



# The Rise of Rimland: The New Political Geography and Strategic Culture

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Modern international relations have entered a period of global change unprecedented in the postwar history. While the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s threw the international system out of balance, it failed to bring about fundamental changes in the nature or main processes of that system. The liberal world order claimed universality but in reality proved a relatively short period of complete domination by a single group of states. It was a transitional and short-lived international political arrangement. The modern global context is being shaped by factors that are qualitatively new in form and substance, with a new political geography of the world as its centrepiece. In terms of the alignment of forces, the world is increasingly reminiscent of the late Middle Ages while also being physically interconnected as never before.

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# The New Political Geography

The rise of China and India as world political powers during the last decade and a half has truly changed the world. However, for the time being they are playing different roles. China has joined the competition for global leadership and resources. According to many scholars, it is the driving force of this competition as well (Russia, unlike China, has been the catalyst of a military and diplomatic exacerbation but not of a global shift). China is certainly one of few key players in global politics, whose accumulated might enables it to project influence all over the world, including Asia, Eurasia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. At the same time Chinese geostrategy is based on Russia's military might, given the countries' close and trusting relationship.

India, for its part, is predominantly a regional power. Despite its international activity, it does not put forward a global agenda and concepts. However, there are grounds to believe that Indian foreign policy will gradually seek to transcend its traditional boundaries. The first sign of it is the Indian infatuation with the Indo-Pacific Region concept (IPR) as an alternative to the Asia-Pacific Region (APR). But India, Japan, and the US have different visions of the IPR idea, which is already a source of concern for China. The concept is being actively promoted by the United States and Japan, which hope to use it as a blueprint for a global arc of containment against China. India needs the IPR as a tool to strengthen its own global standing and, down the line, to legitimize its likely presence outside of its traditional zone of interests in the Indian Ocean.

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The struggle for India (and for Europe) among leading players may emerge as the herald of the new world. But India and Europe enjoy qualitatively different statuses. Europe lost its global domination in the wake of World War I. Then European states tried but failed to recover their former global status by peaceful means at the turn of the new century. Europe is on a downward trend, while India, as well as China, has been

on an upward trend. It is important, therefore, to be attentive to its interests, strategic views and ambitions. For Russia, India is an important partner; their relations are friendly and their geographical zones of interests do not intersect.

The processes unleashed by the changed role of China and India are making an important contribution to the burgeoning 'Eurasian phenomenon', or the surge in international trade and expectations for the traditionally peripheral landlocked regions of Central Eurasia. Just a few years ago, it seemed impossible that overland trade could even marginally compete with traditional maritime trading. However, after China incentivized Eurasian cooperation through its Belt and Road Initiative, fundamental changes are under way. Eurasia has emerged as a crucial part of the modern international narrative, which means that there is an audience for this idea.

This phenomenon is extremely beneficial for Russia, as it removes the long-standing, painful (albeit clearly false) problem of choosing between East and West. According to Chinese scholar Zhao Huasheng, this presents an opening to formulate one's own national foreign policy strategy and, furthermore, to propose a concept of effective multilateral cooperation to other states in the region. Given Russia's conflict with the US and Europe, it is vitally important that its rear in Eurasia is reliably protected. To achieve this, Russia is using peaceful methods.

The inevitable outcome is that the European strategic culture and foreign policy algorithms, which predominated until recently, are being eroded. In a natural way, the new giants are introducing their own behaviour models – ones rooted in their national strategic culture – to regional and world politics. Since Nehru, India has been dividing the surrounding world into concentric circles depending on the degree of proximity; today, it is in the process of turning to its roots and rethinking the circles in terms of the Rajamandala theory formulated by ancient sage Kautilya. Characteristic of China is a tributary system of bilateral relations with neighbours and partners. Both world outlooks will completely transform the multilateral cooperation model that has been cultivated in the classical Westphalian space, that is, in Europe, North America, and Russia which



has been incorporated into that space. Although Russia was not directly involved in the Westphalian effort, it played by these rules, often giving them an interpretation of its own.

Finally, the global context is changing under the influence of the new world political geography: the epoch of European centrality in world affairs is drawing to a close, with the focal point of world politics shifting to the East. The European Age was over 100 years ago. The American Age is coming to an end before our eyes. There will be no Chinese Age because China will be contained with increased energy, but the 21st century is set to become the Age of Asia. Not only will the main systemic conflicts occur in this most densely populated part of the world, its strategic culture and interests, too, which are interests of survival and development, will determine or adjust the course and results of the most important processes at the regional and global level.

The change in the general political context calls for a new perspective on the role played in world politics and economics by the two crucial oceans, Indian and Pacific. Both witnessed the birth and advancement of the Arab, Indian, and Chinese civilizations. However, by virtue of historical circumstances they became, in fact, colonial seas, while the Atlantic and the small Mediterranean Sea figured prominently in the formation of Western civilization that eventually imposed its values and concepts on the rest of the world. Several centuries before the coming of the Europeans, the great thalassocracies of the Indian Ocean, the Chola Empire, was devastated by Muslim invaders, who then turned the Indian Ocean into Islam's inner lake, where it made no sense to seek naval predominance. Admiral Zheng He ventured as far as the Red Sea during the Ming dynasty.

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**Given Russia's conflict with the US and Europe, it is vitally important that its rear in Eurasia is reliably protected**

All of that came to an end in the 16th century, when the Europeans, with their enormous military and technological edge, sailed into these oceanic expanses. Later they called this period the epoch of great geographical discoveries, as usual passing off their own accomplishments as achievements of the whole of humanity. One after another, the Eastern nations suffered military defeats and were partly colonized. Politically,

they were pushed back into the continental hinterland. These dramatic events played a no less important role in the emergence of their strategic culture than the Steppe in the formation of Russia's strategic culture during early Muscovy. But in the historic sense, the most important factor was the fantastic geographical distance between the main civilizational centres in Asia and Eurasia, one inversely comparable only to the close-quarters and perennial shortage of living space experienced by Europeans.

Simultaneously, Eurasia entered the era of the continental curse. Most of its states that managed to maintain independence, including the mighty Russia, were excluded from international trade and developed slower than their maritime rivals over the course of 500 years. The Silk Road fell into desuetude, with caravans replaced by Portuguese caravels and English clippers. These too were later displaced by huge oceanic tankers and container ships. In the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, Europe and the US came up with a strategic geopolitical concept based on controlling the arc framing Eurasia to the west, south and east. That control was to be maintained first by Britain and later by the US with their huge navies. Russia was unable to rival them even at the height of its military power in the late Soviet era.

Simultaneously, the Indian and Pacific oceans were coming into their own as crucial arteries of world trade, yet remaining the periphery of international politics. This is especially true of the Indian Ocean. Today, too, the main trade conflicts in the world are found along two vectors, Trans-Atlantic and Pacific (the latter being the main one). However, a solid 70 per cent of trade in goods and raw materials is in some way or the other linked with the Indian Ocean. If we relate seas to oceans in terms of trade rather than physically, the Mediterranean should not be considered an extension of the Atlantic Ocean, for 80 per cent of its trade today is with countries on the Indian Ocean, or consists of goods that flow through it.

At the same time, the Indian Ocean and the whole of South Asia are still rather remote regions from the point of view of international trade and investment. The biggest and most densely populated country in the region, India, is only one-tenth as involved in the global division

of labour as China. India's country-to-country trade is also limited. India buys hydrocarbons in the Persian Gulf. Everyone buys cotton and textiles from India, as well as Bangladesh and Pakistan. Nevertheless, the main trade partners for the majority of countries are China and the US. In fact, two-thirds of the growth of exports India has enjoyed, including to China (bilateral trade increased by 40 per cent to \$84 billion), is due to higher prices of ore and other raw materials.

Today, bilateral trade between China and India, with a population of 1.5 billion each, is only one-third of China's trade with Japan or Taiwan, and is basically on par with the level of trade between Russia and China. The dependence of South Asia's population on foreign trade is critically low. The second most populous South Asian country, Pakistan, is even less involved in trade with the outside world than others. As a result, the countries of the Indian Ocean are not influencing world trade policy, as evidenced by the types of trade conflicts they are most often enmeshed in: Indian steel-makers or Pakistani textile producers are generally the objects of such conflicts. By virtue of low standards of living and cheap surplus labour, the majority of countries in the Indian Ocean are oriented toward exports, according to DHL Global Connectedness Index 2016. But this applies least of all to India, whose best-known export commodity is computer software, and most of all to Indochina, Malaysia, and Thailand.

Thus, the dynamics of international trade provide no evidence in favour of a unified Indo-Pacific space, revealing the purely political nature of this widely discussed initiative. That said, politics is emerging as an increasingly important factor shaping both the development of trade ties and the future alignment of forces in the world. We should focus on the most important geopolitical factors in the region and draw conclusions bearing in mind Russia's interests and requirements for cooperation with its most important partners in Asia and beyond. These factors primarily include the national interests and strategic culture of China and India, the US attempts to respond to the rise of these giants by Europeanizing the Asian world and promoting its division into two poles, and, finally, the dissolution of the Rimland, with its most important states becoming the subjects rather than objects of geopolitical rivalry and expansion.

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# The Inevitability of China

China's current foreign policy, from the point of view of Chinese strategic culture, is a 'return to the norm'. The official expositions of Xi Jinping's key ideological concepts for the country's overall development (the Chinese Dream) and its external ties (Belt and Road Initiative) are accompanied by references to the experience of the Han and Tang dynasties, the periods when imperial China was at its zenith in terms of development, might, and prosperity. Beijing sees the period from the First Opium War (1840–1842) to the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 as a 'century of humiliation' and a deviation from the historical norm in which China was not only the world's largest economy but also a great world power and the incontestable centre of the entire system of international relations in its part of the world.

