino-American contradictions, the conflict potential is likely to be further growing.

### **Multilateral Cooperation: Limited Effectiveness**

Along the trends presented above, the multilateral discussions on security challenges, including those of maritime nature, haven't brought tangible progress. The cooperative mechanisms are facing serious setbacks.

A conspicuous trend in the evolution of these platforms—rise in number and simultaneously, conservation in substance. So far, ASEAN-led institutions like ASEAN Regional Forum, ADMM Plus Eight and East Asia Summit have been unable to contribute to resolving urgent regional issues. The progress has been hampered by ASEAN style of cooperation with its principles of consensus and moving at a pace comfortable to all participants. As a result, all major decisions are made outside the framework of regional multilateral discussions. On the contrary, at the sessions of ARF and EAS the South China Sea issue is being continuously stirred up by Washington, which complicates China—US relations.

While the challenges to regional security are becoming more and more complicated, approaches to them are conspicuously stagnating. This

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① A comprehensive and in-depth analysis of this trend can be found in: Cronin P. M., Fontaine R., Hosford Z. M., Mastro O. S., Ratner E., Sullivan A. *The Emerging Asia Power Web: the Rise of Intra-Asian Bilateral Security Ties*. Center for a New American Security. June 2013.// [http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS\\_AsiaPowerWeb.pdf](http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS_AsiaPowerWeb.pdf)

② For details, see: Le Miere C. *The Spectre of an Asian Arms Race*.// *Survival*. 2014. Vol. 56. N. 1. P. 139—156.



is exemplified by a clear conceptual deadlock in which ASEAN as the driver of multilateral negotiations found when it turned out unable to distinguish between confidence-building measures and preventive diplomacy in 2001 and 2011 respectively<sup>①</sup>.

Another point that deserves attention stands for inability of ASEAN—with all its pretensions to consolidate its positions as the driving force of regional multilateral dialogue platforms—to develop and implement a unified approach to the South China Sea issue. ASEAN's failure to draw up the Joint communiqué during its 45<sup>th</sup> AMM owing to contradictions between Vietnam and the Philippines on the one hand and Cambodia as the ASEAN Chair on the other is a relevant case in point.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that prospects for Code on Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (COC) instead of Declaration on Conduct of Parties are not very optimistic. But this is compensated by lack of real interest in COC—from both participants of the negotiations and actors outside them. Let us separately consider their motivations.

*The United States.* Currently, Washington de-facto exerts the key influence upon the evolution of the South China Sea issue. Consequently, COC should respond to Washington's expectations on the freedom of navigation (in the US' understanding of this category) and the interests of international community in shaping the developments in this maritime area. But simultaneously, Washington cannot but realize: this will inevitably evoke very strong criticism from Beijing. Such a turn towards an open confrontation with China is contrary to the US interests, especially taking into account the deterioration of relations between Washington and Moscow.

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① ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Concept and Principles of Preventive Diplomacy. Adopted at the 8th ARF. 25.07. 2001.// <http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/library/arf-chairmans-statements-and-reports/159.html>; ASEAN Regional Forum Preventive Diplomacy Work Plan. Approved by ARF SOM. 10. 06. 2011.// <http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/files/library/ARF%20Chairman's%20Statements%20and%20Reports/The%20Eighteenth%20ASEAN%20Regional%20Forum,%202010-2011/20-%20ARF%20Work%20Plan%20on%20Preventive%20Diplomacy.pdf>



*China.* Beijing seems to be the least interested party in moving Code on Conduct instead of Declaration 2002. China doesn't want to lose advantages outlined in DOC and obtained, without any exaggeration, by herculean efforts. Any revision or renunciation of DOC would bring China reputational losses as this would be seen as a compromise on its "core interests" to its key geopolitical rival—the US. Let us not forget that China's power projection capabilities in maritime Asia-Pacific are still incompatible with those of the United States in qualitative and quantitative terms. The US is capable of carrying out intelligence gathering activities near Chinese coast while for China to do the same near the US maritime borders remains beyond the realm of the possible. Last but not least, under this scenario In reputational terms, the losses will be very serious as China will stop being the rule-setter in the South China Sea geopolitical game. For China, to abide by the rules set by other regional actors is the least attractive option. Against this background, China is very likely to use even the slightest pretext to block tangible progress on elaborating on Code on Conduct instead of Declaration 2002.

