

DOI: 10.20542/0131-2227-2025-69-6-16-25

EDN: EEIPQS

## MEGA-REGIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONFLICTING STRATEGIES FOR GLOBAL LEADERSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA

*Vladimir Yu. SALAMATOV,*

*ORCID 0000-0002-6430-640X, VYSalamatov@itandi.ru*

*Moscow State Institute of International Relations, 76, Prosp. Vernadskogo, Moscow, 119454, Russian Federation;  
National Research University Higher School of Economics, 11, Pokrovskii Blvr., Moscow, 109028,  
Russian Federation.*

*Anna V. TANGAEVA,*

*ORCID 0000-0003-3319-2283, tangaeva.anna@mail.ru*

*International Trade and Integration Research Center, 3, Sovetskoi Armii Str., Moscow, 127018,  
Russian Federation.*

*Anna A. ZHARKOVA,*

*ORCID 0009-0006-5860-8555, aazharkova@itandi.ru*

*International Trade and Integration Research Center, 3, Sovetskoi Armii Str., Moscow, 127018,  
Russian Federation.*

Received 16.12.2024. Revised 10.03.2025. Accepted 31.03.2025.

**Abstract.** This article examines the evolving role of mega-regional trade agreements (MRTAs) in the context of rising geoeconomic tensions between the United States and China. As economic rivalry between the two powers intensified in the late 2010s, trade and investment policies became central tools for exerting influence on the global stage. The study explores the strategic motivations behind the United States' push for MRTAs, such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) and contrasts them with China's leadership in agreements. The analysis delves into the economic, political, and security drivers that have shaped these competing trade blocs, emphasizing how both countries seek to bolster their regional influence while countering each other's economic reach. The United States has framed MRTAs as a means to strengthen economic cooperation with allies and partners, reduce dependence on China, and establish high-standard trade rules. Meanwhile, China has leveraged Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to consolidate its economic leadership in the Asia-Pacific by fostering deeper regional integration. The article assesses the sustainability and effectiveness of these trade agreements within an increasingly politicized global economic environment. While MRTAs promise economic benefits such as trade facilitation and supply chain resilience, they also face significant challenges, including differing regulatory frameworks, political uncertainties, and the risk of fragmentation in global trade governance. As economic policies become increasingly intertwined with geopolitical rivalries, the success of these initiatives will depend on the ability of participating nations to balance strategic competition with the economic imperatives of regional cooperation. The study provides an understanding of how MRTAs function not only as economic instruments but also as geopolitical tools, shaping the broader contours of the international economic order in an era of great-power competition.

**Keywords:** mega-regional trade agreements, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), regional leadership, mega-regional trade systems, trade barriers, China, United States.

### **About authors:**

Vladimir Yu. SALAMATOV, Dr. Sci. (Econ.), Cand. Sci. (Tech.), Professor.

Anna V. TANGAEVA, Head of Department.

Anna A. ZHARKOVA, Specialist.

## МЕГАРЕГИОНАЛЬНЫЕ ТОРГОВЫЕ СОГЛАШЕНИЯ В КОНТЕКСТЕ СТРАТЕГИЙ ГЛОБАЛЬНОГО ЛИДЕРСТВА США И КИТАЯ

© 2025 г. В.Ю. Саламатов, А.В. Тангаева, А.А. Жаркова

*САЛАМАТОВ Владимир Юрьевич, доктор экономических наук, кандидат технических наук, профессор,*

*ORCID 0000-0002-6430-640X, VYSalamatov@itandi.ru*

*МГИМО МИД РФ, РФ, 119454 Москва, пр-т Вернадского, 76;*

*НИУ ВШЭ, РФ, 109028 Москва, Покровский б-р, 11.*

*ТАНГАЕВА Анна Вячеславовна, начальник отдела,  
ORCID 0000-0003-3319-2283, tangaeva.anna@mail.ru  
Исследовательский центр “Международная торговля и интеграция”, РФ, 127018 Москва,  
ул. Советской Армии, 3.*

*ЖАРКОВА Анна Алексеевна, специалист,  
ORCID 0009-0006-5860-8555, aazharkova@itandi.ru  
Исследовательский центр “Международная торговля и интеграция”, РФ, 127018 Москва,  
ул. Советской Армии, 3.*

Статья поступила 16.12.2024. После доработки 10.03.2025. Принята к печати 31.03.2025.