Restoring that norm, argue many Western and Chinese scholars, is the fundamental idea underlying the earlier Chinese policy of 'peaceful rise' and 'peaceful development', and it continues to inform the political concepts advanced by President Xi Jinping since 2013. This course towards 'restoring the norm' demands that we take a closer look at the system of relations which had taken shape in the Asia-Pacific region before the early 19th century and which, from China's point of view, could serve as a paragon.

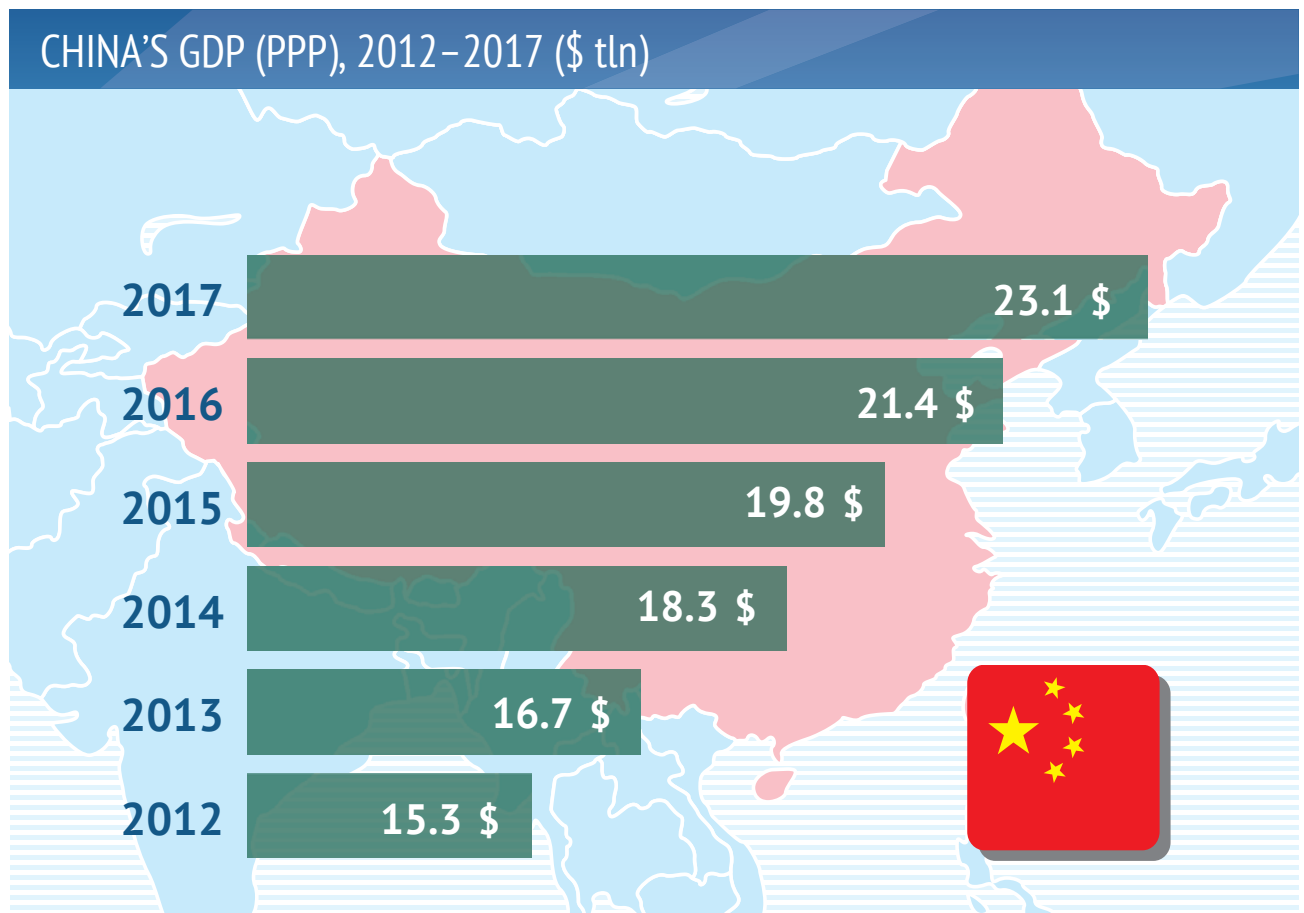
By and large, this system was based on variations on the tributary relationship, in which states in the region, which had a stake in maintaining relations with this or that Chinese dynasty, recognized its formal supremacy and their own subordination to the Chinese empire. While remaining independent in domestic affairs, they had to recognize China's right to set the terms in the region. Critically, this system excluded any other, particularly extra-regional, powers that could challenge China's supremacy, create alternative regional security mechanisms, and aspire to act as ultimate arbitrator.

The Belt and Road initiative, a blueprint for the eventual transition from primarily trade and investment issues to a broader agenda,





is characteristic of China's actions on the international stage. In 2013, Belt and Road began mainly as an infrastructure project that would subsequently expand to trade, finance, culture, and politics. At the same time, this historically informed outlook on the natural regional and world order is just one aspect of Chinese strategic culture, with other no less important aspects emerging after the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949.



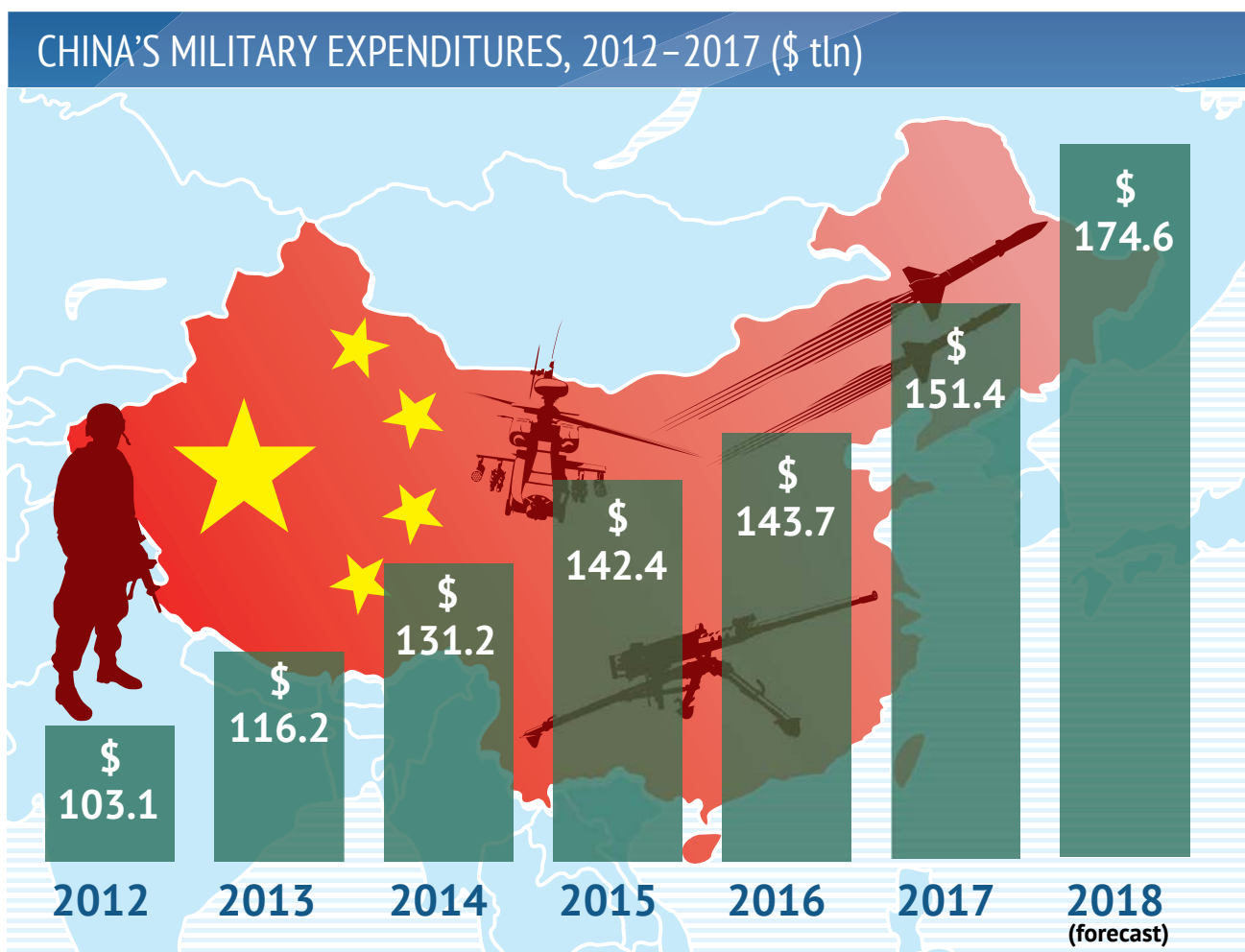
Source: World Bank.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) gained power after a savage struggle, and the first three decades of its rule were marked by catastrophic upheavals, such as the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). These historical traumas are comparable in scale to the Soviet famine of 1932–1933 and the purges of 1937–1938. As a result, the CPC consistently works to bolster its legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese public. But the challenge is only increasing as China grows more prosperous and educated, its society becomes more open, and Chinese lose interest in the defunct Marxism-Leninism and traditional interpretations of Mao's ideas.

