

1. SECURITY AND GEOPOLITICS

CHINA – JAPAN INLANDS DISPUTES AS THE CHALLENGE IN EVOLVING SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The paper portrays the overall political–military situation in East Asia with the focus on security challenges involving major regional powers, namely China and Japan. It outlines the regional implications of current maritime disputes as one of major security concerns in the East Asia. The main attention is given to territorial disagreements over Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands involving China and Japan as a dominant players in the region. Also smaller nations are mentioned as the disputes are strongly influencing their foreign policy and forcing development of defense capabilities. Additionally, the US position toward regional matters is provided as the nation is playing a significant role there as an ally or potential opponent.

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Introduction

The situation in Asia is still of interest of the world based on economic development of the continent, security concerns and the incoming decisions about future of US presence after presidential elections in the Asia – Pacific region. The security domain of the continent is fragile and is it worsened by bilateral and multilateral unresolved territorial disputes. Currently relations between China and Japan are among challenges that could negatively influence the whole region. China's multidimensional

development, including military domain, is causing some worries in Tokyo. At the same time last changes in interpretation of Japanese law, close alliance relations with US and implementation of offensive weapon systems are observed carefully in Beijing. What is important, history is playing a significant role regarding relations between those two regional powers and that factor is used by both sides. The history is also related to ambitions of both to play not only regional role but to be among

¹ Opinions expressed by the author are his own views and they do not reflect in any way the official policy or position of the government of Poland. There is no potential conflict of interest related to the paper.

global powers. The tensions are linked with disputes between two nations over islands: Senkaku in Japanese or Diaoyu in Chinese as those possess military importance, there are raw resources in the East China Sea and national prestige is playing a role. So, none of two actors would give it up. For China it is related with security concepts named a 'two island chain' and an 'anti-access/area denial'. Recognizing the high potential for a change in the current sensitive situation and carefully observing the region US is constantly present there along with progressive investments into military instruments of power. Russia is currently preoccupied in Ukraine and Syria but is observing carefully both China and Japan as of economic and security reasons looking into the future and struggling with economic shortfalls. The overall security is important for Beijing to ensure continuity of economic reforms to meet leadership and citizens' expectations. Especially, as the nation is undergoing transformation of economy model and it requires above all stability. At the same time, the military power is a tool to preserve national position within the political landscape of the continent requiring development of force projection capabilities to defend, to strengthen deterrence factor and also to possess long range attack abilities to strike an opponent from a distance. Japan is not eager to ignite a conflict but national pride is surfacing again not allowing any step back asking to preserve firm stand toward China. It is preserving strategic relations with US and parallel is strengthening regional alliances. Maritime disputes among East Asian nations are a strong impetus for military buildup and special attention is given to air force and navy and other land based long-range weapon systems. There is furthermore nuclear component based in China and US being strong deterrence factor. Such

developments are especially visible in the allocation of resources and weapon procurement in China, Japan, and Russia, but it is linked with the US strategic shift from Europe into the Pacific region. The situation after presidential election in US in November 2016 is even more unpredictable as expectations that "U.S. allies and partners in the region may no longer be able to count on the kinds of the reassurance about Washington's security commitment that they have grown used to" and "will instill a much greater sense of uncertainty – even anxiety – in U.S. allies and partners in the Asia-Pacific region"². The situation however evolved during president Trump term in office; there are also prediction that he could win another term.

The paper will focus on relations between China and Japan and possible challenges related to those fragile relationships. It will also mention the importance of territorial issues and history, which is important factor among Asian nations shaping their mind but also used pragmatic way for political reasons. In that context islands related disputes will be analyzed deeper. The military buildup will be discussed and role of security related organizations and treaties will be covered as important security factor involving not only both regional actors, as 'outside powers' and nations are playing a role. It will allow to provide conclusions and to draw a picture of possible developments between those nations and their influence on Asian security.

Regional security developments

The geopolitical changes in the East Asia are an important topic of debates as

² Yuki Tatsumi, "Trump Wins: Implications for US Allies and Partners in Asia," *The Diplomat*, November 09, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/11/trump-wins-implications-for-us-allies-and-partners-in-asia/> (accessed: November 12, 2018).

of continuously rising China, more ambitious Japan and US commitment to the region. Among regional concerns, maritime disputes and conflicts have been noted by major news agencies as they have potential to develop into struggle for power. It is especially important, as China and Japan are ready to take the lead in the region when their period will come and capabilities will be there to make it happen. The directions of possible confrontation could be triggered by internal and external factors and they are not fully predictable.

There are other actors there, like Russia, having good political and economic relations with China and an intent to keep calm relations with Japan. It is an arena of US interests, followed by building and rebuilding alliances in the region to face potential

competitors for the leader's position on the global arena. US presence is of critical importance for Japan as for now as its military security is relying on the superpower's capabilities and support. A few smaller nations are similarly looking for any reliable option to enhance their security situation and some of them have been in other islands disputes with Beijing (Spratly and Paracel Islands – see fig. 1). The disputes must be treated in broader context, as China is afraid of vulnerability of its East Coast and wants to push a possible threat out of its shoreline. It is paralleled by threat of being contained by US as explained Henry Kissinger; he saw such the endangerment already during Mao era. He mentioned it in relation to a Chinese game 'go' or 'weiqi'³ in which to win it is necessary to surround an opponent.

Fig. 1. Maritime disputes in the East Asia and Pacific



Source: Based on: East Asia Political map 2011. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/txu-pclmaps-oclc-780028873-asia_east_pol-2011.jpg [accessed: October 26, 2018].

