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## RELATIONS BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: CONTEMPORARY REALITIES AND TRENDS

The article analyzes the relations between the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China within the frameworks of present-day system which is inherent to the Asia-Pacific region. The author gives description of various factors that affect bilateral relations and identifies a number of common interests and ideas regarding the current events.

**Key words:** the Republic of Korea, the People's Republic, the triangle «US-RK-China», security, strategic cooperation

Contemporary subsystem of international relations within frameworks of the Asia-Pacific region is passing through hard times, and there are many reasons for that fact. So called «focal contradictions» within the triangle of USA-RK-Japan (bilateral security systems and at the same time territorial and other disputes between the Republic of Korea and Japan), China-Japan, North Korea-South Korea, North Korea-USA, North Korea-Japan and many other disputes shake that system, as a whole, and of course its major components: security, economic cooperation etc.

For almost six decades the security system, established by the United States of America with assistance of internal regional actors (the Republic of Korea and Japan) has determined the future of the Asia-Pacific in mentioned above area. However, a number of objective and subjective factors, such as rapid development of China, which stimulates relationships through line RK-China against the background of growing anti-Japanese climate in social and political opinion of South Korea and the People's Republic of China, some deterioration of relations with the USA—all these issues have already affected and still affect the stability of the system, pushing regional actors to seek alternative variants of their own security.

Since there is obvious need for creation of a collective security system as an alternative to the American one, the bilateral relations improvement induces further development and changes of the strategic priorities of both states.

The theoretical foundation of the article is based on scientific works of various researchers such as R. Cavazos, D. V. Hippel and P. Hayes, Han Suk-hee, D. Goma, D. G. Pinilla and others, which are dedicated to the analysis of certain vectors and bilateral cooperation issues in the context of RK-China relations.

The highest level meeting between the RK President Park Geun-hye and the President of China Xi Jinping took part at the summit, which was held in July 2014 in Seoul [5]. The two leaders discussed issues related to the new challenges of security changes that therefore can be conducted in the context of regional security and cooperation opportunities in various spheres, particularly in economic.

Within the diplomatic history of the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China conduction of such type of summits is indeed very important, taking into consideration that before 1992 diplomatic relations between South Korea and China formally had not existed. However, during more than two decades these relations have developed at a breakneck pace in really different directions.

Economically common interests, security threats etc. are the objective factors that have accelerated all these processes. In a few years China has become the largest trading partner for South Korea, an important market for goods, services and investments, source of imports and even more. The volume of trade between South Korea and China has increased almost 40 times and these are really convincing figures. For comparison, the turnover indicators of the Republic of Korea with China exceed the related trade figures with the US and Japan combined together. By indicators of foreign investments in China the first place is taken by the Republic of Korea [8].

However, against the backdrop of the long history of cooperation, the United States of America are very important for South Korea: this vector is vital in many areas, especially in the fields of security and economy. The last few governments have chosen for Korea to play the role of harmonious balance between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China. However, this balance has its problematic aspects.

In the 90's administration of the President of South Korea Roh Tae-woo was diplomatically considerably distant from the USA and at the same time on the background of this fact the RK moved closer to China in variety of mutual interests' aspects [1].

Over the next few years, bilateral Korean-American relations were rather complicated for various reasons; a certain crisis was felt on that vector. However, during the presidency of Lee Myung-Bak in the Republic of Korea alliance with the US has really become stronger, this foreign affairs' line was pointed out again as a diplomatic priority within the South Korean foreign policy [1]. The course for expansion and strengthening of multi-strategic alliance with this actor in international relations has been chosen as the major one. Such Lee Myung-bak pro-American foreign policy vector was negatively perceived in Beijing as Chinese foreign policy direction has suffered huge damages. But despite that, mutual economic interest hasn't let this factor to largely negative influence on the South Korean-Chinese bilateral relations.

It should be mentioned that the bilateral agreement on free trade between the two states was also signed: by that document it was unanimously expressed the mutual position towards the DPRK nuclear program and historical revisionism and re-militarization of Japan.