*ASEAN.* For ASEAN, Code on Conduct of Parties instead of Declaration 2002 could bring more losses than benefits. Currently, ASEAN is under a scrupulous international spotlight as it is completing its key prospective project—the establishment of ASEAN Community. If so, to display its internal weaknesses and divisions on the South China Sea issue is something ASEAN is eager to avoid. The association, as well as its individual members, has come to understand that to indefinitely stir up the South China Sea issue—which is inevitable as long as COC is elaborated on—will undermine their prospective plans and turn out contrary to their national interests. And more importantly, that living without COC might well be easier than with it. Apart from it, individual ASEAN states which implement joint economic projects with extra-regional actors, don't know how COC would regulate economic activity in the disputed areas. Finally, for ASEAN to invite international bodies like UN Arbitral Tribunal, on which the Philippines insist, and make them mentioned in COC would mean the association's inability to effectively deal with acute Southeast Asian issues without outside



assistance.

*Regional middle powers.* Japan, South Korea, India and Australia are expected to increase their activities in the South China Sea—both in economic and military-political terms. Under these circumstances, it is logical for these countries not to change the present “rules of the game”—although not ideal but habitual and well-known—in order not to narrow their room for strategic maneuver in this economically promising and strategically important maritime area.

In sum, under current trends prospects for COC are not too bright. The same is true for solutions of other Asia-Pacific security challenges, including in the maritime domain. If so, new means to make those challenges less serious should be explored. Some of these means can be offered by Russia.

### **Russia's Connection**

Russia, whose pivot to Asia has become irreversible, cannot be indifferent to the afore-discussed set of issues. Russia clearly understands that only in case it has its say on maritime security and cooperation, it will establish itself as an influential regional actor. By doing so, Russia also strengthens its global positions—in the present world as we know it today to retain the status as an established global power without strong positions in Asia-Pacific is impossible. Russia understands that in order to succeed in socio-economic development of its Siberian and Far Eastern territories it needs a peaceful and cooperative external milieu, including its maritime component<sup>①</sup>.

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① A thorough analysis of Russia's key interests in Asia-Pacific can be found in: Sumsky V., Kanaev E., Koldunova E. *Russia's Interests in the Context of Asia-Pacific Region Security and Development* / Ed. by Ivanov I.—M.: Izdatelstvo Prospect, 2012.// <http://russiancouncil.ru/common/upload/riacapren.pdf>; Sumsky V.V., Kanaev E.A., Koldunova E.V., Zavadsky M.S., Zinovyeva E. S., Iontsev V.A., Kireeva A.A., Likhachev V.L., Lukonin S.A., Menzhulin G.V., Novikov A.V., Prokhorova Yu.A., Sevastyanov S.V., Stapan N.V. *Russia's Guiding Landmarks in the Asia-Pacific after the APEC Summit in Vladivostok* /Ed. by Ivanov I. S.—M.: Spetskniga, 2013.// [http://russiancouncil.ru/common/upload/AsiaPacific2\\_En.pdf](http://russiancouncil.ru/common/upload/AsiaPacific2_En.pdf)



At present, Russia participates in the key multilateral dialogue platforms where issues related to maritime security and cooperation are raised and discussed. The key are East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meetings Plus Eight and Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum. At those meetings, Russia promotes the idea of "indivisible security"<sup>①</sup> which means that security of one state shouldn't be strengthened at the expense of another.

In this light, Russia's arms sales to Asia-Pacific countries should be considered as stabilizing rather than stirring up regional stability. For instance, an argument that in case a conflict in the South China Sea erupts, for instance, between China and Vietnam, both parties will fight with Russian arms seems to be far from reality. In fact, in case the situation in the South China Sea escalates to the point of military confrontation, no serious conflict will take place in case all the claimants are armed with advanced and sophisticated Russian weapons.

In practical terms, Russia's possibilities and potential to influence upon Asia-Pacific maritime security are quite strong.

At present, Russia is developing a pragmatic and problem-solving approach to Asia-Pacific maritime security issues. Moscow understands that it should dissociate itself from any contradictions, especially those existing between Beijing and Washington. For Russia, it would be unwise to support either the nine-dotted line or the American understanding of the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. Russia shouldn't try to act as a mediator, whatever this role might mean.