³ Henry Kissinger, *O Chinach (On China)*, Polish edition translated by M. Komorowska, (Wolowicz: Czarne Company, 2014), p. 115

Among instruments of power, the military one is very visible in the East Asia and is linked with armed forces modernization in China causing accusations about aggressive intentions toward neighbors. It is speeding up an arms race in Asia. Is it the consequence of seeing a more powerful nation advantage as potential source of threat and encouragement to forward national interests in expense of smaller and weaker actors. In addition, Japan's military build-up is observed with attention and there are historically driven concerns in it. Currently US involvement is stabilizing the security situation by building military bases and strengthened alliances. The country has continued reinforcing capabilities as stated by Washington's leadership when discussing Asia – Pacific region: "its development is vital to American strategic and economic interests"⁴. But the situation about US involvement is not clear as

*"during his campaign, Trump averred that U.S. allies needed to pay a greater share of the costs of U.S. protection and suggested that it wouldn't be so bad if South Korea and Japan considered developing nuclear weapons of their own as part of a regional deterrent strategy"*⁵.

Moreover, if US foreign policy will shift "from an ideological model based on the promotion of democracy to a more isolationist model with a hint of mercantilism, the country may be less inclined to intervene in the affairs of emerging democracies"⁶. Such the developments could significantly change the security map in whole Asia with broader implications.

⁴ Michael Sprangler, "Rebalancing the Rebalance", Parameters No 44 (2) summer 2014, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, 12.

⁵ Rodger Baker, "An Asian Perspective on the U.S. Elections", STRATFOR November 16, 2016, "An Asian Perspective on the U.S. Elections is republished with permission of Stratfor" (accessed: November 16, 2018).

⁶ Ibid.

Regional substance of disputes

Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are composed of just five uninhabited islands⁷ and three rocks (the largest island- 4.32 km₂; the smallest 0.45 km₂). There are three nations claiming their rights, as next to two major actors also Taiwan is involved. The geostrategic location is important among reasons to claim rights as having possessing them any of the three players is pushing potential threat far away from own respective borders. On the other side, it is allowing deployment of military assets forward enhancing their range causing a real threat for other claimants (fig. 2). It is expressed by Akiyama Masahiro, President of the Tokyo Foundation claims that "should Japan lose sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands, however, China would gain considerable freedom for its naval activities in these waters. Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force, meanwhile, would find itself subject to major restrictions on its activities there due to China's stance on its EEZ. The impact on the United States, Japan's ally, would be even greater"⁸.

Japan has been controlling islands from 1895 but in 1945 lost it for US as an outcome of the World War II. Although the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951 ended US occupation of Japan, still Okinawa Prefecture, including its Senkaku Islands, were in American possession in accordance with Article 3 of the Treaty. The islands proved to be visible in 1968 when a UN Committee for Far-East economy found oil fields in the East China Sea area⁹. It encouraged

⁷ The names of islands are as follow: Uotsuri-shima / Diaoyu Dao; Taishō-tō / Chiwei Yu; Kuba-shima / Huangwei Yu; Kita-Kojima / Bei Xiaodao; Minami-Kojima / Nan Xiaodao).

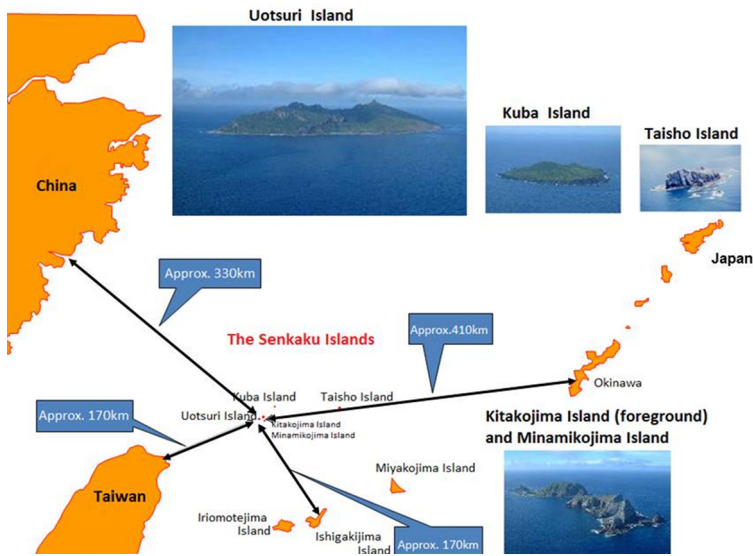
⁸ For details see: Akiyama Masahiro, "Geopolitical Considerations of the Senkaku Islands", The Sasaki Peace Foundation, August 7, 2013, pp. 7-10.

⁹ Read also: Akiyama Masahiro, "Geopolitical Considerations of the Senkaku Islands", op. cit., 7-10 and "Senkaku Islands Q&A", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo April 13, 2016, http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/qa_1010.html#q15 (accessed: November 16, 2018).

Taiwan to claim their territorial jurisdiction in April 1971 and People's Republic of China in December 1971. The problem started to

be trilateral challenge in May 1972 as US returned the Okinawa Prefecture and the islands to Japan¹⁰.

Fig. 2. Geographical location of Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands



Source: AkiyamaMasahiro, "Geopolitical Considerations of the Senkaku Islands", The Sasakawa Peace Foundation August 7, 2013, p. 3.

The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands issue was discussed in September 1972 when establishing diplomatic relations by Prime Minister of Japan Kakuei Tanaka and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in Beijing. When asked about them, Zhou answered that "I do not want to talk about the Senkaku Islands issue this time. It is not good to discuss this now. It became an issue because of the oil out there. If there wasn't oil, neither Taiwan nor United States would make this an issue"¹¹. The next important decisions were

made by Japan as in June 1996 Japan declares a 200 miles exclusive economic zone (EEZ) around islands and in 2010 the islands were declared as a part of Japan-US Security Arrangements which complicated political and security arrangements. China was especially disturbed when in September 2012 Japanese government bought three of the Senkaku islands from private owner. It raised China's anti-Japanese sentiments and more attempts to penetrate established EEZ.

¹⁰ Omar Alkhalili, "Disputed Territory: The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands", *The Political Geography Now* June 11, 2013, <http://www.polgeonow.com/2013/06/disputed-territory-senkaku-diaoyu-islands-japan-china.html>, (accessed: January 19, 2019).

