

THE NEW WORLD ORDER AND THE STRATEGIC SECURITY SITUATION IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST AND INDO-PACIFIC REGIONS

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Abstract

The paper examines the transformation of world order and accompanying geopolitical and strategic processes, particularly developments in the Greater Middle East and Indo-Pacific regions, their key actors, and political ambitions. In 2020, the Artsakh war and subsequent developments created a new geo-strategic and geo-economic reality for Armenia. These events highlight that the international system has entered a highly complex and even chaotic phase, encompassing a vast area from Europe's Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast of the Far East. In this context, the paper discusses two emerging geostrategic concepts in international discourse regarding the Greater Middle East and Indo-Pacific macro-regions.

The paper analyzes the processes, unfolding in those regions, including the US policies and strategies, as well as their implications, the factors of China and India as key actors, formed and emerging alliances, as well as cooperation formats. The transformation of the global order and the emergence of new geopolitical regions – the Greater Middle East, Central Asia and the Indo-Pacific – signal dramatic changes. The competition among great powers or power centers (the US, China, India, Iran, Turkey, Europe, and Russia) in these regions is becoming the core of modern world politics. Thus, it is evident that the Greater Middle East and Indo-Pacific macro-regions are converging, creating a new situation that differs significantly from both the post-Cold War order and the global order established after September 11, 2001.

Keywords - world order, Indo-Pacific, Greater Middle East, macro-regions, geostrategy, the US, China, India, Turkey, Iran, conflicts, power, interests.

Introduction

The war in Artsakh in 2020 and the following developments have formed a new geo-strategic and geo-economic reality for Armenia. Examining this conflict in the context of global and regional politics, and the new world order, established after the Cold War, we observe that the system of international relations has entered a highly complicated and even chaotic period, spanning a vast area from Europe's Atlantic coast

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to the Pacific coast of the Far East. Events unfolding in this region, especially in the South Caucasus, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific along with the strategic positioning of global power centers, reflect the final phase of the collapse of the post-Cold War world order and the emergence of the New World Order, proclaimed by President George Bush in 1991 and never materialized.

Greater Middle and Indo-Pacific Regions

The last two decades have brought to international discourse two geostrategic concepts: the *Greater Middle East* and the *Indo-Pacific Macro-regions*.

The Greater Middle East¹ consists of four subregions: a/ Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan); b/ the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia); c/ Western Asia (Turkey, Iran) and d/ the Middle East (the Arab countries, Israel, Palestinian entity).²

The implementation of this project became possible by connecting the South Caucasian and Central Asian sub-regions with the West Asian and Middle Eastern sub-regions. However, discussing the formation of a new geopolitical macro-region—the Greater Middle East—does not imply a merger of these four sub-regions into a union similar to the European Union, African Union, or NAFTA. It is practically impossible to implement. Implementing this concept is practically impossible, primarily because the Greater Middle East was a US-promoted idea, and the American influence on the macro-region seemed essential.

Nevertheless, during last 10 years the plummeting of the U.S. footprint in the Greater Middle East became obvious: “...*The post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were failures of both design and execution, resulting in costly overreach, part of a broader U.S. focus on the greater Middle East that defied strategic logic. The George W. Bush and Obama administrations dedicated a high percentage of their foreign policy focus to a region home to only about five percent of the world's population, no great powers, and economies dependent on the wasting asset of fossil fuels.*”³

The emergence of a post-American order in the Middle East became evident in March 2023, when, with direct Chinese mediation, Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to restore diplomatic relations after a seven-year hiatus. China's role in this process drew particular attention, especially from the United States, which had obviously not anticipated this development.

¹ That idea has been fermented in a number of institutes and scientific centers. However, the program was developed more regularly and in detail at the Harvey Truman Peace Institute of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, by a group of researchers from different countries (J. Landau, Ghali Odeh, R. Enoch, V. Mesamed, N. Hovhannisyan, etc.), Նիկոլայ Հովհաննիսյան, Մերձավորակելյան-անդրկողմայան աշխարհաբանական տարածաշրջանի ձևավորումը (Nikolay Hovhannisyan, On Formation of the Middle Eastern-Transcaucasian Geopolitical Region, Մերձավոր և Միջին Արևելյան Երկրներ և Ժողովուրդներ 2, 20, Երևան, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ Արևելագիտության Ինստիտուտ, 2001, էջ 102-103):

² Հովհաննիսյան (Hovhannisyan), էջ 102-103

³ Haass, Richard, The Age of America First: Washington's Flawed New Foreign Policy Consensus, Foreign Affairs, November/December 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-09-29/biden-trump-age-america-first>.