Responses to this challenge have been, first, to focus on maintaining high rates of economic growth when possible, and, second, to highlight the CPC's role as the political force that returned China to the ranks of great powers. Failure to succeed in either of these efforts could trigger domestic instability. While before the early 2010s, the relative restraint,

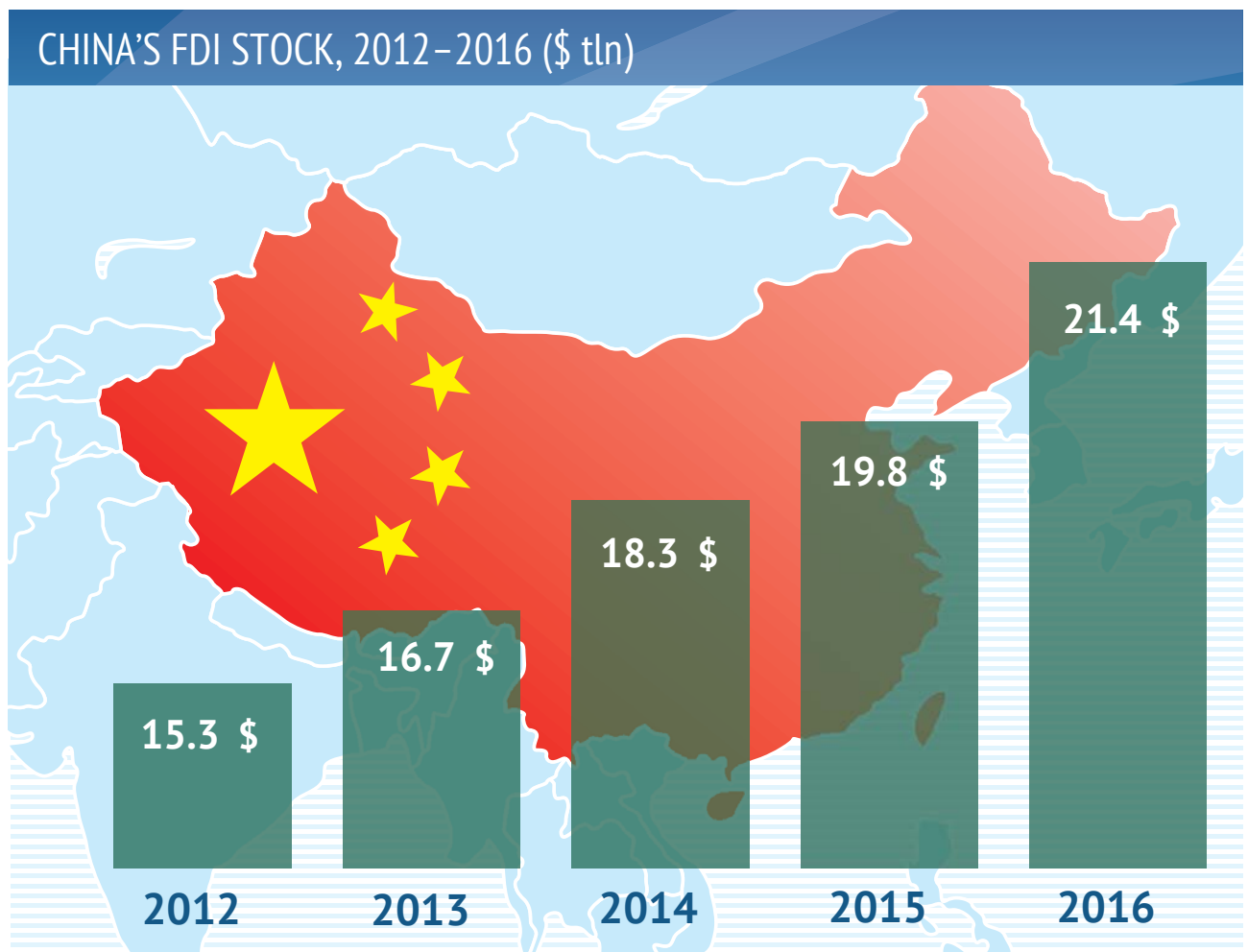
if not passivity, of China's foreign policy could be compensated by double-digit GDP growth, this option is disappearing as the Chinese economy is naturally slowing down.

Raising the standard of living is also an impossible policy to maintain in the absence of an active foreign policy. According to Xi Jinping's report to the XIX CPC Congress in October 2017, China should achieve per capita indices of an advanced country by 2050, which, given its population numbers, would mean an economy three to four times larger (PPP-adjusted GDP) than the present-day US economy. Such an economy can only be created if China becomes an exporter of products developed and manufactured domestically, under Chinese brands, and simultaneously a huge importer of raw materials, semi-manufactures, low-tech products, and even labour.



Source: <https://chinapower.csis.org/>





Source: Statistical Bulletin on China's Foreign Direct Investment, 2016.

What is envisioned, therefore, is an unprecedented re-division of the world market, which will be marked by vastly more serious upheavals than those that accompanied the emergence of Japan and South Korea as advanced countries in the 1970s and the 1980s. To ensure the positive dynamics that are so critically important, China will have to be present in all regions of the globe at once. It cannot afford to concentrate on just one part of the world, while reducing its presence in others, because not a single region possesses enough resources for China's development.

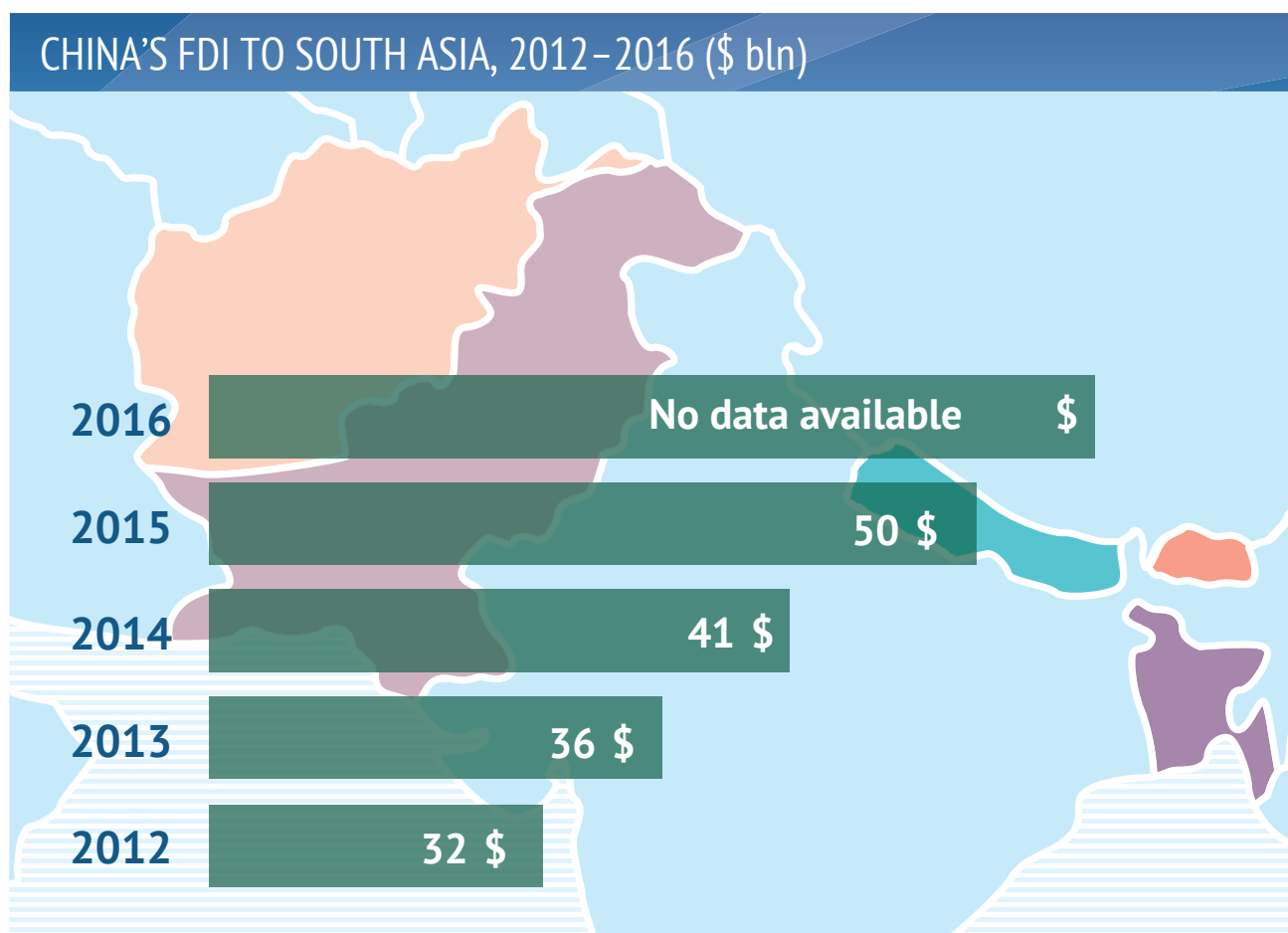
The inevitability of this global presence was grasped by Chinese leaders in the late 1990s, when the PRC government urged Chinese companies to 'go abroad'. Now China's accumulated direct investment in the world is likely close to \$1.8 trillion. It is increasingly clear to China that it must protect its global business empire. The 2011 civil war in Libya



and the subsequent NATO intervention that led to the loss of an important PRC partner in North Africa was a significant lesson. Diplomatically, China was unable to take independent (of Russia) and active steps and its indecision during the crisis led to financial losses to the tune of tens of billions of dollars and an urgent evacuation from Libya of 35,000 PRC citizens working there on contract.