¹¹ Shingo Yamagami, "Reflections on the Issue of the Senkaku Islands -from the field of practice on international law and politics", *Japan's Territories Series*, Japan Digital Library March 2016, 18. Jinping Guo, "Evidence shows Diaoyu Dao is China's territory", *China Daily* October 15, 2012, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2012-10/15/content_15816504_3.htm (accessed: November 29, 2018).

China and Japan – major regional players in East Asia

Bilateral relations between China and Japan are a real source of possible conflict in the region and the dispute over Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands is just one of many possible hot spots. The dispute is not only connected with natural resources (rich stocks of

hydrocarbons and fisheries) and sea lines of communication but also with national prestige as both Beijing and Tokyo want to be recognized as a capable regional powers, strong enough to impose national will; Beijing has also global ambitions. The prestige factor must be also taken into consideration very seriously as national and personal prides are very important in Asia. In relation to islands this is

“their emotional significance for China that defies rational calculation. Here the assumption is that Chinese perceptions born out of historical memories of mistrust and animosity (Japanese imperialist aggression) contribute to the present threat, that get translated directly into strong foreign policy behavior towards Japan. That is, hidden agendas dictate how one sees the other.... What explains China’s assertive behavior is its identity vis-à-vis Japan, which is deeply embedded in historical memories – dominated by a sense of inferiority and the humiliation suffered during Japan’s invasion of China”¹².

So, the tensions between two Asian nations are not new and both are recognizing the possibility of confrontational scenario. According to polls, 54% of Chinese population and 29% of Japanese population was afraid of a war between those two powers in the nearest future¹³. The anti-Japanese moods are linked with historical massacres like the Nanking Massacre committed by the Imperial Japanese Army during the

Second Sino-Japanese War in December 1937. Those memories are still alive and they are cultivated, so reminding that aspect of history would be rather easy and could be exploited by propaganda. The tensions are heated up by the US position related to disputes, as the White House has been treating Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands as territory administrated by Tokyo and is concerned about security there. The statement is important for Japan as Russian actions in Crimea and its annexation could be a case used by China to do the same.

The bilateral relations between Beijing and Tokyo started to deteriorate further after Shinzo Abe became the prime minister and initiated visits in the Yasukuni Shrine dedicated to Japanese who died during wars. The issue is that there are many names mentioned there of soldiers convicted of war crimes including as many as 14 recognized as Class A war criminals – a crime against peace. Such the visits caused great dissatisfaction and criticism of governments and populations in China and South Korea and other countries as those suffered during Japanese occupation during World War II. It was recognized as an attempt to make revision of history trying to negate war crimes and to rewrite past. It was strongly criticized by Chinese President Xi Jinping who mentioning the rhetoric of ‘national humiliation’ said, “the war launched by the Japanese militarists in modern times brought calamity to the people of China and other Asian countries. The facts cannot be denied. China will never allow any denial and distortion of this history of aggression or any return to militarism”¹⁴. It was also reminder for other Asian nations as those also suffered in the past, especially Korean nation.

¹² Amrita Jash, “*Diaoyu/Senkaku islands dispute: identity versus*”, Asia & the Pacific Policy Society, January 11, 2016, <http://www.policyforum.net/diaoyusenkaku-islands-dispute-identity-versus-territory/> (accessed: January 29, 2019).

¹³ “*Ponad połowa Chińczyków obawia się wybuchu wojny z Japonią*” (Eng. *More than half of Chinese is afraid of war with Japan*), IAR, Polish Press Agency – PAP September 10, 2014, <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1329,title,Ponad-polowa-Chinczykow-obawia-sie-wybuchu-wojny-z-Japonia,wid,16874772,wiadomosc.html>(accessed: November 29, 2018).

¹⁴ Amrita Jash, “*China still haunted by Japan*”, Asia Times Online (Holdings), Ltd., September 19, 2014, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/CHIN-01-190914.html> (accessed: November 03, 2018).

Animosity is additionally linked with growing economy disproportion during last decades. China is developing much faster than Japan and took the position of second largest economy in 2010 and it was a matter of frustration in Tokyo especially as another nation – India has a potential to push it down in economic ranking. According to Bao Xiaqin, the associate professor of international relations at the Fudan University, “the national anxiety about Japan’s status and future has been exacerbated by China’s fast rise. At a time when the global order is being reshaped, the Japanese are not sure what position their country will have in the new world system, hence they choose to support politicians that appear tough enough to give the country a voice that can be heard on the world stage”¹⁵. It was one of reasons of more decisive stand in bilateral relations under Abe leadership from 2012. On the other hand, according to Mahmud Ali such the stand intensified assertive Chinese activities near Japanese territorial waters and air space¹⁶. As Tokyo was not passive, it caused a few incidents and those could have had a potential to cause a conflict situation. Many of them included fishing and combat naval vessels e.g. Japanese destroyer was tracked down by Chinese navy vessel using its fire control radar. Such the incidents caused the need to Japan to closely monitor¹⁷ all activities recognizing threat. Ali is claiming that Beijing is trying internationally to create an impression that Japanese side is advocating “Chinese threat”¹⁸ and is intentionally generating tensions. He is looking

back into history and is suggesting Tokyo to make self-esteem, deeper look back into own aggressive history to do more to preserve stability in the whole region it wanted to subordinate in the past¹⁹.

The area has seen many incidents involving aircraft and vessels. It reached a new level when in November 2013 China unilaterally announced establishing the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), covering most of the East China Sea, “with the aim of safeguarding state sovereignty, territorial land and air security, and maintaining flight order”²⁰ as stated by defense ministry spokesperson. It was strongly condemned by many countries including: Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and USA. Japan’s foreign affairs minister recognized that “setting up such airspace unilaterally escalates the situations surrounding Senkaku islands and has danger of leading to an unexpected situation”²¹ warning about the possible threat to peace. Washington did not recognize the ADIZ and two days after the announcement two strategic bombers B-52 made an undisturbed flight over it. The Chinese ADIZ irritated South Korea as both nations are in an argument about leodo, a submerged rock inside a Korea’s territorial line. The rock as such is not the main issue, but is related rather to an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and protection of Seoul’s interests as it is “strategically important”²².

