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THE UNITED STATES' NATIONAL STRATEGIC CULTURE AS APPLIED TO THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

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Abstract. This article attempts to embrace the entire complexity of the United States national strategic thinking as applied to the Indo-Pacific region. The author indicates transformation of the international system and dwells on how this development is reflected in the creation of a relatively new concept of Indo-Pacific. It is worth saying that the article covers foreign policy strategy, not military one, but they both share some general tenets. Then the distinctive features of U.S. strategic culture are highlighted. At the end of the article, the author summarizes briefly the current US Indo-Pacific strategy.

Keywords: strategic culture; Indo-Pacific; transformation of the international system; US national security strategy; US-China relations.

Currently, we can witness the transformation of the international system with the following specific aspects: a change in the balance of power in favor of emerging economies (mainly Asian ones, which are now among the top 20 countries by GDP [7]), acceleration of globalization pace, increased cross-border activity, the emergence of new global threats, etc. These developments are reflected in the establishment of a relatively innovative concept of Indo-Pacific, which replaced its predecessor, the Asia-Pacific region [2].

U.S. strategic thinking has had to adapt to this evolving environment, which resulted in the Trump and then current U.S. President Biden's Indo-Pacific strategies. It should be noted that in their 2017 and 2020 national security strategies, one of the main threats is China. Trump's NSS mentions it 33 times [1]. Biden's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance mentions it 15 times [4].

During the Obama administration, foreign policy shifted to the rapidly developing Asia-Pacific region, which had the potential for accelerated economic and political growth with uncertain future prospects and the probable emergence of new challenges, given the territorial disputes there. In such an atmosphere, the U.S. decided to increase its presence in the region in order to maintain the status quo with U.S. dominance and to guide this evolution in a beneficial direction for Washington, especially as China increasingly assumed more responsibility in the region and challenged the established pattern of relations there.

Before discussing the projection of U.S. strategic culture on Indo-Pacific, we should first define its key characteristics and give a definition of the concept. Strategic thinking and culture itself began to be actively studied in the 1970s, which was associated with the Cold War. T. Mahnken gives the following



definition: “Strategic culture is that set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives (both oral and written), that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives [5].”

C. Gray describes American strategic culture as follows: “That culture referring to modes of thought and action with respect to force, derived from perception of the national historical experience, aspiration for self-characterization...and from all of the many distinctively American experiences (of geography, political philosophy, of civic culture, and “way of life”) that characterize an American citizen. [3]”

Historically, the U.S. has had an abundance of natural resources and so-called “free security,” which eventually made the U.S. a sanctuary country for migrants. A promoted individualism in resource exploitation has enabled the US's rapid progress. It is worth noting that some researchers consider free security a myth [6], but it is nonetheless present in explaining the U.S. place in the world. Generally, it refers to the absent need to defend oneself against an external enemy. This eventually led to a rejection of European power politics.

The U.S. now sees itself as an exceptional transformative force, a global leader in international affairs that promotes the only right values and punishes those violating them. This manifests itself in a desire to replace undemocratic governments in the world with more friendly ones. In short, U.S. strategic thinking is about maintaining its dominant role in the world.

This is projected on the region in question. Consistent with the above characteristics of national strategic thinking, American Indo-Pacific doctrine aims to: 1) creation of a more flexible system of relations with allies under the leading role of the United States. It

is known that the US has signed security treaties with many countries in Info-Pacific, and they, in turn, are reluctant to confront Beijing openly, being aware of their economic dependence on it. Although opposition to China in this sense will not lead to alliances in their traditional sense, it nevertheless creates a circle within which Washington can play a key role in pursuing security policy;

2) Preventing the growing involvement of “third countries” in the region (e.g., Russia);

3) Identifying new forms of cooperation with China, under which the containment of Chinese ambitions will continue while maintaining stable relations in areas where the interests of the two countries converge or diverge minimally. The National Security Strategy of the current U.S. president indicates the importance of this. It also includes preventing the creation and strengthening of new regional security organizations with China playing a defining role;

4) More active U.S. participation in regional organizations (example – ASEAN, with which the U.S. has signed a Treaty of friendship and cooperation) to give their evolution the vector needed for America;

5) Intensifying the spread of the immutable values of democratic peace. This is manifested in helping the local states to strengthen the relevant authorities;

6) Strengthening military capabilities in the region, especially in the South China Sea.

Thus, we can conclude that the current U.S. plan of activity in the Indo-Pacific region clearly correlates with the national features of its strategic culture.

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