

ASIA PROGRAM

China Analysis Group

XX China Analysis Group Meeting

October 14, 2020

Online discussion panel via Zoom

Theme: “Conflict and Cooperation in Asia: Geopolitical Issues”

THEMATIC GUIDELINES

Asia is a vast continent in which coexist some of the first and most enduring human settlements and civilizations, several of the most populous countries, and a diverse amalgam of religions, ethnicities and political regimes, whose influence sprawls across the globe. Economically, the continent includes some of the richest and most advanced economies, as well as some of the least developed ones, but also several of the very few countries that have managed to escape the middle-income trap. Just as in the second half of the 20th century, Japan’s rapid growth followed by the Asian tigers have consolidated a new pattern of integration into the world economy via export platforms that generated sustained increases in productivity and structural transformations. In parallel, China’s rise in the past two decades has been reshaping global value chains and the world. Meanwhile, India is also bound to bring significant influence on the continent and the world in the next decades.

An economic-centered vision is fundamental to understand the rebalancing of the world’s center of gravity from West to East towards Asia in the 21st century, but it is far from enough to try and ponder over all its implications and chances of success. Asia is partially home to Russia, the heir of former Soviet nuclear power, and also to other nuclear states such as China, India and Pakistan, in addition to states with varying degrees of nuclear ambitions such as North Korea and Iran, not to mention non-state actors. East Asia still bears unsettled Cold War issues in the Korean Peninsula, but also the delicate balance of the legacy of World War II with the strong presence of the United States as an Asian-Pacific power itself. Towards the South, the Sino-Indian border remains disputed since the war of

1962, with recent skirmishes aggravating the rebalancing of forces. The India and Pakistan conflict adds uncertainties to the region, and Central Asia has been a source of concern with regard to extremism.

Meanwhile, China's rise sheds light on its own unfinished reunification with Taiwan and a growing presence in the South China Sea, which China sees as a natural vital space for the protection of its interests. That view frequently clashes with the preceding decades status quo and, most of all, with the issue of the balance of power with the interests of the United States and of its allies in the region. Those two issues probably pose the highest danger of uncalculated risks and the potential for generating hot wars or hard power manifestations in Asia.

At the same time, there are spaces for cooperation that could lead the way to more rational discussions and the emergence of compromises. The creation of ASEAN in the 1960s has offered an important dialogue space for Southeast Asian countries, later expanding into a broader framework for the participation of other regional and non-regional partners. The establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994 represented a very important step. It was created with the objectives of fostering constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern; and making significant contributions to efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region. ARF's members include, besides all the ASEAN members, Australia, Canada, the European Union, India, Japan, North and South Korea, Russia and the United States, among others.

In 2001, China and five other countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Russia) established the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), with the goal of ensuring security and maintaining stability across the vast Eurasian region, joining forces to counteract emerging challenges and threats, and enhancing trade, as well as cultural and humanitarian cooperation. Today, SCO also has India and Pakistan as full members, besides six other dialogue partners.

ARF's very broad group of members, where none of the non-regional powers has a clear lead, poses a challenge to its effectiveness. On the other hand, the SCO has a more geographically connected group of members and seems more cohesive, but it is not free of important cleavages in terms of narrow and broad geopolitical long-term interests. Other alliances or special relationships that compound the geopolitical map are the Five Eyes intelligence alliance comprised of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand; the formal alliances between the United States and Japan, and the United States and Korea; the trilateral cooperation between the United States, India and Japan, which includes defense, security, maritime and cyberspace security; and the bilateral relationships between China and Russia, and China and Pakistan.

The hardening of the China-US rivalry along 2020 adds risks to the overall geopolitical balance in Asia and may pose new challenges to the continent and the Asia-Pacific or Indo-Pacific security landscape. Militarily, although China remains globally very distant from the United States, with a defense budget of around 25-30% of that of the US and only one

overseas military base – in Djibouti, there are estimates that China’s naval power may already be capable of deterring US maritime offensives. And there is no doubt that China and Russia are strategic rivals to be contained according to the United States’ 2017 National Security Strategy.

Not only does the economic rise of China and East Asia impact Western views concerning the world order’s transformations, it also provides the awakening and reordering of cooperation and conflict forces in the Asian continent itself, which are fundamental to the global order’s evolution, largely in light of how the presence of the US is evolving.

To help us navigate these uncertain and complex waters, at its 20th Meeting, the China Analysis Group proposes three main themes and questions to our speakers and audience:

- 1) Conflict and Cooperation: A long-term vision of China's role in the region
 - Do China policies and attitudes support the commitment to a peaceful rise?
 - What are the main challenges and opportunities for China to consolidate a benign environment in Asia? Is it a core objective for China? What role for Russia?
 - What could be short, medium and long-term geopolitical objectives for China in Asia?
- 2) Regional and bilateral agreements in Asia/Eurasia and security policies
 - How effective have ARF and SCO been and what to expect from them ahead?
 - How does India’s rise change the security landscape in Asia?
 - Whither China-India cleavage? Does it have an impact on organizations such as SCO and groups such as BRICS?
- 3) The evolving role of the United States in the Indo-Pacific
 - How does the policy of the “pivot to Asia” compare to the “free and stable Indo-Pacific”?
 - Does the US have a clear strategy towards Asia? How could the US play a benign cooperation strategy in Asia?
 - Are the US and China “destined for war”?



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