Both side are preserving hard stand as of domestic and international policy and it is further tightened up by US presence and politics as the White House is treating

¹⁵ Bao Xiaqin, “*Japanese must see China anew*”, China Daily, Beijing November 8, 2014, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/pla-daily-commentary/2014-11/08/content_6218173.htm (accessed: November 03, 2018).

¹⁶ Based on: S. Mahmud Ali, *US- China Strategic Competition. Towards a New Power Equilibrium*, (London, Springer: 2015), pp. 120-122.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²⁰ “*China establishes ‘air-defence zone’ over East China Sea*”, BBC News Asia, November 23, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-25062525> (accessed: November 03, 2018).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Kim Young-jin, “*Why leodo matters*”, The Korean Times, September 18, 2012, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/09/117_120266.html (accessed: October 14, 2018).

Diaoyu/Senkaku islands as an area administered by Japan and an integral part of US-Japanese security treaty. To show willingness to contribute more in September 2015 the upper house of Japan's parliament approved security bills allowing its self – defense forces an “option of going into battle to protect allies such as the United States even if there was no direct threat to Japan or its people”²³. The specific conditions to employed armed forces were linked with: clear recognition that an emerging conflict could be a danger for Japan, there is no other option left except using armed forces and use of force is to be limited to minimum.²⁴ It has changed bilateral relations as the previous security treaty from 1960 included declaration of only US support in the case of attack and it was formalizing the presence of US military bases in Japan²⁵. The decision was made against population's support as the “Asahi Shimbun poll published this week showed that 54% of voters oppose the bills, and 68% saw no need to push the legislation through”²⁶. The population reaction for the new law was partially related to the danger of escalation that could happen in relation with China, as foreign affairs ministry spokesman Hong Lei said “we demand that Japan genuinely listen to just appeals from both at home and abroad, learning

from historical lessons and adhering to the path of peaceful development”²⁷. New regulations were also a concern for South Korea and it was expressed during a meeting of defense ministers Gen Nakatani and Han Min-koo in October 2015. During discussion

*“South Korea has expressed concern about Japan's move to allow its troops to fight overseas in a shift away from the limits placed by its pacifist constitution drawn up after the war, saying Japanese forces will not be allowed on to the Korean peninsula without its agreement”*²⁸.

It was linked with Seoul's perception that the Korean Peninsula is under its jurisdiction²⁹ and in the context of historical memory. It is reminding old saying ‘Those who do not learn from history is doom to repeat it’.

The concerns have been an outcome of changes in legislation paralleled by ongoing military build-up of the he Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF). The important fact that has raised tensions was the sea trial of helicopter carrier JS *Izumo* (DDH 183), being the largest Japanese naval vessel since Second World War; it is officially classified as helicopter destroyer. It was condemned by China's ministry of defense, as “this trend is worthy of high vigilance by Japan's Asian neighbors and the international community” and “Japan should learn from history, adhere to its policy of self-defense and abide by its promise of taking the road of peaceful development”³⁰. It was supported

²³ “Japanese politicians brawl in parliament over bill to allow troops to fight abroad”, Agence France Presse, Tokyo September 17, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/17/japanese-politicians-brawl-in-parliament-over-bill-to-allow-troops-to-fight-abroad>(accessed: November 23, 2018).

²⁴ Olga Podsiadlo, „Parlament uchwalil ustawy bezpieczeństwa”, Japonia-Online.pl, September 21, 2015, <http://japonia-online.pl/news/3475>(accessed: November 06, 2018).

²⁵ The full text see: “Japan-U.S. Security Treaty”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Tokyo <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/ref/1.html>(accessed: December 03, 2018).

²⁶ Justin McCurry, “Japanese soldiers could fight abroad again after security bill passed”, The Guardian, September 18 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/18/japanese-soldiers-could-fight-abroad-again-after-security-bill-passed>(accessed: December 14, 2018).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Japan tries to ease South Korea's concern over military role”, Reuters, October 20, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-japan-defence-idUSKCN0SE0WN20151020>(accessed: December 03, 2018).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Hugo Gye, Anthony Bond, “It looks like an aircraft carrier, it sounds like an aircraft carrier... but the Japanese are adamant their biggest ship since WW2 is a ‘flat-topped destroyer’”, Daily Mail Online, August 06, 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2385430/Japan-warship-lzumo-aircraft-carrier-flat-topped-destroyer.html> (accessed: December 06, 2018).

by an assumption that the JS Izumo could be potentially considered as an aircraft carrier, which would be against Japanese constitution banning possession of 'war potential' (*senryoku*)³¹. It joined the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) in March 2015 and its sister vessel JS Kaga (DDH 184) was operational in March 2017. The vessels could carry up to 14 helicopters but also a navy infantry battalion (400 troops) and 50 combat vehicles. There are some comments that it could be transformed into a real aircraft carrier, as Japan was approved to acquire 105 aircraft Lockheed Martin Lightning II F-35 and some V-22 Osprey VTOL³². The first JSDF's 302nd fighter squadron equipped with F-35A was operational in March 2019. What is important in December 2018 "the cabinet of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe approved an increase of Japan's existing order of 42 to 147 F-35 aircraft including an additional 63 F-35As and 42 F-35Bs"; the latter one is short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) variant of the aircraft³³. Nevertheless, there are shortages related to transferring it to real aircraft carrier comparable to US and Chinese designs. In the context of islands disputes, "China is thus likely to be most concerned about the Izumo enhancing Japan's ability to check Chinese naval power projection into Japan's maritime defensive perimeter, rather than the possibility of it projecting military power onto the Chinese mainland"³⁴. This is based on assumption that those could support small opera-

tions e.g. to seize disputed islands.

The decisive position regarding the islands dispute is not to be changed but both are still not ready for open confrontation. It is a result of internal and external constraints, including: limited specific military capabilities to project power and hesitation to openly face each other, Chinese and US deterrence capabilities (including nuclear potential), the national populations' fears and international pressure (expectations of stability) and economic interests.