Washington's attempts to counter Iran in 2021-2022 were unsuccessful. The "nuclear talks" reached an impasse. The war in Yemen remained unresolved, and there was no diplomatic breakthrough in Syria. Meanwhile, the political situation in Lebanon and Iraq remained complex and tense. Biden's visit to the Middle East in July 2022 neither changed the situation, nor convinced Saudi Arabia that the US had a strategy/desire/will to counter Iranian influence decisively. Accordingly, Riyadh decided to take control of the process to prevent uncontrolled chaos, such as a regional war, into which the Gulf monarchies could unwittingly be drawn.

Widely speaking, the meaning of normalization with Iran is the attempt by Saudi Arabia (and other Gulf monarchies) to increase its autonomous role in determining the future post-American security architecture in the Middle East. Another factor became *China, which is actively investing in the Middle East. For China, the stability, predictability and sustainability of the region are crucial for the success of its major infrastructure projects. Recently, the PRC has become a major strategic partner of many Arabian monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia.*

The overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the neutralization of Iraq as a strong centralized state in the Middle East architecture and the inability of the US to build a new system there, marked an era that led to a gradual decrease of the US' presence and interests in the region, and the emergence of alternative external players. Realizing the need to "withdraw" from the Middle East, the American strategy gave its regional partners more room to maneuver and the opportunity to build a new balance. The US is seeking to capitalize on the situation, guiding the region's developments in a direction that best suits its strategic interests.

Indeed, the regional situation after the Iraq War and Arab Spring pushed Arab states to diversify their alliances and partnerships and reduce their reliance on the US. As a result, Asian countries such as China, Japan, India, Indonesia, and South Korea rushed to fill the vacuum. For example, The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, are India's third- and fourth-largest trading partners, respectively. Japan has become a trusted regional leader in technology, clean energy, and space exploration. South Korea is now a major supplier of technology and arms to the Gulf states and Egypt. The deepening of defense and trade ties, along with the Gulf states' growing clout, has accelerated Middle East's integration into the Asian economic sphere.

Turkey and Iran policies

Over the past two decades, Turkey has undergone a dramatic transformation in both its domestic and foreign affairs. President Erdogan's 20-years rule has reshaped the bureaucracy and transformed the military from a bastion of secularism into an engine of Islamism. He has fundamentally redefined Turkey's foreign policy, reorienting the country away from Europe and more toward the Middle East. For much of the past decade, Turkey has actively sought to expand its influence and reshape the Middle East according to its vision.

Assertiveness has become a hallmark of Turkey's foreign policy. Ankara has supported the Muslim Brotherhood across the region, backed the Arab uprisings, and expanded its military operations in Syria and Iraq. Ankara's main goal in the Greater

Middle East continues to be a geopolitical balancing policy aimed at supporting its economy and protecting its security interests.

To avoid a short-term balance of payments crisis or another currency devaluation, Erdogan's regime has sought financial support from Gulf states. More and more, Turkey is becoming a Middle Eastern state.

Turkey also showed ambitions to dominate areas of Syria controlled by Washington and its Kurdish allies. Ankara tries to prevent the establishment of independent Kurdish states in Syria and Iraq and to disrupt the development of an energy corridor in the eastern Mediterranean that would bypass Turkey. Both objectives are fundamental to Turkey's security interests and could outlast the Erdogan era.

As for Iran's regional positions, Iran is a nation with strong identity and geographic position which stimulate its desire to become a great regional power. Situated at strategic crossroad, Iran is a key transit point for the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Indian subcontinent, as well as for three seas: the Caspian, the Persian/Arabian and the Sea of Oman. Iran stands out as the most traditional Middle Eastern state and the strongest defender of "regionalism" - developing a strong regional system amongst local players, whilst deeming counterproductive military alliances with foreign powers.