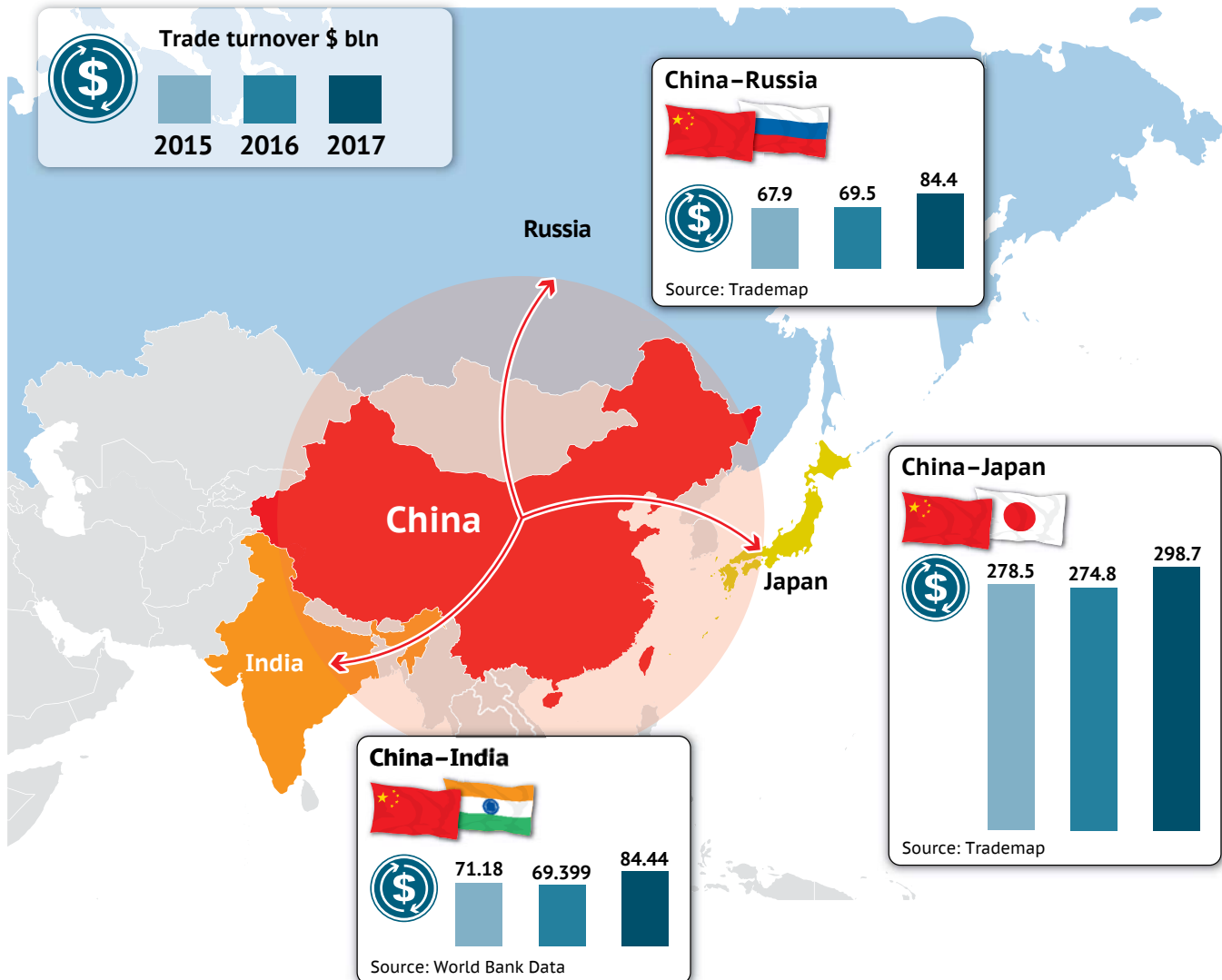
China's 2015 white paper on military strategy explicitly named the 'protection of overseas interests' as an important priority of China's military organizational development. China is building a powerful oceanic surface navy and strategic military transport aviation. It is also in the process of creating a marine corps with a planned strength of 100,000. China's foreign policy is gaining momentum and is directed towards establishing a sphere of influence of its own that will include

**To ensure the positive dynamics that are so critically important, China will have to be present in all regions of the globe at once**



Source: Calculations by CCEIS authors based on China's Ministry of Commerce data.

## CHINA-RUSSIA, CHINA-INDIA, CHINA-JAPAN TRADE TURNOVER



countries dependent on Chinese assistance and loans, the Chinese market and, down the road, Chinese security guarantees. The ongoing, inevitable expansion of China's sphere of interests is accompanied by the promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative and the extension of its geographical framework to the entire Pacific area and even to the Arctic (the Polar Silk Road concept was released in January 2018).

The Indo-Pacific Region (IPR) concept, advanced by India, is emerging as a serious challenge to Chinese expansion. Theoretically, the IPR might be aimed ultimately at creating a united front of countries that would contain China's growing presence in regions of critical importance for the future

of the Chinese economy. If the concept makes real headway, it will pose an existential threat to the political system of the People's Republic of China, which simply cannot survive in the absence of outward expansion.

Therefore, responding to the IPR is a crucial new task of China's foreign policy. Among Chinese foreign policy experts, there are two competing approaches to the IPR in the academic literature. Even though both groups recognize that the IPR is directed against China, some of them are sceptical of America's ability to pursue a consistent and successful containment policy. They point to US domestic problems, the standoff between President Donald Trump and the Congress, and the lack of resources for containing China in Asia, particularly after the US walked out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

The other group of experts tends to see the IPR as an existential threat to Chinese interests. However, both offer similar recommendations that boil down to strengthening relations with the Belt and Road countries, expanding Chinese influence, and creating China's own network of allies and partners. It makes sense to assume that in the present situation China will have to focus both on expanding its economic influence and soft power in Asia and other regions and on playing up its role in maintaining regional security.

The PRC's approaches to relations with India, which are of special importance under the new circumstances, are influenced by a wide range of factors. On the one hand, there are long-standing territorial problems between the two countries, which do not trust each other and are engaged in a local arms race. Many Chinese investment projects and political initiatives involving Nepal, Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka fail to fully take into account the views of India which claims its own zone of influence in this region. At the same time, Beijing and Delhi have displayed, in recent months, a growing awareness of the need to contain their mutual grievances and suspicions within a safe framework. They seek to expand trade and economic ties (in 2017, trade hit a record high of \$84.44 billion); and both countries are SCO members, which opens up additional opportunities for security dialogue, including with the participation of Russia.

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**The PRC's approaches to relations with India are of special importance under the new circumstances**

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# India's Say

India is a state aspiring to be one of the leading world powers of the 21st century. Unlike China, whose ambitions are based on its economic might and which is building a middle-income society, New Delhi's claims to regional leadership have been questioned by many political analysts and economists. India is clearly behind China economically, and India's foreign policy moves often come as a complete surprise to outside observers. In this context, India is trying to substantiate its claims by supporting existing foreign policy constructs that advance its interests, or creating new ones of its own. One of these is the above-mentioned Indo-Pacific Region, an idea which India has supported as soon as it emerged and which Indian scholars and politicians have been actively promoting in the past years.

Historically, India pursued a policy of eastward cultural, religious, trade, and language expansion since the beginning of the Common Era. All the mainland countries in the modern territory of Southeast Asia (excluding North Vietnam) have felt the effects of Indian influence. India also spread its influence to the region's islands, including the whole of what is today Malaysia, western and central Indonesia, Brunei and, partially, the Philippines. Modern Indian historical writings refer to India's historical zone of influence as Greater India or the Indosphere.

The result of this was a peculiar form of sovereignty under which, instead of states with clearly marked borders, there were centres of power and civilizations that spread their influence to the neighbouring territories. These vassal and dependent states usually paid a tribute to these centres of power and supplied them with soldiers in case of war in return for the patronage of the 'universal ruler' or Chakravarti. The distinctive element of this system, which is referred to as Mandala (a spiritual and ritualistic symbol in Hinduism and Buddhism that represents the universe), is that one state could be a vassal and tributary of two or three states at one and the same time. The theory of this model was put forth in the Arthashastra, an ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, economic policy, and military strategy.

The spread of Indian culture throughout the region was cut short by the expansion of Islam, the decline of the southern Indian kingdoms and