The regional implications

The other disputes on the South China Sea are creating new hazards for less capable militarily players making them to unite against commonly perceived threats and that opportunity is used by Japan e.g. toward Philippines. The role of Manila is reinforced by Japanese decision to deliver weapon systems and provide training assistance for Philippian armed forces. It could be followed by a security agreement tightening cooperation and further encirclement of China. That fact could be of importance as it would strengthen Philippines position in relation of islands disputes and would also encourage other smaller nations as Vietnam, Malesia or Taiwan to join the security arrangements if created. If idea would have any progress it would significantly strengthen Tokyo position as a regional leader able to unite efforts of small nations. US would definitely support it politically by providing military support and guarantees within existing security arrangements. On the other hand Beijing, being aware of possible consequences, will try to deny closer cooperation and divide nations using political, economic tools and military deterrence but also playing historical cards against Japan. Such the Tokyo's approach should support national interest by engaging other nations into friendly ar-

³¹ Corey Wallace, "Japan's war potential and the case of the Izumo 'destroyer'", EastAsia Forum, September 05, 2013, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/09/05/japans-war-potential-and-the-case-of-the-izumo-destroyer/> (accessed: December 08, 2018).

³² VTOL – vertical take-off and landing.

³³ Franz-Stefan Gady, "Japan Air Self Defense Force Stands Up First F-35A Lightning II Fighter Squadron" The Diplomat April 01, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/japan-air-self-defense-force-stands-up-first-f-35a-lightning-ii-fighter-squadron/> (accessed: June 15, 2019). F-35 B - the short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) and F-35C is carrier variant.

³⁴ Ibid.

rangements gaining new partners against China. There could be accusations, based on history, that Tokyo could try to rebuild its regional position and in the past, it was leading to aggression against nations located on the Asian mainland. The policy of rather ambitious Prime Minister Abe has been trying to enhance the role of the country and one of crucial elements it rebuilding military capabilities. For Philippines, the Japanese support is much desired as it is linked with flow of new technologies and equipment. The growing concerns among smaller nations about People's Liberation Army (PLA) development were visible in a research performed by the Pew Research Centre; people in a few Asian countries in spring 2013 were asked if they thought that "China's growing military power is a good thing or a bad thing for [their] country"³⁵. As many as 96% of Japanese and 91% of South Koreans recognized it as the threat; however, when moving toward southwest direction "Australia and the Philippines were next, at 71 percent and 68 percent. After that, however, there is a marked drop-off in concern over China's military. Indonesia had 39 percent say China's military power was a bad thing, Malaysia 20 percent, and Pakistan (a longtime friend of China's) a mere 5 percent"³⁶.

For Tokyo, Seoul is important as partner and it is related both to Pyongyang nuclear program and also toward Beijing. Up to some extent, escalation of nuclear tests will in the future reinforce Japanese air defense capabilities to annihilate any rockets launched from North Korea and China. It will be the result of US plans to deploy to South Korea the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) being well-

advanced anti-ballistic missile system capable to destroy variety of short, medium, and intermediate ballistic missiles. Such the option is heavily criticized by Beijing recognizing it as a threat but also claiming that it will speed up arms race in the whole region escalating security situation. The maritime disputes' dynamics are evolving especially as "China has become increasingly assertive of its claims to disputed maritime territories in the East and South China Seas, and remains committed to a relatively high rate of military spending to project its power into the region in the coming years"³⁷. For China maritime disputes are part of larger concept, which is linked to the extension of control of sea lines of communication by enhancing friendly relations and building navy infrastructure and ports along Asian south coastline ('String of Pearls'). Consequentially, it is resulting in the reaction of other actors linked with that subject of international relations.

This is the reason why also India is afraid of Chinese considerations related to the Indian Ocean and is even recognizing involvement into antipiracy on Somali waters as an excuse to penetrate the ocean³⁸. Robert Kaplan has written that China "wants to secure port access throughout the South China Sea and adjacent Indian Ocean, which connect the hydrocarbon-rich Arab-Persian World to the Chinese seaboard"³⁹. The rivalry between Beijing and New Delhi is peaceful, but the enlargement of navy and air force abilities to project power is an attribute that could cause willingness to challenge the opponent in the future. China

³⁷ Michael Sprangler, "Rebalancing the Rebalance", op. cit., p. 13.

³⁸ Toshi Yoshihara, James R. Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific. China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013), p. 174.

³⁹ Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and The Battle Against Fate*, (New York: Random House In., 2012), p. 199.

³⁵ Shannon Tiezzi, "China's Growing Defense Budget: Not As Scary As You Think", *The Diplomat*, February 5, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/02/china-s-growing-defense-budget-not-as-scary-as-you-think/> (accessed: January 12, 2019).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

has made an effort during recent years to make agreements in relation to land borders, and only the one with India remained not resolved. Those treaties were important for Beijing as precondition for the 'shift toward maritime domain'. The border issues were recognized by Jakub Grygiel as for him

*"the stabilization of China's land borders may be one of the most important geopolitical changes in Asia of the past few decades. From a tense frontier similar to that of Ming China is turning into a stable one that does not require an enormous expenditure of military strength or political attention. This might free China from having to devote resources and attention to its land borders, allowing it to pursue a more aggressive maritime geostrategy"*⁴⁰.

Japan is improving security cooperation with India and intensification of military and non-military contacts was intensified in last years. It is connected with Japan being afraid that US support could be questioned in the future, so other strong allies are highly desired. India is afraid of Chinese fast developments and it makes New Delhi and Tokyo closer friends. Abe speeded up such the relations as "under his leadership Japan signed the Strategic and Global Partnership with India in 2006. His historic speech on the Confluence of the Two Seas and his concept of Democratic Security Diamond underscore that India is perceived as an important partner"⁴¹. It was reflected in the 'National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and beyond' released in December 2013 by stating, "Japan will strengthen

its relationship with India in a broad range of fields, including maritime security, through joint training and exercises as well as joint implementation of international peace-keeping activities"⁴². The cooperation is beneficial for both nations within economy, security, and exchange of intelligence information and by transfer of technologies. India is also continuing pragmatic politics trying to avoid any open conflict as the focus now is economic development but it is showing willingness and readiness to support regional efforts to enhance preparedness to face Beijing if it will be more assertive. It is concerned about Chinese efforts to developed naval infrastructure within 'String of Pearls'. In that context Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands disputes are playing a role as it is preservation of continuity of freedom of navigation along seas linking Delhi and Tokyo. The cooperation with Japan is visible by regular bilateral naval exercises (JIMEX) from 2012 and by joining US-India 'Malabar' exercises in 2015. The latter is important as it "intends to strengthen cooperation with the 'JAI' countries. (Note: The Japan, America and India acronym of 'JAI' means victory in Hindi"⁴³.

