The USA and China: Contradiction Growth in Security Sphere in the APR

With Chinese building up comprehensive national power, a variety of contradictions between Beijing and Washington are continuously expanding. Over the period of more than twenty years of ‘unipolar moment’ existence, the United States of America, having accustomed to their unchallenged dominance in global and regional matters, are not ready to accept the right of another state to ‘shape the future of the world’ on an equal basis with Washington. Washington evermore intends to continue setting the tone of global development, to prescribe remedies for economic prosperity and to dictate rules of ‘appropriate’ behavior to other states both in international and internal domestic affairs, which can’t but trigger quite understandable irritation and resistance on the part of the strengthening Beijing.

Contrary to official eloquence of the US and China senior officials, and their public claptrap on strengthening of bilateral cooperation and possible development of ‘relations of a new type between the Great Powers’, in reality there is an increase of rivalry and contradictions in the American-Chinese relations. If at the beginning of XXI century the ‘negative’ agenda included the Taiwan issue, human rights discourse (Tibetan and Uighur issues, the problem of Chinese dissidents, freedom of speech, etc.) and a range of economic problems, then in the last few years in record-breaking time this list of contradictions was supplemented by a range of problems related to the South China and the East China Seas, cyber security issues, freedom of Internet in China, the situation in Hong Kong, and also intensifying rivalry between the two countries in the APR, as well as at other regional venues (the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, etc.).

Widening of the spheres of contradictions between the USA and China lends evidence for the thesis on the inevitability of rivalry between a firmly established state – global leader and a potential super-power rapidly expanding its might, both of which drastically differ in ideology, value system, political and economic model.

In this relation the augmentation of the American-Chinese contradictions in security sphere in the APR is extremely indicative. The both states which since the beginning of XXI century have boosted their involvement in this region’s affairs give each other a handle for grounded concern and building up of distrust.

Beijing’s growing discontent and deep concern is related to the US intervention since summer 2010 into territorial disputes in the South China and the East China Seas, to strengthening by Washington of the military alliances and formation of new partner relations in the APR (in particular, Washington’s ‘drawing over to its side’ of such key Asian countries as Vietnam and Myanmar), to the American policy for China demonization, to the intensification of the US joint exercises in this region, to the US continuing intelligence-gathering activities in close vicinity to China’s territory. Behind the events in Hong Kong, Beijing also sees the US’ purposeful activities in accordance with the proven scheme of triggering ‘colored’ revolutions, aimed in this case at destabilization of the situation in China and erosion of the CPC legitimacy. Beijing often interprets the majority of critical situations which China currently faces in its internal and external policy, as a result of measures implemented by Washington to deter China.

For Washington there are also more and more issues for concern in relation to the current situation in the security sphere in the APR. Now it is hard to deny the fact that China becomes a new centre of power and influence in the APR. Chinese defense budget demonstrates sustainable growth in absolute terms (in 2015 defense expenditures will grow by 10.1% compared to 2014 and will amount to USD 142 bn), China’s war potential is considerably
consolidating, operating capabilities of its armed forces keep growing, China’s push in implementation of its national interests also increases.

Incidents with the Chinese and American marine vessels and aircraft standoffs in the water areas around China and aerial domains over them have long become common occurrence. China, upholding the principle of absolute ban for foreign war ships’ navigation within the 200-mile exclusive economic zone of a coastal state, disturbs the American ships’ navigation in its exclusive economic zone and sometimes outside it. Yet another incident took place in August 2014, when a Chinese fighter aircraft Su-27 impeded the navigation of an American maritime patrol aircraft P-8 flying at the distance of 145 miles from the Chinese Hainan Island. By contrast with the similar incident which ended up in the plane collision and the death of the Chinese pilot, the August incident was without losses and resulted only in protests on the American part.

A peculiar response to the continuing intelligence operations by the American Navy and Air Force in the Chinese exclusive economic zone was introduction by China since 2012 of the practice of conducting military maneuvers within the limits of the US exclusive economic zone, in particular in the area of Guam and Hawaii islands in the Pacific Ocean. Such maneuvers became possible due to enhancement of Chinese armed forces’ operational capabilities. Increased capabilities of the China’s fleet to overpass ‘the first island chain’ and enter the Pacific Ocean unhindered were demonstrated in July 2013, when for the first time in history Chinese ships sailed through the La Perouse Strait located between the Sakhalin and Hokkaido islands. At the end of March 2015 another showcase incident took place: for the first time the Chinese Air Force crossed ‘the first island chain’ and held maneuvers in the Western part of the Pacific Ocean. Prospectively, one can predict further expansion of military exercise level and the increase of the number of China’s maneuvers in the Western part of the Pacific Ocean near the American territory with all that it implies.

Rapid strengthening of China’s military power is accompanied by Beijing’s attempts to spread its control over navigable and air routes in the APR. The creation by China of the air defense identification zone in the East China Sea in November 2013 was the first signal, which caused a massive outcry in the region and an extremely negative response on the part of the USA. The second signal followed at the end of March 2015, when China, without relevant coordination with the interested parties, officially opened a new air route M503, only 8 km away from the West of the Taiwan Strait water parting line. Such proximity of the new air route to transportation corridors of Taiwan, the US long-standing partner in the region, can obstruct both civil and military operations for Taiwan, in particular, affect communication between Taiwan and Taiwan-controlled islands of Kinmen and Matsu.

Washington also shows deep concern in view of Beijing’s spinning-up activities in vindicating its claims for disputed islands and water zones of the South China Sea. In 2014, Beijing designated its new tactics in materialization of territorial claims: China undertakes extraordinary in scale and unprecedented in speed works on the creation of artificial islands in the South China Sea. Over the past year China constructed through sluicing at least five artificial islands. In mid-November 2013, Jane’s Defense Weekly made public satellite images of the construction of the Jongshu Island that was even then larger, in terms of area, than Taiwan-controlled Itu Aba – the largest natural island of the Spratly Islands. In February 2015, the world community’s attention was drawn to sluicing by China of the Yunsidao Island – the largest in the group of the Paracel Islands. Compared to 2013, the island area almost doubled. The construction of new islands and the enlargement of those already existing can considerably strengthen China’s positions in the South China Sea, which is certainly in conflict with the US interests.

And finally, contradictions between the USA and China can reach their pinnacle in relation to the actively promoted by China idea of creating a new regional security system in the APR, that should replace the currently functioning system based primarily on the bilateral allied relations between the USA and the five countries of the region. On the basis of statements from Chinese high officials, heard throughout the last year, Washington has come to the conclusion that Beijing intends to bolster the creation of the new system of regional security without the US’ participation under the principle ‘Asia for Asians’.

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