Russia can shape the South China Sea issue in a cooperative way by developing alternative transportation routes—Trans-Siberian railway and Northern Sea Route. This will allow making the regional SLOCs somewhat less intensive. Given that many maritime territorial disputes are heated by energy resources deposits Russia has enough possibilities to strengthen regional energy security. Milestone contracts, including the gas

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① Speech by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the plenary session of the 8th East Asia Summit, Bandar Seri Begawan, 10 October 2013.// [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/0/0C7F5771728E0FB644257C06003674F2](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/0C7F5771728E0FB644257C06003674F2)





deal, signed between Russia and China in Russian-Chinese relations in May 2014 substantiate this point.

Apart from that, Russia can develop the potential of the working group within the former Six-Party Talks—Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism. Currently, it is abundantly clear—no individual problem in Northeast Asia can be successfully dealt with unless the overall security in Northeast Asia is strengthened. In this light, Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism could serve as a permanent security forum. Owing to numerous maritime territorial disputes, its agenda might include an elaboration of a document that at the initial approximation might be called Code on Conduct of Parties in Northeast Asian Seas. Without touching upon the issue of sovereignty, all regional maritime powers could codify their relations in terms of what is permissible in “real-life situations”. If these discussions even start, the overall situation in Northeast Asia will become more cooperative than it currently is.

The positive effect of these actions, in case they are translated into reality, can be magnified in case Russia makes an important symbolic step—joins the multilateral initiative Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP). This could be a good supplement to Russia’s participation in ASEAN Regional Forum, East Asia Summit or ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus Eight.

By participating in ReCAAP and making the Pacific Fleet its “focal point”, Russia can achieve two intertwined goals. First, to establish an effective additional channel of communications with the “focal points” of our partners. Second, to present the modernization of the Pacific Fleet as a development that really contributes to strengthening peace and security in maritime Asia-Pacific.

In sum, Russia as an emerging Asia-Pacific power has plenty of opportunities to strengthen cooperative trends in relations between key regional maritime actors. In this light, Russia’s potential contribution should be carefully analyzed and translated into policy actions.

## **Conclusion**

Asia-Pacific maritime security is entering a new phase of destabili-



zation. Confrontation between China and the US is expected to grow. New naval arms race seems a likely scenario. All this will be heated by rise of nationalism in many countries. This will form demand for more actively defending national interests explicitly or implicitly oppressed by others.

In case these trends continue, which is a likely scenario, further polarization of Asia-Pacific appears imminent. And—which is the most upsetting for East Asians—contrary to the Cold War era, this time their “economic miracles” are very likely to be out of the question.

The potential of multilateral dialogue is likely to remain low. The existing multilateral dialogue structures cannot effectively deal with urgent maritime challenges. Signs that the situation may change are not evident. And the key security challenge—the South China Sea issue—is unlikely to be codified by adopting Code on Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea instead of Declaration 2002. Even in case COC is developed and agreed upon, it will not differ much from the current Declaration.

Now that Russia's turn to Asia-Pacific has become irreversible, Russia can and should contribute to mitigating tensions over the key maritime security challenges. Russia is the least interested party in stirring up regional security and can offer win-win options which, if implemented even partially, will make the situation in Asia-Pacific maritime domain more peaceful and predictable. Given the deadlock in which many regional issues are, Russia's contribution should be welcomed.



## Appendix III

# Name List of Participants for the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region

### **Adm. Sun Jianguo**

Deputy Chief of the General Staff, PLA

Chairman, China Institute for International Strategic Studies

### **Ms. Katie Chan**

Chairperson, Katie Chan Foundation, Hong Kong, China

Honorary President, Art Concept Culture Institute

### **Mr. Shen Guofang**

Vice President, China Foundation for International Studies

### **Honorable Guests**

#### **H.E. Mr. Bob Hawke**

Former Prime Minister, Australia

#### **Gen. (Ret.) Ray Henault**

President, Conference of Defence Associations Institute, Canada

Former Chairman of the Military Committee, NATO Headquarters

Former Chief of the Defence Staff, Canada

#### **Adm. (Ret.) William J. Fallon**

Former Commander in Chief, US Pacific Command, U.S.

#### **Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Bang Hyo Bok**

Former President, Korea National Defence University

Former President, Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, Republic of  
Korea



**H.E. Mme Fu Ying**

Member, NPC Standing Committee

Chairwoman, the NPC Foreign Affairs Committee

**H.E. Mr. Yu Hongjun**

Vice Minister, International Department of the CPC Central Committee

Vice President, Chinese People's Association for Peace and Disarmament

**Mr. Chen Youyi**

Member, National Committee of CPPCC

Standing Council Member, China Institute for International Strategic Studies

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