For Japan good relations between Russia and China as 'partners of convenience' are important especially as Tokyo and Moscow still have no peace treaty as of the Southern Kurils (Russian) or the Northern Territories (Japanese). As Moscow is considering rebuilding military infrastructure there, it would create direct threat for key Japanese civilian and military locations. The warmer relations with Russia would be desired by Tokyo as of economic reasons

⁴⁰ Jakub Grygiel, *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change*, (Baltimore: the John Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 169-170.

⁴¹ Titli Basu, "Shinzo Abe's Visit to India: Reviewing the Strategic Partnership", Institute for defence Studies and Analyses, Comment, February 27, 2014, http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/ShinzoAbesVisittoIndia_tbasu_270214(accessed: January 14, 2019).

⁴² "National Defence Program Guidelines For FY 2014 and Beyond", Tokyo, December 17, 2013, p. 11, http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2014/pdf/20131217_e2.pdf(accessed: January 12, 2019).

⁴³ "Japan-India Summit Meeting", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, New Delhi December 13, 2015, http://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sw/in/page3e_000436.html(accessed: January 22, 2019).

but those could allow Japan to focus on Chinese direction as major issue of national interest and prestige within Asia. The bilateral relations between Russia and Japan are also a factor shaping the dynamics on international relations in the region creating some sympathy among countries based on pragmatic politics. The statement by Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu in 2016 that “should complete the formation of the whole infrastructure on the Kuril Islands”⁴⁴ is fixing Japanese military assets. According to Kremlin press service Putin and Abe in 2016 “discussed in detail the development of the Russian-Japanese relations. They pointed to mutual interest in stepping up cooperation in the political, trade, economic, humanitarian and other fields. An agreement was reached on continuing personal contacts”⁴⁵. The situation between the nations was a matter of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visit in Russia in May 2016 in spite of US administration suggestion not to conduct it. During Japan-Russia Summit Meeting Abe and Putin discussed options for further development of disputes over Northern Territories or Kuril islands “toward the formulation of solutions acceptable to both sides through a new approach that is not stuck in a traditional way of thinking in order to overcome the current negotiation stalemate and make a breakthrough”⁴⁶. It was agreed to continue high-level political dialogue and visits and to continue economic cooperation. There is as for now mutual interest to preserve peaceful relations as “Russia is becoming a very important

stakeholder in Asia-Pacific and could be a good counterbalance to China, playing a peace-making role in the region in general”⁴⁷. It has also other geopolitical aspects, as “Kremlin should be more interested in establishing strategic cooperation with Japan because Russia needs to diversify its partners in Asia-Pacific. In the case of Japan, it is seeking to prove its independence in making foreign policy decisions from the United States”⁴⁸.

Japan is observing relations between Beijing and Russia enhanced by significant gas agreements and Moscow’s export of weapon systems to their partner. It is related to worsening relationship of Russia with the Western nations forcing to cooperate closer with Beijing. The two nations are united in a collective security organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and those are exercising together in large-scale exercises codenamed “Peace Mission”⁴⁹. Although SCO is security related body the military link is limited to exercises only and there are no common standing forces for combined joint operations. The concerns for Japan have been linked with Chinese – Russian naval exercises showing new capabilities. From 2005, there were five major exercises within the “First Island Chain” followed by ‘Joint Sea -2015 II’ on the Sea of Japan in August 2015 with 23 warships, two submarines, 20 aircraft and marines. They were coming from Russian Pacific fleet and from three Chinese fleets and the drill was “the largest in the modern history of cooperation be-

⁴⁴ Sergei Fadeichev, “Russia plans to complete development of military facilities in Kuril islands in 2016”, TASS, January 12, 2016, <http://tass.ru/en/defense/848989> (accessed: January 22, 2019).

⁴⁵ Mikhail Klimentyev, “Japanese PM to visit Russia this spring, meet with Putin — media”, TASS, February 5, 2016, <http://tass.ru/en/politics/854705> (accessed: January 23, 2019).

⁴⁶ “Japan-Russia Summit Meeting”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, May 7, 2016, http://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page4e_000427.html (accessed: January 23, 2019).

⁴⁷ Pavel Koshkin, “Better Russia-Japan relations would be good for stability in Asia-Pacific”, Russia Direct, September 13, 2016, <http://www.russia-direct.org/analysis/better-russia-japan-relations-would-be-good-stability-asia-pacific> (accessed: January 23, 2019).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Yuri Smityuk, “SCO exercise Peace Mission 2014 to involve 7,000 troops”, Shanghai August 19, 2014, <http://en.itar-tass.com/world/745617>, (accessed: February 02, 2019).

tween the [Russian and Chinese] navies"⁵⁰. Zhang Junshe from PLA Naval Military Studies Research Institute described it as aiming to „improve the PLA Navy’s capability of defending and safeguarding national sovereignty, national security, and maritime rights and interests. They are not targeted at any country, but will definitely exert deterrent effects on countries harboring ill intentions against China”⁵¹. The drills were continued by China alone also in August 2016. Such the maneuvers are recognized as a danger as those are close to Japanese territorial waters and both exercising nations are in disputes related to islands and those are requiring naval capabilities to seize and defend later. The exercises are continued and it is obvious that Chinese naval capabilities are growing and those are overpowering Russian navy in some categories of combat ships. The think tank the Centre for Strategic and International Studies estimated that possessing “300 warship hulls, the PLAN is the largest navy in the world, counting aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, corvettes, submarines and amphibious assault ships”⁵². Such the statements were linked with the “joint maritime defensive operations” focused on “strengthening the two navies’ capability to commonly address maritime security

threats” within the exercise ‘Joint Sea 2019’ in May 2019 in both East China Sea and Yellow Sea⁵³.