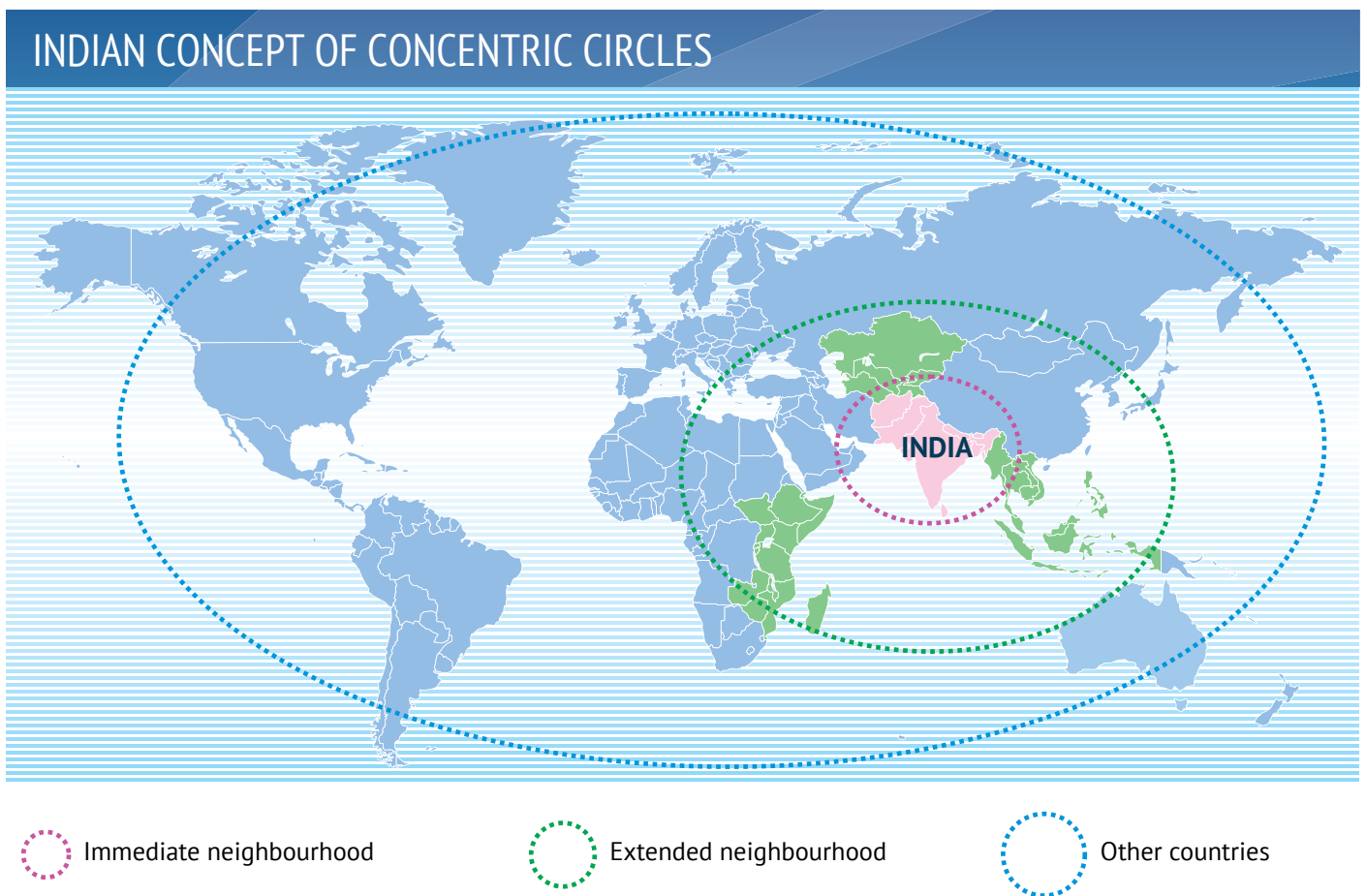




the emergence of a major Islamic centre of power with Afghan and later Mughal dynasties in northern India, which redirected the subregion politically towards the west and northwest. The eastern vector of Indian policy was completely eroded by the European colonization of the region, the division of Southeast Asia between the colonial empires, and the establishment of British rule in India. The authorities of British India focused on carving out their own sub-empire within the British Empire, which would include territories in the Middle East and East Africa.

After India gained independence, it had to develop a new foreign policy concept that would facilitate its transformation into a great power. However, until the early 1990s, India focused exclusively on gaining dominance in its closest neighbourhood and on developing ties with socialist countries, as well as with Arab and African states. At that time, India was not interested in spreading its influence to the Pacific, as exemplified by the so-called Indira Doctrine which refers to India's role under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Similar to the American Monroe Doctrine, the Indira Doctrine limited India's interests to South Asia and the states of the Indian Ocean.

The economic and political situation in India deteriorated significantly following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The government of Narasimha Rao adopted the Look East policy to cultivate ties with the Pacific states that were able to supply the resources and technologies India needed. The subsequent governments of Atal Bihari Vajpayee (Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP) and Manmohan Singh (Indian National Congress, INC) continued to promote the eastern policy, which they interpreted as India's pivot to the East. They



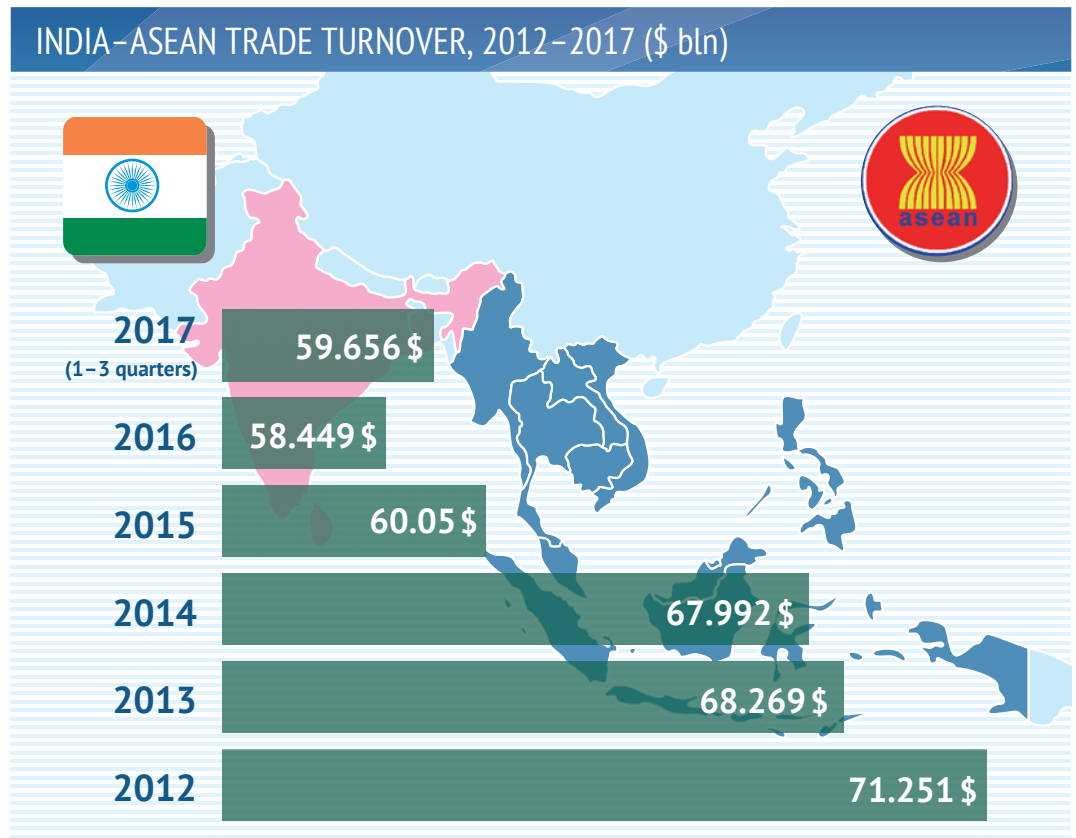
strengthened ties with the ASEAN economies, Japan and South Korea. In 2014, the government of Narendra Modi announced India's transition from the Look East policy to the Act East policy, which stipulates increased activity in the region.

Since Indira Gandhi, the Indian political elites have viewed the surrounding countries as forming concentric circles. The first circle, or the 'immediate neighbourhood', includes South Asian and small Indian Ocean states. The second circle, or the 'extended neighbourhood', comprises Southeast Asian, East African and Central Asian countries. And the third and widest circle encompasses all the other countries.

India tries to dominate the immediate neighbourhood, including politically, assert its economic interests in the extended neighbourhood, and strive for recognition as a great power in the third circle. Over the past years, India has focused on expanding its influence eastward in the immediate neighbourhood. Prime Minister Modi is playing an important part in this regard by appealing to India's Golden Age and trying to revitalize the Indian zone of influence in Southeast Asia. The most effective of the range of tools used to this end is the so-called religious diplomacy, which highlights Theravada Buddhism (that is different from Mahayana Buddhism widespread in China) as a common religious heritage.

The Indian expert and political communities are actively promoting the Indo-Pacific concept as a means to eliminate the imbalance that built up over the previous decades, when India focused exclusively on Eurasia and the Indian Ocean. From the perspective of the Indian foreign policy, formalizing the Indo-Pacific concept would substantiate New Delhi's interest in the east and undergird the economic needs of India with a theoretical framework of cultural and historical relations, in the interests of attracting investment and technologies from Asian Pacific countries. Besides, the addition of the Pacific Ocean to the zone of India's strategic interests has allowed New Delhi to give up its futile attempts to attain absolute dominance in the Indian Ocean amid the growing Chinese presence, and to adopt a more flexible strategy of projecting power in maritime zones that may prove sensitive to China.