The Chinese government has offered the RK to join new institution within the Asia-Pacific region – Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) which, in general, excludes the possibility of Japan's participation, and that is suitable for both sides. In the same 2014 Memorandum «On Mutual Understanding» was also signed, a direct telephone line between the Ministers of Defense of the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China has finally been established [8]. For comparison, before that the similar link existed only with the United States of America.

President of China Xi Jinping in 2014 changed the tradition of the DPRK first visit by visiting Seoul first [3]. At first sight, one might say that there is nothing significant, but that factor, combined with a cold reception in the capital of North Korea, which wasn't followed by an invitation of the North Korean leader in Beijing demonstrated some deteriorations, tensions in the North Korean-Chinese relations [6].

Before the summit in July, Beijing maintained a fairly neutral in inter-Korean relations, leaning more to North Korea. However, the third nuclear test has forced China to change its position; it has even supported UN sanctions against North Korea. The leaders of the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China stated that they will form the «opposition of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula» [5].

A significant impetus to these relations was also given by anti-Japanese attitudes in both China and South Korea. The author would like to quote the speech of the President Xi Jinping, delivered at the National University of Seoul: «Both our countries have experienced great suffering after Japan launched its barbaric attack on China and Korea... and during the first half of the XX century occupied the Korean peninsula... both nations fought together side by side...» [7].

Both states have their own territorial disputes with Japan (Diaoyu / Senkaku islands and the Dokdo / Takeshima), and that issue also plays an important role in bilateral rapprochement of South Korea and China [9].

But that is only one side of the coin. Before that the author concentrated attention on the position of the political elites of both entities of bilateral relations, but the weighty importance in the sphere of realization and implementation of international relations also has the public opinion. In particular, if the policy of President of the Republic of Korea is negatively perceived in the social environment, it threatens by resignation and change of leadership in the state.

In the early 1990s, the People's Republic stepped up its policy in Asia on major spheres: while the USA focused on the Middle East, China tried to bring Asian states via so called «charming offensive» or «smiling» diplomacy. After Barack Obama has become the US President, they expressed interest in Asia with a new bang. This turning point noted the emergence of new opportunities and new challenges for regional actors.

It's necessary to point out that China and the USA, in fact, have no common enemies, whoever they were able to fight against together, and thus to smooth tensions. China is now quite popular state among the others as an economic partner. Ideological issue also has considerable importance for these

bilateral relations. The rivalry — that's how these relations look like in fact. But, in general, of course, they vary from confrontation to cooperation.

And now for the other states it is undesirable, because they may be forced to choose between China and the USA. The Republic of Korea has kept the security alliance with the United States; and South Korea generally believes that the USA — the most important actor with whom to cooperate in security and other spheres.

Considering foreign policy planning on this direction, it can be stressed out that Seoul prefers moderate position and shows very pragmatic approach to the rise of China. The RK does not perceive China growth process with a negative value, it's rather own admission of impossibility to develop successfully ignoring such an important regional and global actor like China. South Korea feels the need for cooperation in different areas both with the USA and China; so, controversies between two given parties may adversely affect the third side — the RK.

The author means not only the danger in economic sphere for Seoul but also certain security threats. Despite the interaction with China in economy, and with the USA in military and strategic security, this state has no actual leverage on relationships within the triangle US-China-Korea. The negative or positive trends are set by just two global actors. The only thing that remains essentially to Korea — is to use modern advances of the art of diplomacy, which, in general, Seoul does.

But to say that though China plays much more important role than the United States in building of foreign policy strategy in Korea is a huge mistake. The agenda for the RK is to continue dialogue and cooperation with China in the economy and at the same time to work closely with the US government, especially within the frameworks of their military alliance.

Of course, this position is rather pragmatic, due to national interests and practical considerations of South Korea, but according to the author, this guide is more preferable and advantageous than sharp movements left or right; generally, this policy is supported by South Korean political elites as well as by very important element in the system of foreign policy making and political life, in general — by major economic corporations in South Korea.

