On March 19 - 21, 2022, the Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited India and Cambodia. Despite the obvious difference in the “weight classes” of the visited countries, both stages of this trip constitute a single remarkable event at the present stage of the “Big World Game”, which focuses on the confrontation between the United States and China, the two leading superpowers.

Cambodia is considered to be a de facto ally of China, while India is balancing in the field of forces created by all the world’s leading players. Finding this balance is becoming increasingly difficult due to some tensions in its relations with China. Therefore, one can notice a certain shift towards Washington in India’s foreign policy, which has manifested itself, among other things, in India’s membership in the “Quad” Configuration. The other participants of this alliance are Australia, USA and Japan.

The trend towards a multifaceted rapprochement between Tokyo and Delhi has been one of the most remarkable trends in today’s global agenda and it has become noticeable since the second half of the 2010s. The background of this trend includes many centuries of history, and a remarkable part of this history is associated with the period of World War II, when the British administration resorted to various kinds of repressions against the future leadership of independent India, in the face of approaching forces of the “Japanese liberators of the people of Asia from oppression by white colonialists.”
The main idea at the current stage of the Japanese-Indian relationship is their concern (be it substantial or not) of both countries about China’s multifaceted development and growth. The above mentioned rapprochement between India and Japan is evidenced by more frequent mutual visits and videoconferences of the top leadership of both countries. The formal reason for Mr. Kishida’s current visit to Delhi was the discussion of two upcoming anniversaries this year: One of them is the 70th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations between India and Japan and the 75th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of India.

The main outcome of the negotiations between the Japanese Prime Minister and his Indian counterpart, Narendra Modi, were included in the Joint Statement (). Those who are interested in the political situation in the Indian Pacific region, are recommended to study this extensive document.

Here are two aspects worth paying attention to. Firstly, one can clearly see the above-mentioned concerns of the leadership of both countries about the growing influence of China in the Indian Pacific region in this document. However, the source of this concern is not directly indicated. But, of course, the subtext is quite obvious, for example, from the following phrase of Prime Minister Modi, he said during the final press conference: “We have agreed to resolutely resist any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo in the East China and South China Seas by force.”

Just as a reminder: in the East China Sea, the subject of the dispute between China and Japan are the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands controlled by Japan. As for the South China Sea, the subject for concern is the military and economic development of several groups of islands carried out by China, while Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia also claim partial or full ownership of those islands. In addition, countries located on the outer boundaries of the South China Sea (such as India and Japan) believe that the above mentioned “development” is a threat to freedom of navigation across this, one of the most important global trade routes. It is exactly this problem which is mentioned in the Joint Statement, where it says about the need to respect the “freedom of navigation.” However, Beijing does not recognize that its activities in the South China Sea may serve as a source of any inconvenience.

The second thing to pay special attention to is the parties’ statement about the successful implementation of a large-scale Japanese investment program (total amount is USD 30 billion) in the Indian economy, adopted in 2014. As was recorded in the Joint Statement, Japan also took a commitment to allocate another USD 45 billion for similar purposes for the next five years.

All the experts who expressed their opinion on the Mr. Kishida’s visit to India, came to unanimous conclusion that one of his major tasks in Delhi was to encourage his Indian colleague to move away from the neutral position that the Indian leadership adheres to in relation to the Ukrainian crisis. During the UN’s voting in early March on accepting the anti-Russian resolution proposed by Western countries, India abstained from supporting this resolution and also did not allow anything which could be understood as expressed support to be written into the final document issued upon the results of the Quad summit held a few days later. This caused the US President Joe Biden to be “disappointed.”

According to the aforementioned commentators, without the Ukrainian topic mentioned in the signed document, the Prime Minister Mr. Kishida would have assessed his visit to India as a failure. It is alleged that it took several days for the experts from both countries to agree on the final wording on this issue, which was set out in paragraph 10 of the Joint Statement. The result turned out to be fairly generalized phrases expressing concerns about the “ongoing conflict and humanitarian disaster” in Ukraine. Russia was not mentioned in this text at all.

Once again, it bears emphasizing that even though Japan joined most of the anti-Russian actions imposed by the USA, it has not cut off its economic ties with the Russian Federation. A while ago, NEO already pointed to some clear signs of Japan’s intent to preserve the relations with Russia, demonstrated by the Prime Minister Fumio Kishida as well. The author will now refer to the results of a study conducted by Teikoku Databank Ltd, specializing in the provision of services in the field of financial transactions. It turned out that only 37 out of 168 Japanese companies operating in Russia announced the “suspension” of their activities. At the same time, “none of them” (that is, out of the mentioned 37 companies) is willing to make this “suspension” process irreversible.

Just another proof that the Japanese are very intelligent and quick-witted people. However, it is unlikely that the Germans, Italians, French, and British are less smart… This gives one hope that the race “face back to Russia” will start very soon (in the near future, most likely in a few months), with participants elbowing each other. And Russia should accept and embrace them with the words of consolation: “It’s ok. Happens to the best of us”. Today businesses are the main victim of crazy “global politics.”
In response to all unfriendly (to put it mildly) actions taken against Russia recently, the most counterproductive reaction would be that of an offended child: “You are all being too mean! I am leaving your playground.” The concept of “self-sufficiency” is very popular today, but it has a very relative nature, since no one has ever produced “all and everything” by themselves. While “international division of labor” is one of the greatest positive outcomes of human development. Abandoning the concept of “division of labor” will bring much more serious risks than the consequences of “dishonest behavior” of some of its participants. The USSR managed to survive in the conditions of hardly less severe international blockade, but it never waived the benefits of the “international division of labor”.

Going back to the subject of the present discussion - the foreign visits of the Japanese Prime Minister, let us briefly focus on its second stage, namely the visit to Cambodia. First of all, one should pay attention to the fact that Cambodia is one of the ten countries of the South-East Asia sub-region that forms the coastal zone of the South China Sea, and the concerns about the situation around this sea (once again) were expressed in the same Japanese-Indian Joint Statement.

Secondly, in 2022 Cambodia is acting as the Chairman of the ASEAN Regional Association, which includes the same countries from the Southeast Asia. Although this position of a chairman is mostly ceremonial in nature, the role of ASEAN in regional (and global) affairs is continuously growing. All global players, at any appropriate occasion, consider it necessary to express their positive attitude to this Association.

Thirdly, note again that among all the ASEAN member countries, Cambodia is China’s most reliable political partner in this critically important sub-region of Southeast Asia.

This region is also important for Japan. In order to strengthen Japan’s positions in one of the countries of this sub-region, during the meeting with his Cambodian colleague Hun Sen, the Japanese Prime Minister promised to grant a loan worth USD 378 million, as well as to provide further assistance in the amount of USD 50 million through some international programs.

In conclusion, the author would like to note once again that the state of affairs in the configuration “China-India-Japan” has an increasing influence on the nature of the development of the situation in the Indian Pacific region. China is facing problems of varying complexity in the relations with the remaining two countries in this group of the leading Asian players.

Meanwhile, Russia could play a special role in the process of resolving the challenges in this triangle.

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