The Indo-Pacific concept offers India a tempting opportunity to become a regional leader. India is one of the few major countries in the region (along with China and Australia) that pursue an independent foreign policy, as well

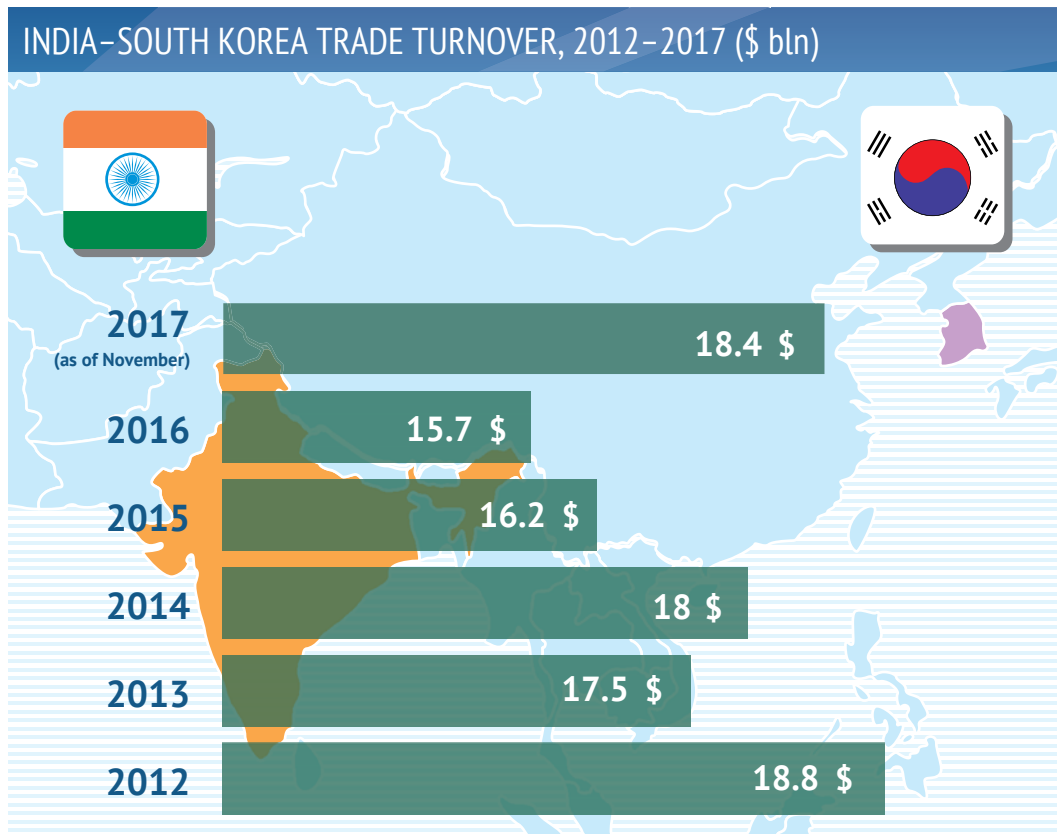


Source: Aseanstats.

as a regional centre of power with sufficient military and political capacity to maintain its position. However, it is unclear how precisely India can implement this enticing opportunity. New Delhi views the Indo-Pacific Region as the most promising area for its economic interests. Minister of State for External Affairs M.J.Akbar once said, 'The Indo-Pacific is one of the most significant and dynamic trade zones of the world, and the rising economies and growing commerce have created a greater scope for regional economic integration.' Furthermore, the development of India's economic cooperation with Indo-Pacific countries is closely connected with the Blue Economy, a concept of 'a healthy ocean supporting higher productivity' that is extremely popular with modern Indian economists and politicians.

However, there are no grounds for a conclusion that the Indo-Pacific concept can have a positive effect on India's economy, considering the dynamics of its cooperation with the ASEAN economies, Japan and South Korea, as well as persisting trade problems, in particular, a number of unfavourable terms in free-trade area (FTA) agreements like the one with South Korea. The Indo-Pacific concept may have a future in the context of the corridor created between



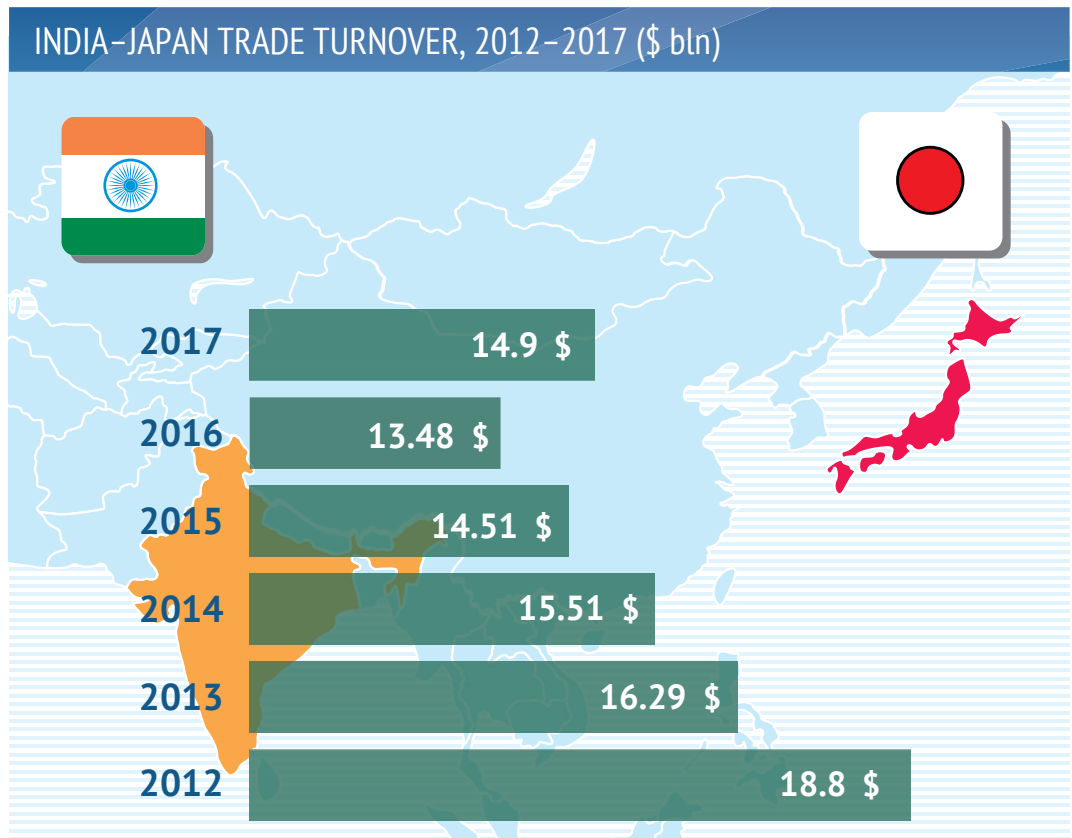


Source: Embassy of India in Republic of Korea.

Japan, India, and Africa, known as the Asia–Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), which was conceived primarily as a marine route connecting Africa with India and countries in Southeast Asia and Oceania. Many Southeast Asian countries, as well as Iran and Mongolia, have expressed interest in this project, but its main beneficiaries are Japan and India. It is unclear if they can manage to make this project multilateral, or if it will remain an Indo-Japanese venture. In the latter case, it will make no sense to fold the AAGC into the Indo-Pacific concept.

The Indo-Pacific concept will gain some traction only if it helps ease proneness to conflict and boost trade in the region. Considering that China is engaged in the fiercest regional rivalries, the most viable security initiatives, which India has been invited to join, are aimed at containing China. And lastly, in light of China's negative attitude to it, the Indo-Pacific concept will likely increase rather than reduce points of discord in the region.

The United States and its allies, primarily Japan, are trying to draw India into the Quad – a proposed multilateral security cooperation organization involving Japan, Australia, India, and the US – that is openly anti-China. India



Source: Embassy of India in Japan.

likes the Quad in its present form, because it does not impose any additional obligations on India and offers a venue for multilateral political dialogue and exchange of technologies. But if it is formalized as a membership organization, India will have to assume additional obligations, which is something it does not want at all.

India is unlikely to rely on hard power to bolster its influence in the Indo-Pacific. For one, New Delhi lacks the necessary resources and technical capabilities. The Indian Navy is inferior to its Chinese counterpart and has no bases in the region. In other words, if India opts to rely on hard power to strengthen its political influence in the region, it will have to cooperate with the United States. But this could further aggravate relations with China and make India dependent on the United States, which New Delhi has been trying to avoid. Therefore, India will only be nominally involved in any security cooperation schemes, including the Quad, going further only during periods of heightened Indo-Chinese tensions.

The Indo-Pacific concept, while not even directly benefitting the Indian economy, has the potential to create a security trap. Still, India will carry on with this project, mostly through the use of soft power and cultural and religious diplomacy, because New Delhi believes that this format can be used to redress imbalances in its foreign policy. India will pursue an Indo-Pacific policy that will directly affect none of the major powers, least of all the United States and China, but will simultaneously try to strengthen its economic penetration of the region.

India does not want to throw its foreign policy out of balance again. Indian investment in Iran's infrastructure is evidence that Eurasia – and primarily the establishment of a North–South corridor – remains a foreign policy priority for New Delhi. However, India has its own interpretation of Eurasian integration that differs from the one of Russia. New Delhi not only wants to promote ties with Moscow, but also to strengthen its positions in Iran and to make inroads in Central Asian countries, which India views as part of its extended neighbourhood. In this scenario, India would emerge as a major new player in the region, which will not please China. However, India will be unable to consolidate its hold in the region without Russia's assistance.

How might Russia respond to the growing popularity of the Indo-Pacific concept? The Indian government, on the one hand, is aware of the need to develop the Eurasian track, which means that New Delhi will continue to promote cooperation with Moscow and maintain bilateral ties at the level of strategic partnership. On the other hand, in light of ongoing global processes, such as US attempts to contain China, including by drawing India closer, it makes sense for Moscow to strengthen its ties with India not only in Eurasia but also in the IPR by increasing its presence in the Pacific and bolstering its ties with the Pacific nations, primarily those Southeast Asian countries (as well as Japan and South Korea) that are of most interest for India. Russia can only do this by accelerating the development of the Russian Far East. In addition, it should also develop ties with other Southeast Asian countries which are not involved in acute territorial disputes and are interested in promoting close security and economic cooperation with Russia. The more political and economic sway Russia gains in the region, the easier it will be to enter into dialogue with any promising partner, including India.

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## Is Asia Headed for Europeanization?

Flexibility and diversity historically have been among Asia's defining features, which explains why international relations in Asia did not go the same route as in Europe. Despite all the many differences, disputes and conflicts in Asia, despite the deficit of trust, the region has not suffered from the deep and protracted geopolitical divides that have been so common in Europe, especially in the 20th century, and that continue to this day. Even the Cold War, having spilled over from Europe into Asia as a part of the Soviet–US confrontation, took on a different dimension. Starting in the 1960s, the strict separation between the Soviet-led and the US-led blocs simply disappeared, and this trend became even more pronounced in the 1970s as communist China turned against the Soviet Union and started developing relations with the US and Japan, while India, a capitalist and democratic nation, drew closer to the USSR.

