The US and the Asia-Pacific: A "pivot-shift" in American foreign policy Part 1

The evolution of the U.S. foreign policy observable in recent years cannot fail to reflect on the character of the new global game that has been unfolding after the conclusion of the previous game, dubbed the "Cold War". Those who have been discussing this evolution have coined the terms "pivot" and "shift" towards the Asia-Pacific region to describe this phenomenon.

When did the "pivot-shift" start and why

The terms "pivot" and "shift" became widely used after the articles "America's Pacific Century" and "The American Pivot to Asia" were published in the Foreign Policy magazine at the end of 2011; they were written by, respectively, former State Secretary Hillary Clinton and Kenneth Lieberthal, who was a special assistant to President Clinton during his administration. The process described by these terms has been going on since the beginning of the first decade in the 21st century. However, keen American experts began to talk about its inevitability during the second half of the 1990s as part of a discussion on the new "Big Strategy" that the U.S. should follow during the post-Cold War period. Even at that time, the search for a country to fill the role of a new "sparring partner" in the future global game (instead of the no longer existing USSR) rightfully pointed to China.

Among other factors taken into consideration to make this forecast, special attention was devoted to the fast and steady economic progress in China that has been apparent since the beginning of the 1980s. Extrapolating from the tempos of this growth, by the end of the 2000s, China's Comprehensive National Power indicators would lead it to a position where it could challenge the global leader.

Because the key goal of American foreign policy has always been (especially in the last 60-70 years) focused on resisting the possible appearance of a global competitor, these new global trends raised the issue of the need to develop the country’s strategic course to solve this problem. The strategy would consist of a completely understandable and the only viable course of action, which was based on re-allocating the available resources (most importantly, military resources) to zones that directly border China as well as to regions that are vitally important for the Chinese economy.

As part of this strategy, the U.S. conducted military operations into Afghanistan and Iraq under the pretence of "countering terrorism" in the first half of the 2000s. However, lately, there are increasingly more discussions on the exhaustion of the "international terrorism" topic as a whole, which really carried a more transitional and official character during the process of preparing to implement the true (and intensively more relevant for the global hegemon) strategy of containing China.

In discussing this strategy, it is also important to note that the military invasion into the Middle East and Central Asia (with the official goal of "fighting terrorism") was not at all the first manoeuvre in this "pivot-shift" of American policies to the Asia-Pacific. One of these was the visit of then democrat-president Bill Clinton to India in 2000. This visit began the process of "defrosting" and developing the relationship between the United States and one of the most important countries for the American strategy of containing China. This process was successfully continued by Republican president George Bush.
The development of comprehensive relations with India, including within the sphere of defence, is an important component of the overall process of the "pivot-shift" of American policies towards the Asia-Pacific, regardless of issues present in these bilateral relations: both those that have continued since the Cold War and new issues. The latter should include those that arise in the sphere of the quickly-developing economic ties or those that arise from the American policy of "leaving" Afghanistan and negotiating with the Talibans.

However, attempts at including India in the strategy of containing China gave rise to discussions about "strategic geography" in the American expert community, a seemingly abstract, but in truth, a topic that has a real practical use.

To be continued.

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