The Pacific shift of US – the time for a new rebalance of Asian policy

US commitment to Asia and attitude toward islands disputes was highlighted by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel who said, that “it’s not about a rocky island or even the oil beneath the sea, he said, but rather is about sustaining the Asia-Pacific’s rules-based order, which has enabled the people of this region to strengthen their security, allowing for progress and prosperity”⁵⁴. To achieve such security and prosperity according to Hagel “From Europe to Asia, America has led this effort for nearly seven decades..., and we are committed to maintaining our leadership in the 21st century”⁵⁵. Washington’s assurance is an important factor for Tokyo as it is relying on US as security guarantor when facing an unpredictable future. Nevertheless, “having bound their fortunes inextricably to America, Japanese leaders monitor shifts in U.S. policy and strategy carefully, looking for signs of abandonment”⁵⁶. The same applies to other nations, which are basing their security on an alliance with the world’s dominant military superpower. For the US, the main goal has been to avoid being rejected from Asia by an antagonistic block of nations or just one nation, and the shift to the Pacific has been just an adaptation

⁵⁰ Matthew Bodner, “Russia, China Launch Largest Joint Naval Exercise in History”, the Moscow Times, August 20, 2015, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/russia-china-launch-largest-joint-naval-exercise-in-history/528346.html> (accessed: January 23, 2019).

⁵¹ “Comments: China needs more large-scale exercises”, China Military Online, August 3, 2015, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/pla-daily-commentary/2015-08/03/content_6613183.htm and “China, Russia start joint military exercise at Japan Sea”, China Military Online, August 20, 2015, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2015-08/20/content_6641468.htm (accessed: February 06, 2019).

⁵² Kristin Huang, “China and Russia have been doing joint navy drills for years, and now Beijing ‘has overtaken’ Moscow as a naval power”, South China Morning Post July 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-overtakes-russian-as-naval-power-after-joint-drills-2019-7> (accessed: July 16, 2019).

⁵³ Franz-Stefan Gady, “China, Russia Kick Off Bilateral Naval Exercise ‘Joint Sea’”, The Diplomat April 29, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/china-russia-kick-off-bilateral-naval-exercise-joint-sea/> (accessed: July 16, 2019).

⁵⁴ Jim Garamone, “U.S. to Continue to Lead in 21st Century, Hagel Says”, American Forces Press Service, Singapore, May 30, 2014, <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=122373> (accessed: February 02, 2019).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Toshi Yoshihara, James R. Holmes, Red Star over the Pacific..., op. cit., p. 196.

to new circumstances based on the well rooted tradition that Americans are not only Atlantic but also Pacific nation⁵⁷.

In general,

*"some countries, notably US allies, Japan and the Philippines, have become more vocal in their objections to Chinese maritime claims and more convinced of their need for American military support as maritime disputes unfold. Indeed, US allies appear to perceive the rebalancing as designed to put them on a more equal footing to resolve their disputes with China -- and not leave them to face rising Chinese power alone"*⁵⁸.

The US factor has been a game changer, however it must be linked with credible support by purposeful and convincing build capabilities in relation to all instruments of power to ensure that commitment is not only temporary. Especially as any evidence of weaknesses could result in rebalance of foreign policy of a small nation and could harm alliances. The situation is complicated for USA as in the past the focus was on containing Soviet Union, mainly in Europe, and now it has reallocated focus to contain Chinese expansion into Pacific. The war in Ukraine is again asking the White House to reconsider the future of its presence in Europe as a credible and most powerful member of NATO.

The last elections in US caused some concerns about the future policy, as the statements from the campaign were not promising for Japan. According to the Guardian "Trump's victory had come as such a shock to Abe that his advisers 'hastily went out to build contacts with the

Trump team"⁵⁹ being afraid of future relations and security arrangements. Any attempt of US to move back from East Asia could be not appreciated by Tokyo causing it to invest more in own security. Moreover, any symptoms of pivot back could cause Beijing to exploit such the decision. This is why Abe hurriedly visited president elect in November 2016 to discuss security relation and possibly the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) as of great importance but useless without Washington. Politically it was important as "after the Trump-Abe meeting in New York, Japan may publicize the results and show off to the world how firm the US-Japan alliance is"⁶⁰. Without that, Abe's policy could be endangered and nation's position could be downgraded in the East Asia. Therefore, the future was to show the US policy priorities especially as the wording could change in the benefit of Asian nation generating again their confidence in the White House support. However, Japan is still an important ally for US; it was presented during political statements the symbolic visit of President Trump on board of Japanese warship JS Kaga in May 2019. He said, "soon, this very ship will be upgraded to carry that cutting-edge aircraft. With this extraordinary new equipment, the JS Kaga will help our nations defend against a range of complex threats in the region and far beyond"⁶¹. That statement was important for Japan and rather disappointing for China.

China was also concerned about US stand toward the country particularly after

⁵⁹ Justin McCurry, Tom Phillips, and David Smith, "Shinzo Abe says Japan can have confidence in Donald Trump", The Guardian, November 18, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/18/japan-confidence-trump-president-shinzo-abe> (accessed: January 25, 2019).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Michael Zennie, "President Trump Visited Japan's Biggest Warship Since World War II. Here's What to Know About the JS Kaga", The Time May 28, 2019, <https://time.com/5597046/japanese-aircraft-carrier-kaga-izumo/> (accessed: June 15, 2019).

⁵⁷ Henry Kissinger, *O Chinach (On China)*, op. cit., p. 532.

⁵⁸ Michael Sprangler, "Rebalancing the Rebalance", op. cit., p. 13.