After the end of the Cold War, Asia became even more tolerant of diversity. There are countries in the region that are able to combine a political system of single-party communist rule with a market or hybrid economy. They do not face discrimination from their neighbours and are fully involved in regional cooperation and integration projects. ASEAN, Asia's most advanced integration structure, brings together capitalist and democratic Singapore with socialist Vietnam and the absolute monarchy of Brunei – something that would be unthinkable in Europe. Rivalries and long-standing mutual enmity among Asian countries, especially among great and major powers, go hand in hand with a constant drive to promote economic cooperation and even integration. Projects like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), APEC and ASEAN bring together countries that could be viewed as political antagonists that hardly trust and sometimes even hate each other. Until recently, the main items on the Asia-Pacific agenda were connectivity, transport infrastructure development, economic development, trade, regulating global value chains, and integration.

However, there is now a threat that the Asia-Pacific region may be headed in a different direction, down what could be called a 'European' path of gradual

splitting into two opposing geopolitical, and ultimately geoeconomic, blocs. One bloc will be pro-American; the other is pro-Chinese. The first bloc could combine three formats: the emerging US–India partnership, the US–Japan–India–Australia quadrilateral cooperation framework, and the system of US military alliances in Asia. The second bloc would be underpinned by the Russian–Chinese strategic partnership, which is likely to attract Iran and Pakistan. Smaller states in the region, such as South Korea and ASEAN members, would have to choose between one of the two blocs (which would mean the end of ASEAN as a single whole), or opt for a neutral status and non-alignment. This would not eradicate the traditional Asian flexibility, since it is embedded in the cultures of the region’s countries and peoples. Asia is also highly unlikely to reproduce the European bloc-based model of the Cold War. However, there is a real danger that flexibility will decline in the region as polarization grows, undermining political and even economic cooperation between countries from opposing coalitions.

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**Beijing is increasingly open about its intentions to assert its ‘legitimate’ role in the region as the Middle Kingdom**

Two objective factors and one subjective factor are behind this trend. The first objective factor is the response of a number of countries in the region and the US to China’s rapid expanding economic, military, and political power, its assertive and sometimes even hegemonic policies in Southeast, East, and South Asia, and its plans to build a China-centric economic and political order and ease the US out as the dominant force in the region. Beijing is increasingly open about its intentions to assert its ‘legitimate’ role in the region as the Middle Kingdom, and seeks to re-format its engagement in the region accordingly. This deepens fears in a number of countries, primarily Japan and India, who view China as a competitor that has left them behind.

For them, preventing the emergence of a China-centric system in Southeast, East, and South Asia is a way of ensuring their survival as great powers. China’s Belt and Road Initiative has raised serious misgivings in Tokyo, Delhi, and a number of other regional capitals who regard it as not only the first example of Beijing’s own trans-regional project, but also an attempt to lay the foundations for its economic and military presence and influence in Southeast, East, and South Asia or even hegemonic dominance. Finally, China’s policies have become a matter of grave concern for the US which fears losing its global leadership, as well its leading positions in the key macro-region of the 21st century. This would mean global marginalization for the US.

The second objective factor is a consequence of the first. The 21st century strategic competition among great powers is playing out in the Pacific Region, just as Europe was at the centre of 20th century events. To some extent, Asia's flexibility and diversity in eras past were attributable to its peripheral status in international relations. Despite the wars in Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan, Asia remained a secondary front of the Soviet–American Cold War confrontation. Today, the Pacific Region has become the setting for the strategic rivalry between the US and China, the main confrontation of the 21st century. The same applies to the great power rivalry between China and India, and between China and Japan. Consequently, the region is under increased pressure to follow in Europe's footsteps of polarization and division.

Finally, the third, subjective factor is the policy of the US that has made what seems to be a definitive choice in favour of strategic containment of Russia and China for refusing to adopt American values, or join the US-led world order as junior members. Not only has Washington affirmed the competitive nature of its relations with Moscow and Beijing, it has adopted a strategy with the ultimate goal of defeating them. The US has abruptly altered the balance between containment and engagement in its policy towards Russia and China by stepping up containment efforts (including political, military and economic) to the detriment of engagement. The idea of improving relations with Russia that floated in the early days of the Trump administration is unlikely to resurface in the coming years, to say the least. The same applies to the idea of a US–China strategic partnership as the foundation of international relations in the APR or in the larger world. Interestingly, contrary to the recommendations of the realist school, Russia and China are now viewed as a monolith, a bloc of authoritarian 'revisionist' states challenging the 'free world' and seeking to undermine the world order and reshape it to suit their own (authoritarian) values and interests.

Clearly, this is an attempt to rekindle a global Cold War in new conditions, dividing the planet into the US-led 'free world' and the 'authoritarian bloc' comprising Russia, China and several rogue states. The ideological simplicity of this division matches well the equally simplistic formula of classical geopolitical theory on competition between sea and continental powers as well as worldview of Trump's foreign policy team. The sea powers are the United States and its partners, which are forming an Indo-Pacific maritime partnership, and the continental powers are Russia and China with their Greater Eurasia initiative. The greatest risk of a divided, polarized Asia-Pacific region is posed by this US strategy.

The Indo-Pacific strategy is the main element of the US policy of containing China in Asia Pacific. The Americans borrowed this strategy from Japan and made it more anti-Chinese than Tokyo intended. The military component of Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy includes the development of the Quad, a comprehensive security cooperation organization involving Japan, Australia, India, and the US. These four states should develop horizontal cooperation with each other, which includes regular military exercises, build up their military presence and infrastructure in East, Southeast, and South Asia, as well as coordinate their military policies. The Quad would complement the existing hub-and-spokes system of US military alliances in the region, which does not stipulate horizontal interaction between the allies, and would prevent China from strengthening its military presence and influence in the region. The United States intends to focus on bilateral military cooperation with India, the second largest military power in Asia after China, and on trilateral cooperation with India and Japan, like in the Malabar trilateral naval exercise.

Economically, this US concept is designed as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative, with the goals of hindering its implementation and drawing away at least some of its members. Then US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said in a speech on US policy in the Indo-Pacific, delivered at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in October 2017, that China's policy threatened the economic order in the Pacific, and that the countries that joined China's Belt and Road Initiative would have to pay for this with their sovereignty and the loss of future control of their economies. To prevent this, the United States and Japan plan to offer projects to develop quality infrastructure and connectivity in South, Southeast Asian, and East African countries.

The idea in both cases is to create a regional infrastructure and a network of relations surrounding China on the east, south, and southeast and preventing it from creating its own economic and security order in the region. Washington has begun forcing regional countries to choose between China – exposing themselves to the predatory policies of an authoritarian power with hegemonistic ambitions – and an Indo-Pacific coalition and a rules-based world order. The current US rhetoric is highly reminiscent of the Cold War era: either the United States and its Quad allies create a 'correct' order based on freedom, democracy, rules and economic openness in the Pacific, or China's policies will turn the Indo-Pacific into 'a region of disorder, conflict, and predatory economics'.

At the global level, the US policy of containing China has taken the form of a trade war and attempts to hinder Chinese influence in Asia and around the world. In March 2018, the Trump administration announced the introduction of 25 per cent tariffs on the import of steel and 10 per cent on aluminium. For the first time during nearly a century, Washington adopted a clearly protectionist policy targeting China. The Trump administration is resolved to reduce its trade deficit with China and to encourage an inflow of money in the US economy. Given Trump's efforts to add more loyalists to his administration, this mercantilist, protectionist policy will continue throughout his term in office at the least. At the same time, Washington has started adapting its policies around the world to the goal of strategic containment of China and Russia, which is adding a global dimension to this effort.

Finally, the United States is significantly curtailing its cooperation with China on global economic and climatic regulation as well as security issues. Until recently, the North Korean nuclear program was a priority in US cooperation with China. However, the possibility of direct dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang, including a possible meeting between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un, has rendered US–Chinese cooperation mostly unnecessary and has greatly weakened China's position on the North Korea issue. If the Trump administration succeeds in solving the North Korean problem, or at least paves the way to attaining this goal through direct dialogue with Pyongyang, this will create even more favourable conditions for globalizing containment of China.

However, it should not be accepted as inevitable that a deep European-style geopolitical and geoeconomic rift will open up in the Pacific region. There are many factors working against this, primarily the different strategic culture of Asian countries and their unwillingness to join centralized structures, or choose between the United States and China. In particular, the ASEAN economies, including US allies and both old and new US partners (the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam), as well as a major strategic ally in East Asia – South Korea – do not want to make this choice. Instead, they have been trying to maintain and even strengthen relations with Russia and China without harming relations with the United States. The more harshly the US tries to force them to make a choice, the more its positions in the region will deteriorate. India, which is the key US partner in its new containment strategy, will hardly agree to limit its foreign policy independence and become Washington's junior partner.



New Delhi is demonstrating growing interest in Eurasian affairs and obviously will not accept Greater Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific partnership becoming Cold-War-era-like blocs cast in opposition to each other. Even Japan, Washington's closest ally in Asia, who appears happy with the US growing resistance to what Tokyo views as China's aspiration to become the dominant power in East and Southeast Asia, does not want the US–Chinese rivalry go too far and reach the point where Asian countries would have to make a choice. Moreover, Japan does not want Russia to be included in the group of opponents of the Indo-Pacific partnership. India and Japan would like Greater Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific partnership to complement each other, not wall themselves off from each other.