**Аннотация.** Исследуется роль мегарегиональных торговых соглашений (МРТС) в контексте нарастающей геоэкономической напряженности между США и Китаем. Анализируются причины и проявления эскалации американо-китайских экономических противоречий во второй половине 2010-х годов, включая влияние инициативы США по продвижению МРТС, таких как Индо-Тихоокеанское экономическое рамочное соглашение (ИТЭРС) и Всеобъемлющее региональное экономическое партнерство (ВРЭП).

**Ключевые слова:** мегарегиональные торговые соглашения, МРТС, ВРЭП, региональное лидерство, торговые барьеры, КНР, США.

## INTRODUCTION

Mega-regional trade agreements (MRTAs) have become an integral part of global economic policy, especially in the context of increasing competition between the USA and China. They not only promote market integration, lower trade barriers, and facilitate trade, but also serve as important instruments of strategic influence, particularly for countries seeking to assert their position in the global economy. MRTAs play a key role in redistributing economic power among the world's major players. The USA and China are actively using them to strengthen their positions in the global economy, which has far-reaching consequences for both the participating countries and world trade in general.

This paper offers a new perspective on MRTAs, considering them not only as economic instruments but also as key components of global leadership strategies. This approach makes it possible to reveal the role of MRTAs in transforming the world economy.

## CLASH OF GLOBAL LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES OF THE USA AND CHINA

The American strategy of global leadership is based on maintaining and strengthening the liberal world order established after the Second World War. The main principles of this strategy are free trade, open markets, democracy, and the rule of law [1]. The USA played a key role within the bi-

polar system for more than half a century, shaping the global aspects of world politics and the economy while ensuring the relative stability of the international system.

Under the unipolar system that emerged after the end of the Cold War, Washington's attention became focused, on the one hand, on China, which was actively competing in the international arena and demonstrating unprecedented economic growth despite global crises such as the coronavirus pandemic, and, on the other hand, on Russia, which was regaining its position as a significant geopolitical force.

The consolidation of countries under American leadership, based on the sanctions imposed on Russia in 2022–2024, pursued the strategic goals of containing Russia, China, and other emerging centers of power in the developing world, preventing them from rapprochement and creating their own alliances. The coalition of partners created by the USA is a relatively new phenomenon in its policy, consistent with its confrontational vision of the world. This aligns with the theory of hegemonic stability<sup>1</sup>, which regards the presence

<sup>1</sup> The theory of hegemonic stability is a concept within the theory of international relations, according to which the presence of a hegemonic state contributes to the creation and maintenance of the liberal international economic order. The main idea is that the hegemon, having sufficient power and resources, assumes the role of a guarantor of stability; this, in turn, contributes to the growth of common welfare and mitigation of conflicts between states. The main authors of the theory are American scientists Ch. Kindleberger and R. Gilpin.

of a hegemon in the international economic and political system as the main condition for preserving the liberal world order. Accordingly, it is considered feasible to strive to preserve hegemony through the creation of blocs and alliances, thereby securing its presence in a controlled collective format. It is in this vein that the USA views the possibility of preserving its leadership in the global economy.

Russian researcher O.B. Pichkov notes that in conditions of hypoglobalisation<sup>2</sup> and increased geopolitical competition, the USA has significantly expanded the range of tools used to maintain its leadership. The focus is shifting from military force to economic measures, including lending, investment, trade, and humanitarian aid, as well as the use of information technologies and the concept of “hybrid warfare”.

As mentioned earlier, American economic policy is now mainly oriented towards confronting global competitors, especially China. Important aspects of this policy include inflated interest rates, sanctions pressure, siphoning resources from dependent countries, increased financing of the military-industrial complex, and active investments in strategically important industries. The USA also actively creates conditions for attracting human resources and uses “infodemia” (informational influence through mass media) to shape global public opinion. In particular, the American strategy of global leadership is based on a hybrid approach that combines economic, political, and informational tools [2, pp. 43-44].