The results of the opinion polls showed that over 59 % of South Koreans considered that it's necessary to strengthen cooperation with the USA, while less than 25 % were in favor of close cooperation with China. [3] The vast majority of South Koreans see growing economic power of China is neither more nor less than one of the threats to sustainable development of South Korea.

Such foreign policy dilemma in the Republic of Korea complicates the amplification of bilateral relations and the formation of an integrated multi-level system of collective security in South-East Asia and Asia-Pacific region, in general.

Both states are trying to develop a concept of foreign policy that is able to predict almost any scenario of development of the bilateral relations and regional systems as a whole, but it is complicated by numerous external factors that have a strong influence on them.

On the one hand Korea is under the pressure of an importance of the security system with the United States; on the other hand – by the objective need of productive cooperation with China in the sphere of economy. This pattern, considering the sub-regional level, is not unique to Korea. Modern realities require changes in different areas, even under conditions set by the bipolar system of international relations, when the concept of security and economic interests were convergent.

South Korea and China formally operate by politically nominal phrases such as «strategic cooperation and partnership», but when it comes to issues of strategic and defensive nature; their relationships are kept purely at the level of economic interaction. Beijing points out that both states have «warm economic and political relations» – or growing close economic and political ties. [4] But the real fact is that these two subjects have quite «cold» relations in the military, security areas; and this is unlikely to change soon.

But the region as a whole and SEA in particular have such characteristics as the inertia of any institutional changes. It means that there is a certain strategic stalemate when any changes are seen by intraregional actors as a threats to security and instability.

So, the attitudes of not only of the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China play an important role in these bilateral relations, but also the positions of other regional actors on this foreign policy line have considerable impact. There is a kind of vicious circle that has butcher contradictions entities; each state has a direct or indirect impact on these relations, promoting its own state and national interest. For example, immediately after the above mentioned summit Japan stated that it cancels the series of sanctions against the DPRK (there were even rumors of the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visit to Pyongyang).

The current regional conditions — are tough challenges to the foreign policy of the Republic of Korea. On the one hand, today Seoul has a great chance to become the «first violin» in the strategic dynamics of Asia-Pacific region, balancing between the United States and the People's Republic of China, acting as mediator, and, thus, supporting equally relations with both states, as well as promoting regional institutions for strengthening collective security and increased cooperation in various fields, especially in the economy. On the other hand, the high-level competition between the USA and China sets South Korean security interests at issue. However, the balancing between these two states makes traditional security architecture in South-East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region more complicated.

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## **ВІДНОСИНИ РЕСПУБЛІКИ КОРЕЯ І КИТАЙСЬКОЇ НАРОДНОЇ РЕСПУБЛІКИ: СУЧАСНІ РЕАЛІЇ ТА ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ**

### **Резюме**

В статті проводиться аналіз відносин між Республікою Корея та Китайською Народною Республікою в рамках сучасної системи, яка притаманна Азіатсько-Тихоокеанському регіону на сьогоднішній день. Автор дає характеристику різноманітних факторів, які впливають на двосторонні відносини та виділяє низку спільних інтересів і ідей стосовно існуючих питань в контексті регіональних відносин.

**Ключові слова:** Республіка Корея, Китайська Народна Республіка, трикутник «США — РК — КНР», система безпеки, стратегічне співробітництво.

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## **ОТНОШЕНИЯ РЕСПУБЛИКИ КОРЕЯ И КИТАЙСКОЙ НАРОДНОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ: СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ РЕАЛИИ И ТЕНДЕНЦИИ**

### **Резюме**

В статье проводится анализ отношений между Республикой Корея и Китайской Народной Республикой в рамках современной системы, которая присуща Азиатско-Тихоокеанскому региону на сегодняшний день. Автор дает характеристику различным факторам, влияющим на двусторонние отношения, и выделяет ряд общих интересов и идей касательно существующих вопросов в контексте региональных отношений.

**Ключевые слова:** Республика Корея, Китайская Народная Республика, треугольник «США — РК — КНР», система безопасности, стратегическое сотрудничество.