The Iranian regime has sought to expand its influence across the region. To do this, Iran has countered conventional military forces with a network of associated militia groups and other non-state actors. Regional instability and weak states in Lebanon (from the 1980s), Iraq (from 2003) and Yemen (from 2014) have allowed Iran to develop alliances with Hezbollah in Lebanon, militia groups in Iraq and the Houthi movement in Yemen. Iran has also supported President Assad in Syria, as the two countries have been long-standing allies. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its Quds Force has been key to this process.

Tehran seeks to secure the regime through a "forward defense" strategy, meaning it battles its enemies in other states (eg, Lebanon, Iraq). As a Shia-majority state, Iran stands in contrast to the Sunni-dominated regimes across much of the Middle East—most notably Saudi Arabia, a key regional rival. Iran positions itself as a protector of Shia Muslims. Despite facing isolation and the sanctions, Iran has not missed opportunities to demonstrate its important role as a regional player, albeit without achieving significant results.

Indo-Pacific region

The modern concept of the Indo-Pacific dates back to 2007, when Japan's late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe observed in a speech in India that "the Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity. A 'broader Asia' that broke away geographical boundaries is now beginning to take on a distinct form".⁴ During his first visit to India as prime minister, in August 2007, Abe delivered his seminal "Confluence of the Two Seas" speech to the Indian parliament. Abe drew his speech title from a book written by the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh in

⁴ Jackson, Van, America's Indo-Pacific Folly, Foreign Affairs, March 12, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2021-03-12/americas-indo-pacific-folly>

1655, which explored the commonalities between Islam and Hinduism as neighbouring religious and civilizational constructs. The Pacific and Indian Oceans also share many commonalities, Abe noted. The “dynamic coupling” of these seas of freedom and of prosperity would transform not only the Indo-Pacific region but also broader Asia.⁵

After the speech, the “Indo-Pacific” became a recurring referent in Japanese, Indian, and eventually Australian foreign policy circles. The Indian Ocean had always held importance for these countries; Australia and India front it, and since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Japanese strategists had quietly promoted the idea of partnering with India there to dilute China’s strength in East Asia. Reframing Asia as the Indo-Pacific served the interests of all three nations.

In advancing the notion of the Indo-Pacific as a critical region, Shinzo Abe created a strategic framework that anticipated the geopolitical and economic integration now unfolding across Asia and parts of Africa. As South Asian and Middle Eastern countries merge into West Asia, a new continental order could reshape the global balance of power.

The idea that the Indian Ocean would take center stage in the twenty-first-century strategy games of great powers was supported by the prominent American geostrategist Robert Kaplan. He identified real patterns crisscrossing the Pacific and Indian Oceans: energy corridors, shipping containers, migration, terrorism, and subdued Sino-Indian competition for influence among smaller states that long predated the current all-consuming rivalry between China and the United States.⁶

Today, the clearest manifestation of Abe’s and subsequently US Indo-Pacific strategy is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, better known as the Quad, which began as a humanitarian initiative when the US, Australia, India, and Japan coordinated relief efforts following the deadly tsunami that devastated Indonesia in 2004. Notably, that within the Indo-Pacific strategy, the Biden Administration has strengthened efforts to upgrade the Quad, including regular maritime exercises, and has also launched a complementary strategic initiative with Australia and the United Kingdom (AUKUS). Regular engagement through the Quad also facilitates bilateral and trilateral cooperation, including with non-Quad partners. For instance, Australia, Japan, and the United States, have coordinated approaches to infrastructure financing. Australia, India, and Japan have collaborated on supply chain resilience. In October 2020, India and Japan signed a statement on digital encryption released by the Five Eyes intelligence alliance, which includes Australia and the United States. There is also a trilateral cooperation between Australia, Indonesia and India; and a joint Italy–Japan–UK fighter-jet project. These initiatives, aimed at enhancing security and stability across the Indo-Pacific, reflect the region’s ongoing transformation. By establishing regional alliances, the US counters the rapid rise of China, whose military expenditures in the Indo-Pacific region surpasses that of all other regional countries combined.