Pichkov also identifies a number of internal factors that, despite active efforts to preserve the historically dominant position of the USA, continue to undermine the foundations of the US economic model and may become obstacles to maintaining its dominant position in the inter-

<sup>2</sup> O.B. Pichkov introduces the concept of “hypoglobalisation” – a centrifugal process characterised by increased barriers in all forms of international economic relations, weakened co-development of national economies against the background of the formation of a new system of world trade, new international financial system and, in general, new global economic order based on the principle of multipolarity in the conditions of increasing global turbulence.

national arena. Firstly, the increasing poverty affecting about 37 million people, or 11.4 percent of the population, creates social tensions exacerbated by ethnic differences. Secondly, the shrinking share of the middle class – from 61% in 1970 to 50% in 2023 – points to a worsening trend regarding social inequality and the deterioration of living conditions. It is also important to note immigration problems caused by changes in the racial and ethnic structure of the population, which give rise to internal conflicts due to the absence of a unified approach to migration policy. The inaccessibility of health care and the crisis of the educational system limit opportunities for social and economic growth, which in the long term can weaken the position of the USA as a global leader [2, pp. 27-29].

Some experts consider the decline of the US global role, together with the growth of China’s economic potential and the emergence of new regional institutions involving Russia and China, as a prerequisite for the development of a multipolar scenario for the future world order [3]. However, some experts argue that the international configuration is evolving towards a “new bipolarity” rather than true multipolarity – where China becomes the main rival of the United States, while other countries play a less significant role.

For instance, Russian expert D.A. Degterev notes that, from a foreign policy perspective, multipolarity has been an important concept for China over the past 30 years. Chinese interest in multipolarity was particularly heightened during the conflicts in Yugoslavia. In this context, Russian approaches to multipolarity have also been influenced by Chinese traditions, as noted in the 1997 joint declaration in which Russia and the PRC focused on the development of a “positive trend towards the formation of a multipolar world” against the backdrop of the collapse of the bipolar system.

Nevertheless, in the 2000s, especially after China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and put forward the concept of a harmonious world, the rhetoric of multipolarity became less prominent in the country’s foreign policy. This transition may indicate that the PRC is seeking to take the place of the USA in the global economy [4].

China offers its model as an alternative to the Western-centric development model, promoting it through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which involves the creation of a network of trade routes and infrastructure projects linking Asia, Europe, and Africa. In addition, China is enhancing its influence through financial aid and cooperation with developing countries. Unlike the Western model, which is often accompanied by political demands, the Chinese strategy focuses on economic development, assuming no interference in the internal affairs of its partners. This makes the Chinese model attractive to countries seeking economic growth without external political pressure [source 1].

China is actively developing a network of bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs). A significant element of this strategy is the emphasis on “contiguous diplomacy”, involving economic alignment with neighbouring states, which promotes closer economic integration in the region. These initiatives fit seamlessly into larger formats, allowing the country to expand its influence and strengthen economic ties with its partners. Particular attention is paid to developing ties within the framework of global South-South cooperation. Expanding the range of BRICS countries and transforming this platform into one of the most influential forces in the world is an essential part of China’s long-term strategy [5, p. 31].

Promoting globalisation and free trade is important for China, as evidenced by PRC Chairman Xi Jinping’s speech at the 2017 World Economic Forum in Davos [source 2]. In conditions where the USA is demonstrating a tendency towards protectionism, China is positioning itself as an advocate of an open world economy and a supporter of global cooperation.

China actively promotes its interests by formally opposing any rules that oppose the country’s strategic objectives. For example, China has been engaged in a struggle within the WTO to be recognized as a market economy, disputing the continued application of its status as a non-market economy in the context of anti-dumping rules [6].

The confrontation between the USA and China reflects significant changes in the global economic system and indicates that the world economy is

moving towards diversified approaches, assuming different development models, whereby countries will be able to choose economic strategies based on their national interests. In this context, the role of macro-regional alliances that ensure the sustainability of national economies under deteriorating external conditions is increasing.

### ESCALATION OF US-CHINA ECONOMIC CONTRADICTIONS

In the second half of the 2010s, the economic contradictions between the USA and China significantly intensified, leading to the escalation of the trade conflict and having a considerable impact on the global economy and trade. This exacerbation is mainly explained by the growing trade imbalance between the world’s two largest economies, increasing competition in high-tech sectors, and reciprocal claims.

For years, the USA faced a tremendous trade deficit in its commercial relations with China. In 2017, the figure was about \$ 375 billion [source 3], which caused discontent in the USA. The United States accused China of using protectionist measures, such as subsidies to domestic companies and currency manipulation, which allowed Chinese goods to remain competitive in the global market. Disproportionate household incomes and job losses in the USA due to the shift of production to China also served as reasons for rising tensions. At the same time, the impact of growing Chinese production on the American economy and the resulting availability of cheap goods increased tensions among US producers competing with Chinese manufacturers in the domestic market.