“drumming up headlines with his pledges to slap 45% tariffs on imported Chinese goods and label the country a currency manipulator his first day in office”⁶². It was important statement as Beijing is continuing evolution of economy model when facing economic slowdown so stabilization is much desired. The security related statements about Japan and South Korea were showing as for now that that aspect of foreign policy could be for China’s benefit if it will be followed. Nevertheless, the relations between Washington and Beijing are of great importance for both so the policy will be revised as soon as new leadership in US will be fully selected. The President Xi Jinping congratulated President elect Trump saying, “I place great importance on the China-U.S. relationship, and look forward to working with you to uphold the principles of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation”⁶³. The hope is that it will not be a turning point in bilateral relation as it is not desired by both nations and stability would valuable for other Asian players.

Conclusions

As for now those small disputed islands and bigger ones such as Taiwan, Philippines and Japan are significantly restricting freedom of movement of PLA Navy (PLAN) giving strategic advantage to the powerful US Navy and its allies. Currently PLAN is under constant development, investing in aircraft carrier and capable submarine fleets, but it will take time to match the capabilities presented by the US and the Japanese Navy. PLAN’s development as the part of the anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) concept could be defensive in nature but is also representing offensive

capabilities and has been created rather to improve security and to present abilities to challenge in the nearest future other competitors on the high seas. Taiwan and other islands are an important factor for China as it is connected with its concepts of enforcing the protection of the vulnerable east coastline, which is of vital importance for national well-being. The maritime dispute in the South China Sea and the East China Sea are crucial to extend power within “two island chains”, underpinning broadening of military reach, as according to PLA those “two key island chains as forming the geographic basis for expanding China’s maritime sphere of influence. While these have not been formally defined as such by PLA leaders, the “First Island Chain” is generally thought to run from the Japanese main islands through the Ryukyus, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Borneo, thus roughly bounding the East and South China Seas. The “Second Island Chain” stretches from the north at the Bonin Islands southward through the Marianas, Guam, and the Caroline Islands, encompassing the western Philippine Sea”⁶⁴. In that context, all the disputes are making sense and the long-term visionary undertaking is acknowledging that to achieve its aims. Beijing will follow the proactive policy towards regional adversaries. For China, the US factor, connected with overwhelming navy capabilities to impose maritime blockade, is the real concern but Beijing also has strategic patience coming from the rich and long history of the Middle Kingdom.

Arms race in Asia is ongoing and sea and land borders territorial disputes are an important dynamic, which has caused rise of arms sales during last decade in relation to the continent. They have had differing

⁶² “Donald’s Trump’s Victory raises Questions in China”, Reuters, November 9, 2016, <http://fortune.com/2016/11/09/donald-trump-win-china/> (accessed: January 25, 2019).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Jan van Tol, Mark Gunzinger, Andrew Krepinevich, and Jim Thomas, *AirSea Battle: A Point of Departure – Operational Concept*, (Washington: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010), p. 11.

background behind it and they are driven by respective nations' strategies. For China, it is linked with national ambitions and core interests; at the same time, Japan will not stay behind in weaponry procurement and will not give up any disputed territory, which is important for national pride and credibility of the respective governments. Other smaller nations are unable to compete in that rivalry and they have no other choice but to look for balancing options by closing ranks with outside powers (US) being interested in building/enhancing regional alliances e.g. with Japan or with international organizations (e.g. ASEAN)⁶⁵. They are also using any opportunity to promote their interests and present possible threats using other forums. The arms race is visualized by defense spending related especially to air force and navy, in which PLA is in lead compared to US regional allies, especially Japan. Among spending: power projection, amphibious and expeditionary capabilities, which are not purely defensive in nature, are priority; they could be easily used to solve islands' disputes by implementing joint air – sea warfare concept.

For China, the US position is and will be rather a challenge as the nation has no reliable and strong ally in Asia. Therefore, the country has been rather silent toward Moscow support for separatists in Ukraine as it is rather necessary as potential partner not an enemy. Moreover, China needs a modern weapon system for all the services and Russia has for them a reliable offer in relation to all the services. As for now, China is observing the military reorientation of US armed forces in the Pacific region and Washington's effort to tighten relations with coalition partners there: Japan, South Korea, and Australia. It is paralleled with the White House attempt to make

closer relations with the ASEAN, India and other smaller nations in the region, which is linked with their geostrategic location. US involvement in the Asia-Pacific region is "creating another intangible factor that could be both stabilizing and destabilizing in contextual manner"⁶⁶ and that statement is very proper one after the last presidential elections in US. Continuous military presence in Afghanistan along with partners is a security factor causing other major players to observe the developments. It is also linked with observing allocation of reasonable resources in Asia to stay involved there in the long-term and to ground influence allowing the shaping of the security situation when facing other emerging powers looking for regional dominance. European nations are not real player as they are currently preoccupied with security and economic tensions on the continent. They also lack force projection capabilities allowing decisive deployment in East Asia. Their involvement in Asian affairs is rather cautious and there are limited tools to influence them, but more attention should be given to that region as in every case Europe will be hit by and disturbances there.

The role of Washington in the region is growing and the country's leadership is not clear about which strategy to select: a hawkish or 'softer' one. As for now, the military build-up, strengthening alliances, supplying new weapon systems to friendly nations is suggesting that harder policy proponents are winning; nevertheless, the country is still trying to play the role of arbiter. The question is if US will be willing, in the case of escalation, to be involved a conflict with China as of a few small islands in the East China Sea. The future involve-

⁶⁵ ASEAN – the Association of South-East Asian Nations.

⁶⁶ Sanu Kainikara, *Security Challenges to South-East Asia and the Prospects of Conflict*, (Perth: edited version of the paper presented at the 4th Annual National Security and Strategy Workshop, November 9, 2012), p. 3.

ment will soon be visible by actions and it could have real impact in East Asia and beyond. The economic exchange with the region and especially China's factor is and will play a role in the approach to region, but expectations of allies are growing when facing political and territorial challenges. The danger is that any unexpected incident could cause regional conflict, Washington would be automatically involved if one of its allies were to be engaged, and maritime disputes are such the possible case, which could inflame the whole region.

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