Though security concerns and the need for military cooperation is a primary objective of the Quad, at this point, it should not be considered a military alliance or Asia’s “NATO” aimed at containing China. “Multilateral military alliances have never worked

⁵ “Confluence of the Two Seas,” Speech by H.E. Mr. Abe Shinzo, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>

⁶ Jackson, *America’s Indo-Pacific Folly*.

in the Asian region.”⁷ As John Bolton states, “*emerging Indo-Pacific security efforts like the Quad (India, Japan, Australia and America) and AUKUS nuclear-powered submarines can be enhanced and replicated. An Asian NATO isn’t imminent, but there is enormous room for innovative alliances with like-minded states, including more South Korea-Japan-U.S. cooperation.*”⁸

US geostrategic supremacy

The two concepts mentioned above raise the question of the strategic positioning of the most powerful state in the international system. Indeed, as the most secure power in history, the United States has more freedom to choose its strategy than other countries. The kind of supremacy the United States currently enjoys is complex and wide ranging, involving military power, technological innovation, the controversial but nonetheless important appeal of American society, and the role of America as the locomotive of the global economy. Despite some limitations, this American supremacy will likely remain a central reality in the foreseeable future.

The modern world, particularly over the last 200-300 years, rests on industrial production, finance, and trade. For its normal functioning, the stability and security of logistical links are essential. However, the efforts of some powers to undermine what they refer to as the “unipolar world” lead to disorder and a decline in globalization.

As noted by formidable geostrategist Zbigniew Brzezinski, “*Europe will not be able to play a role worldwide that might challenge American primacy, except in some specific financial and economic areas. These are important, but that will not be sufficient to make Europe an independent global player. An ambiguous relationship of partnership and tension with America will be a security necessity for Europe. Let us consider some other possibilities.*”⁹

Potentially, the most dangerous scenario would be a grand coalition of China, Russia, and perhaps Iran, an “antihegemonic” coalition united not by ideology but by complementary grievances. It would be reminiscent in scale and scope of the challenge once posed by the Sino-Soviet bloc, though this time China would likely be the leader and Russia the follower. Averting this contingency, however remote it may be, will require a display of US geostrategic skill on the western, eastern, and southern perimeters of Eurasia simultaneously.¹⁰

According to Brzezinski, the main objective of US engagement in Europe and Asia should be to support an equilibrium that discourages any one power from acting in an excessively assertive fashion towards its neighbors. In the foreseeable future, it is, in any case, unlikely that any single power will have military superiority that would enable it to

⁷ Zhang, Yun, Quad: A regional military alliance to contain China will not work, March 25, 2021, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/quad-regional-military-alliance-contain-china-will-not-work>.

⁸ Bolton, John, A new American grand strategy to counter Russia and China, Wall Street Journal, April 13, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-new-american-grand-strategy-to-counter-russia-and-china-asian-nato-aukus-collective-defense-taiwan-da555cf>.

⁹ Brzezinski, Zbigniew, *China and America in the Changing World*, Harvard Asia Pacific Review, Summer, No 1, 2003, http://web.mit.edu/lipoff/www/hapr/summer03_security/BRZEZINSKI.pdf.

¹⁰ Brzezinski, Zbigniew, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York: Basic Books, 1998, p. 54.

assert itself in a hegemonic fashion on as a diverse, complex, and complicated mega-continent such as Eurasia.¹¹

That what we see in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific. It has low importance for Washington, so here the United States prefer to delegate the power to India, Japan, Australia, and others. Recently, during the skirmish with China in the Himalayas, the US provided India with intelligence. The United States also welcomes French, and British involvement in the region, since it costs Washington nothing and has the potential to amplify Washington's voice while moderating its overzealous competitive impulse through democratic multilateralism.

The US strategy is also considered as “offshore balancing” one. *“First, offshore balancing calls for the optimization of defense posturing and expenditures by viewing them through the lens of national interests. This strategy prioritizes national interests and only commits resources offshore when vital interests are threatened, thereby reducing areas the U.S. military is committed to defend, and forces other nations to pull their own weight. Thus, offshore balancing not only reduces resources devoted to defense, but allows for greater investment and consumption at home and puts fewer American lives in harm’s way. Second, offshore balancing leverages regional allies to maintain global security. Instead of providing the bulk of deterrent forces and capabilities, the US will empower its allies’ abilities to do so through international institutions, diplomacy, economic support and military capabilities, if necessary. By empowering allies, US primacy as the impetus of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership is obscured by a network of equally contributing stakeholders bound together by liberal democratic values. Therefore, offshore balancing requires not only a serious assessment of national interests, but a strong network of alliances, which must be rebuilt based on trust and compromise rather than U.S. domination. Offshore balancing provides that trust by allowing allies to handle their own affairs with affirmation that the U.S. has their support in times of crisis. Finally, without a single common enemy — the US — the Sino-Russian partnership is likely to unravel.”*¹²