China’s rise in high-tech sectors such as AI, 5G communication standards, internet commerce, and other innovative technologies has also become a major challenge for the USA. Chinese companies receiving government support turned into world-class competitors, causing alarm in Washington. In addition, in 2017, the WTO recognized the PRC as a market economy, which caused serious concern in the USA since it constrained the practice of applying protectionist measures against Chinese enterprises. The introduction of steel and aluminium tariffs by D. Trump in March

2018 proved to be a starting point for further escalation of the conflict.

The compilation of a “black list” of organisations subject to a ban on American companies doing business with certain Chinese firms [source 4], including *ZTE Corporation*, which was accused of violating US sanctions against Iran, was also a significant step in this direction. Despite reaching a tentative agreement at the *G20* summit in Osaka, the USA and China quickly returned to exchanging threats of further tariff increases.

In 2018–2019, the D. Trump administration imposed tariffs on thousands of goods worth about \$ 380 billion. The J. Biden administration essentially maintained the tariff restrictions imposed by the former president [source 5]. In addition, in 2022, the USA imposed severe export restrictions on equipment and software for the production of advanced semiconductors. In 2023, the United States expanded these restrictions by tightening licensing requirements for China and some other countries. J. Biden also strengthened controls over Chinese digital platforms, particularly the largest of them, *TikTok*, and tightened rules for investment in Chinese high-tech companies. In August 2023, an executive order was signed to investigate US investments in Chinese technologies [7]. In May 2024, new tariffs were imposed on Chinese goods worth \$ 18 billion, affecting key industries including the production of electric cars, semiconductors, lithium-ion batteries, and rare earth metals.

D. Trump’s return to the presidency in 2025 led to a further tightening of tariff policy against China. In February 2025, he announced new tariffs on automobiles, semiconductors, and pharmaceuticals. On February 10, 2025, steel and aluminium tariffs were increased. In response, China imposed countermeasures on US exports [source 5].

#### THE US ROLE IN PROMOTING MEGA-REGIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS

In its effort to consolidate strategic interests within the changing world trade architecture, the USA has taken a leading role in promoting a number of mega-regional agreements. A com-

mon feature of MRTAs involving the USA is tangible harmonization of standards, technical regulations, and product safety. This is based to a great extent on US proposals aimed at ensuring the best possible access for American companies to partner markets (for more details, see [8]).

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a trade agreement aimed at creating a free trade zone in the Asia-Pacific region (APAC). The process of forming the TPP began with the signing of the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership between New Zealand, Singapore, Chile, and Brunei in 2005. This relatively concise agreement focused on tariff reductions and trade facilitation. The USA originally expressed interest in joining in 2008 under the administration of President George W. Bush and made significant progress in negotiations under the Obama administration. With the US submission, Australia, Canada, Mexico, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Peru joined the negotiations, resulting in a significant increase in the geographic scope and economic importance of the TPP. Advancing its standards in areas such as intellectual property protection, labour and environmental standards, as well as access to government procurement, the USA played a leading role during the five years of TPP negotiations, which resulted in a consensus on the text wording. On February 4, 2016, the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement was signed in Auckland by all 12 participating countries. The agreement included commitments concerning tariff reductions on thousands of goods, simplification of customs procedures, regulation of e-commerce, protection of intellectual property, and the introduction of labour and environmental standards, as well as other obligations consistent with WTO norms and rules.

One of the first enactments of the newly elected US President Donald Trump was the country’s withdrawal from the TPP in January 2017. Trump explained this step as a desire to safeguard the employment of US citizens and protect the manufacturing sector from foreign competition, while at the same time signalling his intention to pursue bilateral agreements with APAC countries.

The withdrawal of the largest TPP member changed the operational dynamics in the APAC

free trade area but did not stop the other 11 countries from taking further steps toward mutual integration. In March 2018, they signed a new version of the agreement – the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP, or TPP-11) – which retained the main provisions of the TPP but suspended or modified a number of clauses in the absence of the USA. The TPP-11 entered into force in December 2018 and continues to operate as one of the largest free trade zones in the world.