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**For the first time during nearly a century, Washington adopted a clearly protectionist policy targeting China**

There are also other aspects of the evolution of US foreign policy working against long-term polarization of the Pacific region. These include less emphasis on the liberal component, as well as its long-term prospects. Washington's self-serving and mercantilist foreign economic policy is incompatible with its rhetoric about creating an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative, and the need to strengthen what remains of the liberal order and protect it from encroachments by the 'revisionist powers' Russia and China. Washington is unlikely to return to the liberal policy of 'benevolent hegemony' in the face of declining military and economic superiority over China and growing self-interest and protectionist sentiments at home, and this will limit the potential for US cooperation with India and other Quad partners, and the Pacific countries on the whole.

And lastly, turnover among the US political elite, while still in its early stages, may have a different effect: the United States could gradually retreat from its hegemonistic policies (both the liberal and neo-liberal variants), accept the rules of peaceful coexistence with Russia and China as independent centres in a multipolar world, and even join forces with them to create new common international orders on the global and regional levels. The new elite groups of right-wing and left-wing populists no longer think that America's security and prosperity can be ensured through retaining its global hegemony. Their growing influence will create new opportunities for developing constructive relations with China and Russia and hence for aligning the Indo-Pacific partnership and Greater Eurasia projects.

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# The Rise of the Rimland and the Future of World Politics

The new political geography of the world is a physical reality observable in the emergence of China and India as global powers with global interests. At the same time, the leading Asian powers themselves will have to respond to the challenge presented by their own centrality, and they will do so based on their own unique strategic cultures that, in turn, will have to adapt to new global requirements. Therefore, the right questions to ask are whether the Indian strategy will be a simple extrapolation of the traditional Mandala foreign policy philosophy and whether China's relations with its junior partners will be just a modern and politically correct copy of the tributary system? Or will both players accept centuries-old Western models of international relations based on multilateral mechanisms and institutions? Will the rise of India and China, and the corresponding response from the US and other states, divide the region, or lead to the emergence of a new multilateral balancing system with the participation of Russia, a system based on the unique Asian tradition?

The tectonic shifts in the global economy and global politics will inevitably produce adjustments in the very name and toolkit of European political geography as we know it today. First formulated by Germany's Friedrich Ratzel in the late 19th century, these geopolitical constructs were later taken further by Anglo-Saxon writers based on contemporary political realities, which in turn were shaped by the weakness of leading Asian states, the absolute predominance of maritime trade routes, imperial and Soviet Russia's aggressive southward pressure, and the West's military edge.

Today, all these conditions can no longer be taken as objective starting points for analysis. Asian states are powerful, overland trade routes in Eurasia are pulsing with life again, while the US and allied military enjoy only relative superiority now. Russia, historically considered the main enemy in the West and a threat to the East, is no longer seeking a warm-water port. But beyond that, modern Russia, unlike its predecessors during its 500 years of independent statehood, is unable to sustain offensive action both in the Western and Eastern sectors. Despite its geographical reach and military capabilities, by dint of its

demography and economy, Russia must maintain the course towards creating multilateral institutions and platforms. The confrontation with Russia that the West began in 2014 is only doing more to encourage Russia to be a positive force and pursue a qualitatively new level of engagement in Eastern affairs. Paradoxically, as Russia pivots to the East, where its main partners are China and India, it is preaching European values of conducting international affairs to the Eastern states. The factors that defined the old geopolitics are on their way out, while new factors and new geopolitics are emerging.

In the mid-20th century, when the opposition to the Soviet expansion was at its peak, Nicholas Spykman used 19th century geopolitical constructs to develop the concept of the Rimland. If the Island – the oceanic powers, i.e. Great Britain and the United States – can maintain control of the Rimland, it can contain the power of continental Eurasia and its central power, Russia. This concept is at the foundation of US global strategy, but it can no longer work as previously conceived. The most important states of the Rimland, China and India, are increasingly the ones driving expansion, to varying degrees, and making a place for themselves on the continent. The attempts to squeeze China back to Eurasia are causing Chinese power to spill into previously unexplored continents rather than to clash with Russia. The central component of the Rimland is disappearing, with control preserved only over its western and eastern extremities, Europe and Japan. In the meantime, China and India are beginning to put pressure on other geographical zones.

To quote British geographer Gordon West, ‘Man proposes, but Nature disposes.’ This refers not only to the restraints which geography imposes on states, however. Irrespective of subjective factors, the active involvement of the most important new geographical zones in world politics will change the very nature and content of world politics. If previously the geopolitics of India and China were of limited but growing interest in the context of international politics, today this interest is overwhelming. According to American author Robert Kaplan, China is of much greater importance to world politics than, for example, Brazil, and not only by virtue of its geographic location. It is so powerful that its interests must be taken seriously. The same, albeit to a lesser degree, is true of India or Japan. Indonesia is looming on the horizon and a united Korea beyond the horizon.

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It took more than 150 years for China's forcible inclusion in the international system to result in fundamental changes to the principles and the physical realities of this system's development and existence. China's 'emergence from the shadow' devised by the great Deng Xiaoping has been realized, and the only question is how a powerful China will act as a global power. After declaring its independence (1947), India also joined the international system, but only recently began to influence world affairs. Thus, the process of political globalization is nearing completion following the economic globalization that may start to erode in places under the pressure of the West's economic war against Russia. All regions of the world are now actively involved in international politics, and there are no longer only two active powers, as was the case in the latter half of the 20th century. International politics, 150 years after the universal promulgation of the Westphalian system, has become global.

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## The New Rimland and the Third Rome

The globalization of international politics is changing the coordinate system of the world powers' foreign policy. Russia's military-political and, to a lesser degree, economic capabilities help it preserve the status of a key power and one of the three UN Security Council's permanent members with an independent foreign policy. However, Russia has to operate amid restrictions that do not constrain the United States or China, namely weak demography and political and economic pressure from the US and its allies.

Russia has come up against a problem that several other great powers have confronted before. It is too big to enter into other countries' alliances, but its potential is not sufficient for taking a dominant position in a bloc of its own. This is why Russia's foreign policy must be more flexible, contextual and designed to ensure the state's involvement in multilateral balancing at the regional, Eurasian and global levels. The acquisition by the former Rimland powers (the strip of coastal land that encircles Eurasia) of a new quality as the sources of power, expansion and influence has created new conditions for such a policy.

First, the fundamental change in the global balance of forces and conditions compared to previous historical periods has further reduced the potential for even relative success of the West in its battle for global domination. This should fuel the confidence of the Russian elite who think Russia has few opportunities in the confrontation with the West. The objectively unavoidable US–China rivalry will overtax their resources and give Russia an opportunity to diversify its foreign economic ties and sources of technological solutions. Shocked by the US sanctions imposed against the largest global industrial companies in 2018, China will strive to increase its economic independence, primarily in finance and technology. This will give Russia access to new development resources now that Western resources are not available to it. Furthermore, the position of the United States is more complicated than during the first Cold War, because it is now confronting both Russia and China. The current position of the United States is similar to that of the Soviet Union between 1965 and 1989. The US allies in Europe are ineffective and the largest Asian countries openly despise them as former colonial powers that have lost their power. Europe's weakness and subordinate position have turned them from an asset to a liability in US policy.

Second, Russia should gradually stop viewing its ties with China and India as less important than its relations with the West, and reduce the distance from the other regional and global dimensions. Russia can no longer develop its relations with the United States and Europe separately from its ties with the Asian giants. It must strengthen the connection between its regional policies, at least in the US–Europe–Asia triangle. This will give Russia access to the possibilities and restrictions arising in the East, or because of the East, while developing relations with the West, bearing in mind that these relations will be hostile, or almost hostile, for the next 10 to 15 years.

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**Russia should gradually stop viewing its ties with China and India as less important than its relations with the West**

Third, Russia must redouble its efforts to develop non-diplomatic channels of interaction with the leading Rimland countries – China, India, Iran, Indonesia, and South Korea. This concerns the business and expert communities and civil society. The scope of diplomatic and expert interaction with India and China must be proportionate to the size of their populations and those of Russia's traditional partners in Europe. Russia must consistently remove the transport and logistics obstacles so that European

Russia has equally strong connections with the Rimland countries and its traditional Western partners. This is a challenging goal considering the distances and the length of communications. However, these physical or geographical obstacles are becoming more easily negotiable thanks to modern transport and communications. The Rimland must be connected to the Heartland physically and institutionally, leaving the World's Island in isolation, if possible.

Fourth, Russia must promote and emphasize its commitment to the traditional Westphalian principles of sovereignty, non-intervention, and the legal equality of states, which are important for the new global powers. Russia must continue to attract India and China to the multilateral organizations in which Russia is involved. India and China will try to reach agreement despite their differences, and Russia must be able to take part in this process. Excessive duality in relations with each other and other countries, which is a traditional element of India and China's strategic culture, is both an obstacle and an opportunity for Russia. It is an obstacle because it objectively weakens multilateral institutions that are a major foreign policy resource for Russia. But it is also an opportunity because it creates conditions for diplomatic manoeuvring and for creating contextual alliances based on common interests. The most important part is that the members of such alliances have common basic values of international communication, which the West rejected after its victory in the first Cold War. These values provide the basis of the mutual recognition of legitimacy as the key condition for efficient multilateral balancing.

Last, Russia must launch a systematic and multifaceted national study of the short- and long-term consequences of globalization in international affairs. The arising geopolitical system is unique. Historically, Russia has limited knowledge of the strategic culture of India, China and other non-Western powers, and is unable to assess their role in global politics efficiently. Russia must fill these gaps in close cooperation with its Asian partners. Its foreign policy mentality must change alongside the ongoing global transformation.

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