China’s factor

The first and most prominent element of modern world politics is the centrality of great-power rivalry - above all, between the US and China. President Biden himself has spoken of “extreme competition” with China, and his coordinator for Indo-Pacific affairs Kurt Campbell has proclaimed that “the period that was broadly described as engagement has come to an end”.¹³

It is evident that the main challenge for the US in the foreseeable time is the containment of China. Practically any development, including those in the South Caucasus, should be viewed within the framework of this challenge.

¹¹ The Interview: Zbigniew Brzezinski, By Zachary Keck, September 10, 2012, <https://thediplomat.com/2012/09/the-interview-zbigniew-brzezinski/>

¹² Lt. Col. Ryan B. Ley, U.S. Air Force, Marshall Center senior fellow, America’s Geostrategic Advantage, PerConcordiam, December 6, 2021, <https://perconcordiam.com/americas-geostrategic-advantage/>

¹³ Haass, The Age of America First.

For the first time since the end of the Second World War, the US confronts a country with economic and technological potential that is comparable to its own. Henry Kissinger warned that “endless” competition between the world’s two largest economies risks unforeseen escalation and potential conflict. In Kissinger’s view, the US-China competition today differs from Cold War competition in two crucial respects. First, the United States and China today are nearly equal in power, whereas the Soviet Union in the Cold War era was relatively weaker than the US and was not integrated into the global economy. Second, the current situation is more dangerous given the availability of “artificial intelligence (AI) and futuristic weaponry” in addition to nuclear armaments.¹⁴

Over the past two years, Washington has focused on improving its relationship with its allies to confront the growing power and influence of China. Beijing’s increasingly assertive conduct, both in the region and on the world stage — including the pressure campaign against Taiwan, economic coercion of Australia, and retaliatory sanctions targeting individuals and institutions in North America and Europe — has caused serious concern in the US and ally countries.¹⁵ According to the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the Biden administration’s approach to China will be “competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, and adversarial when it must be.”¹⁶ From the Chinese perspective, many recent moves of the Biden administration indicate that a new anti-China Cold War is imminent. These actions include restructuring global industrial and supply chains, initiating the so-called “chip alliance” or “semiconductor industry alliance,”¹⁷ joining “like-minded countries” to boycott Chinese products and China-sponsored events because of human rights issues, urging EU countries to reconsider the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, and hosting the “democracy summit” at the White House.

As Biden administration’s main strategists Sullivan and Campbell note, “*in contrast to the military competition of the Cold War, which was a truly global struggle, the dangers for Washington and Beijing are likely to be confined to the Indo-Pacific. Even so, the region features at least four potential hot spots: the South China Sea, the East China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, and the Korean Peninsula*”¹⁸.

¹⁴ Brennan, David, Endless U.S.-China Contest Risks ‘Catastrophic’ Conflict, Henry Kissinger Warns, *Newsweek*, March 26, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/endless-us-china-contest-catastrophic-conflict-henry-kissinger-1579010>.

¹⁵ Rajah, Roland, Vital Trade Lessons from China’s failed Attempt at Coercion, *The Australian*, April 14, 2021, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/vital-trade-lessons-from-chinas-failed-attempt-at-coercion/news-story/5bdde5f46e89e79818231fa7e1624a4>.

¹⁶ Wadham, Nick, Blinken Says Only China Can Truly Challenge Global System, *Bloomberg*, March 3, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-03/blinken-calls-china-competition-a-key-challenge-for-the-u-s>.

¹⁷ Some Chinese analysts claim that the United States is now seeking to form a semiconductor industry alliance with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the Netherlands. Deng Yuwen, The Real Gap between China and the U.S., *Deutsche Welle*, March 24, 2021, <https://p.dw.com/p/3r2SC>. On April 12, the White House convened a webinar focusing on the status of chip production in the United States and around the world, which was attended by 20 chip manufacturers. See Soho Website, April 12, 2021, https://www.sohu.com/a/460379090_465219.