The American withdrawal from the TPP created risks of losing positions in APAC markets; therefore, the D. Trump administration intensified work on bilateral agreements. To date, the USA has FTAs with six countries of the TPP-11: Australia, Canada, Chile, Mexico, Peru, and Singapore; in addition, a free trade agreement with Japan on essential minerals is effective. Bilateral agreements provide significant flexibility regarding trade terms and differentiation of concessions for different trading partners; therefore, they are more justified for countries having a prevailing right to dictate their terms. The course toward predominantly bilateral relations has yielded some definite results, but for the most part, only producers of certain groups of goods (in particular, those manufactured by the military-industrial complex) have benefited, while exporters of mass-market goods and services (particularly in the sphere of information and communication technologies) found themselves deprived of new opportunities. It was these manufacturers that initiated the campaign for the country's "return" to the TPP, declaring the withdrawal from it to be "the greatest mistake of President Trump" [9].

One of the most important goals of US participation in the TPP was to contain China's economic influence in the APAC. The partnership was viewed as a way to create an alternative economic alliance capable of competing with China without including it. The US withdrawal from the TPP in 2017 changed the geopolitical landscape in the region and created a vacuum that was actively filled by China and other major economies. The move also raised concerns among US allies and partners about the reliability of US leadership in the region. The TPP retained

its importance both in terms of economic integration in the APAC and Washington's strategic interests. The US influence in shaping the TPP and the standards underpinning it still has a significant impact on international trade policy and the development of new trading blocs. Considering all of the above arguments, experts regarded America's possible accession to the new TPP and the consolidation of trade interests with all parties to the Agreement as a probable scenario. However, the administration of the next US President, J. Biden, initiated the creation of a new structure partially parallel to the TPP.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) is an initiative launched by the USA in May 2022 to enhance economic cooperation and strengthen trade ties with partners in the Indo-Pacific region. The initiative brought together all participants of the Asia-Pacific TPP – Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Brunei – as well as potential participants such as South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, towards cooperation with the USA and India. The IPEF's main objectives include promoting economic development, securing sustainable supply chains, strengthening standards in the digital economy and technology, and promoting fair trade.

The main agreements within the framework of the IPEF are:

- The IPEF Supply Chain Agreement effective from February 2024. Three new bodies were set up by its decision:
  - The Supply Chain Council instituted to facilitate cooperation in strengthening sustainability in critical sectors;
  - The Supply Chain Crisis Response Network;
  - The Labour Rights Advisory Board.

It also introduced a mechanism to handle "labour rights inconsistencies" at IPEF member countries' enterprises;

- The Clean Economy Agreement signed in June 2024 aims to support member countries' transition to green energy by enhancing cooperation in innovation and investment in clean en-

ergy and environmentally friendly technologies. An annual investment forum was established to consolidate the Agreement participants' resources intended to mobilise finance for climate projects;

- The IPEF Fair Economy Agreement. Its main targets are combating corruption and tax evasion, enhancing transparency of information and improving information exchange. The Agreement contains capacity-building initiatives deemed necessary by the US Department of Commerce for assisting IPEF partners in meeting the Agreement's standards [10].

The IPEF is not a traditional trade agreement with commitments to reduce tariffs or create FTAs. Instead, it focuses on creating a platform for dialogue and cooperation on key economic issues. The initiative is aimed at strengthening the economic alliance with India, which is demonstrating increasing strategic autonomy in its technological and foreign policy. At the same time, the USA is prioritizing the reinforcement of the economic component of the US–Japan–Australia–India quadrilateral partnership, including cooperation with Australia to counter Chinese influence in the Pacific islands. In addition, the multilateral format can strengthen the strategic alliance with South Korea against the backdrop of growing anti-Chinese sentiment in the country [11].

Unlike classical FTAs, the IPEF provides participants with flexibility in choosing cooperation areas and offers a new approach to economic integration oriented towards sustainable and equitable development. Participants are able to set their own priorities within each thematic area, allowing them to account for national specificities and varying levels of reform readiness.

Another ambitious project of a mega-regional agreement with US participation is the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the EU countries. Work on the agreement started in 2013 and was suspended in 2016 due to its loss of relevance for the USA due to changing US foreign policy priorities under the Trump administration. After J. Biden took office as US President in 2021, there were some expectations of resuming negotiations in a new form; however, no concrete steps were taken in this direction. Nevertheless, the TTIP remains an important example

of how complex MRTAs can shape global trade policy and geopolitical relations. The agreement laid the groundwork for continued dialogue between the EU and the USA within the framework of the Trade and Technology Council, which was established to coordinate actions in trade, the digital economy, data protection, and technology standards.

## CHINA'S POLICY OF MEGA-REGIONALISM

China continues to actively strengthen its position in the international economy, relying on a comprehensive approach that includes infrastructure investment, economic cooperation, and the promotion of its own standards. Its policy in the sphere of mega-regionalism has also shown remarkable progress.

The signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) in 2020 cemented China's influence at a new level. The Agreement includes 15 countries – 10 ASEAN states<sup>3</sup>, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand – and represents the world's largest FTA in terms of population coverage and aggregate GDP.

The main accomplishment of the Agreement is the elimination of tariff barriers between RCEP participants: about 90 percent of import tariffs are scheduled to be eliminated within 20 years, with the remaining portion retained as individual withdrawals by participating countries to protect particularly sensitive product markets. The inclusion of tariff exclusions reflects the countries' desire to preserve established proportions in their domestic commodity markets and minimize the risks of integration with other RCEP participants. Another important element of the Agreement is the harmonization of product origin regulations, designed to accelerate the development of regional and global supply chains within the RCEP space (for more details, see [12]).

The creation of the bloc implies potential leadership for China, which is regarded as the RCEP's main beneficiary with respect to integration pro-

<sup>3</sup> Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam.

cesses and multilateral diplomacy in the APAC; it also opens new opportunities for Chinese enterprises to access APAC countries' markets, including through the harmonization of standards and requirements. RCEP may be considered a way to compensate for losses caused by the trade war with the USA and as an instrument to diversify trade and economic ties by building intra-regional production chains and it also serves as a tool for RMB internationalization [13].

China promotes a model of economic cooperation that minimizes the influence of political and social conditions; unlike other large trading blocs, such as the European Union or the TPP, the RCEP does not require strict unification of labor standards or environmental protection, which makes it more attractive to states focused on economic growth rather than social or ecological reforms.

Despite the prevailing view of Chinese dominance, the character and spirit of the RCEP are largely a result of ASEAN countries' diplomacy and approaches. The ten countries of this established trading bloc succeeded in acting collectively as a driving force within the RCEP, assuming a central and stabilizing role in facilitating a universal compromise and turning the APAC into a global trade liberalization center.

The TPP was originally set up as a free trade agreement uniting Pacific region countries, with a view to strengthening economic ties and promoting high standards of trade and investment, as well as labor and environmental regulations. However, China, the region's largest economy, was not included in the TPP negotiations, which was regarded as an attempt by the USA and its allies to constrain China's economic and geopolitical influence in the APAC. The TPP focused on creating high standards of intellectual property, labor, and environmental protection, which might create obstacles for Chinese companies and exports. After the USA withdrew from the TPP in 2017, Beijing began showing cautious interest in the TPP-11 which succeeded the original TPP, considering it as a possible tool for strengthening economic ties with major trading partners and

promoting its economic interests. In 2021, China formally applied to join the TPP-11, committing to the Agreement's high standards, particularly in intellectual property protection, market transparency, and respect for workers' rights. According to the PRC Ministry of Commerce, China regards itself as fully self-confident and capable of meeting the standards set by the TPP-11 [source 6]. Currently, the issue of China's accession is under consideration by the countries that are parties to the Agreement. Given the US role in the TPP-11 and the likelihood of America's "return" to the alliance, the decision to include China presents a diplomatic dilemma for the TPP-11 countries.

## RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The politicisation of international relations has significantly influenced the role of MRTAs, turning them into important elements of foreign policy strategy. China has been actively promoting the RCEP as a mechanism to enhance economic ties in the APAC. Unlike traditional free trade zones, where countries' participation is often limited by a rigid framework, MRTAs offer participants flexibility to identify priority areas of cooperation. This allows for the consideration of unique conditions for different players, making these agreements attractive to countries with varying levels of readiness to reform their trade policies.

The USA is strengthening its role in the international economy through the conclusion of new agreements and the revision of existing ones. Under such agreements, the USA is promoting more stringent standards for environmental protection as well as the protection of intellectual property and workers' rights, reflecting the country's striving not only for economic gain but also for the establishment of global norms beneficial to American business. MRTAs thus enable member states to shape economic standards and rules, creating conditions for strategic competition. In this context, mega-regional agreements serve as crucial instruments for transforming the global economy and advancing the strategic objectives of global leadership.