¹⁸ Campbell, Kurt M., and Jake Sullivan, Competition Without Catastrophe, *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/competition-with-china-without-catastrophe>

Admiral Phil Davidson, head of what was a few years ago renamed the Indo-Pacific Command from the Pacific Command, announced that the Pentagon was shifting away from its historic focus on Northeast Asia and Guam toward “revising our Indo-Pacific force laydown . . . to account for China’s rapid modernization.”¹⁹

To counter this strategic move, China has enhanced its diplomatic, economic, and military relationship with both Russia and Iran in recent months, resulting in the closest ties these countries have had in the post-Cold War era. These actions and the resulting reactions from China have increasingly driven the world into two trade and investment systems, two IT and internet systems, potentially two financial and currency systems, and two political and military blocs.

On the other hand, China is a significant regional, but not a global power. It is the second largest economy in the world, but it is still relatively impoverished on a per capita basis. China is a dominant regional player in its immediate regional environment, particularly in Southeast Asia. It has also entered Central Asia, initially through economic engagement and now with cautious political involvement. However, China is still unlikely to become a global power in the coming years, as it lacks the full range of attributes needed for comprehensive global influence—political, economic, military, technological, and cultural.

It should also be taken into account, that since the 2019 crisis in Hong Kong, China has been experiencing a deep economic crisis. The negative impact of the recession that began in Hong Kong on the Chinese economy was pedaled by the coronavirus outbreak.

It should also be noted that since the 2019 crisis in Hong Kong, China has been experiencing a deep economic downturn. The negative impact of the recession in Hong Kong on the Chinese economy was further intensified by the coronavirus outbreak.

There is also a tendency in Chinese diplomacy which sometimes can be very adept but also in its “Wolf Warrior diplomacy” is sometimes overreached and antagonized a lot of countries across the Indo-Pacific.²⁰ China is now a lonely power. So, it will be an increasingly important global player and certainly a very important player regionally, and therefore China will be more of an independent player on the world scene than anyone else except the United States.²¹

China’s strategy regarding the South Caucasus and Middle East rests on its cooperation with Turkey and Iran. Yes, Turkey has been a strategic ally of the US for nearly 70 years, serving as NATO’s trusted southern wing. Nevertheless, since 2010s Ankara positions itself as a logistical and military-political supplier of China’s geo-economic plans, advancing its own agenda. Ankara’s cooperation with Moscow in the South Caucasus and its support for the Baku regime in the war against Armenia have actually opened up a new geopolitical space for Turkey to enter Central Asia and increase its geopolitical and economic value both for the West and for China and Russia.

The China-Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey-Europe multimodal cargo transportation route, part of the Belt and Road Initiative, has become vital for China, as the China-Russia-Belarus-Poland route faced a serious obstacle and block due to the war

¹⁹ Jackson, America’s Indo-Pacific Folly.

²⁰ Rice University, April 11, 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/static/4888127e2193ed9bf68b9ccfb7b36197/DCIA-at-Rice-University-11-April-2023.pdf>.

²¹ Brzezinski, *China and America in the Changing World*.

between Russia and Ukraine and the Western sanctions. On the one hand, uninterrupted land transportation in Eurasia has become of utmost importance for China amid escalating US-Chinese tensions in the Pacific and over Taiwan. In this regard, the fact that the Baku-Kars railway passing through the Azerbaijan-Georgia junction is mostly out of the control of Russia and Iran and under the supervision of Turkey, is of crucial importance for China. Additionally, the land transportation of goods, including multimodal routes through the Black Sea, is a key project for both India and the European Union.

At the same time, Turkey currently lacks sufficient political and economic resources to continue its expansion. If it continues, it will become more dependent on Western power centers, and the China-Turkey connection will face a big risk.

Meanwhile, for China, the tension between Iran and its regional rivals is increasing in an unprecedented way, and if this souring tension is not contained, the consequences arising from a regional clash would endanger China's interests perilously. Therefore, de-escalation in the region is one of China's priorities, and it is quite natural that China will use the opportunity to convince Iran's leadership to take Beijing's security plan seriously. The same will relate to Iran's policies in the South Caucasus. If China can involve Iran in its security arrangement, the ground for boosting economic cooperation between Tehran and Beijing will also be provided. Otherwise, it is very unlikely that the Chinese-Iranian relationship will lead to a significant economic achievement.

India's Factor

Since 2001, India's rise as a strategic regional partner of the US has become evident. India is currently considered a reliable partner for the US in the Indo-Pacific region. India's economic, military and technological dimensions and strength make it one of the most influential powers in the region, and its democratic order is the most attractive for the United States. After events of 9/11, 2001, India announced its involvement in the US-declared war on terror, considering the fight against Islamist groups operating in Kashmir and sponsored by Pakistani military intelligence.

India's weakness also lies in its ethnic and religious diversity, as conflicts between different ethnic and religious groups within the country often turn violent: "India has a population bigger than in China. It certainly has major international ambitions. It measures itself by its rivalry with China. There is a remarkable democratic record in the country. And there is growing evidence of strains between the Muslims and the Hindus, and the Muslims in India number between 130 to 140 million people. Furthermore, a large portion of the population is still illiterate, much more so than in China, and politically passive."²²

India's foreign policy concerns are mainly focused on China and Pakistan. India views Pakistan as the primary instigator of the Kashmir conflict, as well as a threat, based on Islamic faith and ideology that rejects India's Hindu identity. Pakistan's close association with China heightens its perception as a national security threat in Delhi.

As Indian analyst C. Raja Mohan noted, "*far from being in an unenviable bind, New Delhi now looks well placed to leverage its position in the middle for its own benefit in*

²² Brzezinski, *China and America in the Changing World*.

the short and long term. From Russia, India is getting discounted oil, fertilizer, and other commodities as Moscow desperately seeks new buyers. From China, India is looking to extract an easing of the Sino-Indian military confrontation in the Himalayas. With the United States and other Western partners, India is looking to modernize its defense industrial base and reduce its dependence on Russian military supplies.”²³

He also adds that India's most immediate concern is ending its low-intensity border war with China in the Himalayas, where Beijing has yet to signal serious movement. “*Just as India considered itself nonaligned during the Cold War but tilted to the Soviet Union, India's current constellation—a multi-alignment among China, the United States, and Russia—will be weighted in favor of the United States and the West. For all the maneuvering, India's difficulties with China are not about to disappear, nor can Moscow prevent the steady diminution of Russia's importance for New Delhi.*”²⁴

The Bidens administration has tried to involve India in the strategy of containing China in the Indo-Pacific region. “*The larger challenge posed by China - its economic practices, its aggressive military moves, its efforts to dominate the industries of the future and to control the supply chains of the future have had a profound impact on the thinking in Delhi,*” said Jake Sullivan, Biden's National Security assistant.²⁵

It should be noted that the US currently deploys more technology, including military ones, to India. Washington also encourages companies from both countries to collaborate on military equipment like artillery systems.

Conclusion

The hypothesis of this brief, generalized analysis, presented in the form of theses, is the assumption that the intermediate joint goal of the Western Pole of the global world order is the formation of deep contradictions in Central Eurasia between the Eurasian continental powers, Russia and China, with its further transformation into confrontation.

a/ The transformation of the global world order and the formation of new geopolitical regions of the Greater Middle East, Central Asia, and the Indo-Pacific herald major dramatic changes: the end of the post-9/11 world order and the beginning of an era of great power competition. This means that the US implementation of the Greater Middle East and the Indo-Pacific strategies, including the establishing of the still fragile Quad format, especially the inclusion of India in it, is becoming the focal point of modern world politics. Consequently, we can assert that the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific are moving closer to one another. Due to this phenomenon, a new situation has evolved fundamentally different from the one that existed before.

b/ The US effectively returned to the Reagan-Bush Administrations' idea (1988-1992) of establishing a New World Order as an American global strategy. Washington simultaneously adopted the concept of “strategic restraint,” which implies that no major global power should dominate Europe or Asia. This approach requires US allies to take

²³ C. Raja Mohan, For India, Russia's War on Ukraine Could Be a Gift, Foreign Policy, March 30, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/30/india-ukraine-russia-war-china-oil-geopolitics/>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Hunnicutt, Trevor, U.S., India partnership targets arms, AI to compete with China, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/us-india-partnership-targets-arms-ai-compete-with-china-2023-01-31/>.

the brunt of maintaining security in their regions and relies on local forces to balance regional powers such as Russia and China. The ultimate goal of the US is to keep its geostrategic supremacy, where all geopolitical actors adhere to the American rules of play. In a certain sense, the current conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Greater Middle East (including the South Caucasus) are leading to a complete change of the balances in the Black Sea and the Greater Middle East regions, as well as the strong leaning in Indo-Pacific to the US-India-Japan triangle.

c/ China, on one hand, is advancing its Belt and Road Initiative through the Caspian Sea-Azerbaijan at the Georgia-Turkey junction, while, on the other hand, it supports Iran as a key factor in maintaining regional stability. At the same time, China does not have a global or civilizational offering or project for the entire world, focusing primarily on its Belt and Road Initiative, which lacks formal alliances and a strategic framework. In contrast, the U.S. operates on multiple tracks, including the Euro-Atlantic, East European (new Rzeczpospolita), Black Sea, Greater Middle East, and Indo-Pacific regions. For example, the emerging “Rzeczpospolita-2” project - a political and military alliance of Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Baltic and Visegrad group states - could block the rapprochement of Russia and Germany, as well essentially reduce the interdependence between China and the EU. Without Ukraine and Poland, the Chinese “Belt and Road” strategy would become highly virtual, and if China explores alternative routes through the South Caucasus, Iran, and Turkey, it will not be the sole and main beneficiary of these logistics, as India, Southeast Asian nations, and Gulf states will also benefit.

d/ India is becoming one of the powers which helps reduce both global and regional risks, including in the South Caucasus. The war in Eastern Europe and situation in the Greater Middle East strengthens the positions of India in regional and global arenas. The entry of India into the Middle East’s political and economic domain is an extension of the geostrategic model of the Indo-Pacific and Indian strategy of “neighborhood policy plus extended neighborhood.” With India as the link between the Indo-Pacific and the Greater Middle East, a continental Asian order is beginning to take shape.

e/ The Greater Middle East and the Indo-Pacific are both entering a phase of prolonged turbulence, marked by shifting roles, alliances, and antagonisms. In the Greater Middle a system of alliance-competition relations—such as those between China, Russia, Pakistan, and Turkey—is expected to develop. Meanwhile, the management or containment of these coalitions will be largely driven by Western power centers (U.S. and U.K.) and their allies (India and France). In the Indo-Pacific, China’s military, political, and economic influence will be checked by a robust system of deterrence, notably through the Quad and other formats.

f/ For European countries and India alike, the South Caucasus serves primarily as a natural bridge connecting Europe with the Middle East, Central Asia, and further with India, China, Japan, Korea, and other Far Eastern nations via the shortest and most convenient routes. In this regard, therefore, the bridge region has a strategic significance for Europe and India.

The implementation of several important projects, including the North-South and Gulf-Black Sea International Transport Corridors, the Great Silk Road, TRACECA, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the construction of gas pipelines, oil pipelines, and

railways, will greatly contribute to regional integration and the shaping of the Greater Middle East and Indo-Pacific regions.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that this is perhaps one of the most complex and contradiction-filled regions in the world today. Various issues and opposing forces are at play, with significant disagreements and even serious conflicts both within sub-regions and between them. Therefore, it is premature to speak of a harmonious alignment of interests across these emerging macro-regions.

g/ The stability and architecture of the Greater Middle East and Indo-Pacific are increasingly dependent on the situation in Eastern Europe, Black Sea, and the South Caucasus regions and vice versa. We should take into account that the current situation in the Greater Middle East and Indo-Pacific regions will create long-term instability around Armenia in the coming years. Permanent military threats for Armenia, stemming from the nature of conflicts in the Greater Middle East and Indo-Pacific regions, is a long-term reality. At the same time, Armenia is facing a challenge to be integrated in the new world order.

These new realities will require Armenia to refrain from engaging in global and regional confrontations. In this situation, Armenia's foreign policy will likely adopt a more cautious and precise approach in the West-India-China-Russia-Iran-Turkey conflict zone or on the edge of the dividing line, where serious military and other conflicts are possible. Notably, this situation enables Armenia to raise its level of sovereign responsibility.

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