## REFERENCES

1. Brands H. *American Grand Strategy and the Liberal Order: Continuity, Change, and Options for the Future Perspective*. RAND Corporation, 2016. 38 p. Available at: [hTTPS://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE200/PE209/RAND\\_PE209.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE200/PE209/RAND_PE209.pdf) (accessed 01.08.2024).
2. Пичков О.Б. *Стратегия глобального лидерства США в мировой экономике и ее трансформация в первой трети XXI века*. Дис. д-ра экон. наук. Москва, 2024. 324 с.  
Pichkov O.B. *The Strategy of US Global Leadership in the World Economy and Its Transformation in the First Third of the 21st Century*. Dr. Diss. (Econ.). Moscow, 2024. 324 p. (In Russ.) Available at: [hTTPS://www.rudn.ru/storage/media/science\\_dissertation/ddfc31e9-5490-432f-b614-bf658d3fa06c/NRy7wEVIQ7Xuvp78EO4ze75jqxttk9qQXTVLPwIV.pdf](https://www.rudn.ru/storage/media/science_dissertation/ddfc31e9-5490-432f-b614-bf658d3fa06c/NRy7wEVIQ7Xuvp78EO4ze75jqxttk9qQXTVLPwIV.pdf) (accessed 01.08.2024).
3. Солюянов В.С. Концепция многополярности: многообразие подходов и интерпретаций. *Вестник РУДН. Серия: Политология*, 2021, т. 23, № 4, сс. 424-445.  
Soluyanov V.S. The Concept of Multipolarity: Diversity of Approaches and Interpretations. *RUDN Journal of Political Science*, 2021, vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 424-445. (In Russ.) Available at: [hTTPS://doi.org/10.22363/2313-1438-2021-23-3-424-445](https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-1438-2021-23-3-424-445)
4. Дегтерев Д.А. *Многополярность или “новая биполярность”?* Российский совет по международным делам, 16.01.2020.  
Degterev D.A. *Multipolarity or “New Bipolarity”?* Russian International Affairs Council, 16.01.2020. (In Russ.) Available at: [hTTPS://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/mnogopolyarnost-ili-novaya-bipolyarnost/](https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/mnogopolyarnost-ili-novaya-bipolyarnost/) (accessed 01.08.2024).
5. Спартак А.Н. Метаморфозы процесса регионализации: от региональных торговых соглашений к мегарегиональным проектам. *Контуры глобальных трансформаций: политика, экономика, право*, 2017, т. 10, № 4, сс. 13-37.  
Spartak A.N. Metamorphosis of Regionalization: from Regional Trade Agreements to Megaregional Projects. *Outlines of Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, Law*, 2017, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 13-37. (In Russ.) Available at: [hTTPS://doi.org/10.23932/2542-0240-2017-10-4-13-37](https://doi.org/10.23932/2542-0240-2017-10-4-13-37)
6. Hořman M.T. China’s NME Status at the WTO: Analysis of the Debate. *Journal of International Trade Law and Policy*, 2021, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 1-20. Available at: [hTTPS://doi.org/10.1108/JITLP-09-2020-0054](https://doi.org/10.1108/JITLP-09-2020-0054)
7. Lawrence S.V., Sutter K.M. China Primer: U.S.-China Relations. *Congressional Research Service. In Focus*, 24.10.2023. 3 p. Available at: [hTTPS://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10119](https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10119) (accessed 14.02.2025).
8. Саламатов В.Ю. Мегарегиональные торговые соглашения. *Мировая экономика и международные отношения*, 2016, т. 60, № 9, сс. 17-27.  
Salamatov V. Yu. Mega-regional Trade Agreements. *World Economy and International Relations*, 2016, vol. 60, no. 9, pp. 17-27. (In Russ.) Available at: [hTTPS://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2016-60-9-17-27](https://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2016-60-9-17-27)
9. Рогожин А.А. *Выйти или войти? Возможно ли вступление США в обновленное Транстихоокеанское партнерство*. Международный дискуссионный клуб “Валдай”, 19.03.2018.  
Rogozhin A.A. *To Exit or to Join? Is It Possible for the United States to Join the Renewed Trans-Pacific Partnership?* Valdai Discussion Club, 19.03.2018. (In Russ.) Available at: [hTTPS://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/vyyti-ili-voytissha-TPP/](https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/vyyti-ili-voytissha-TPP/) (accessed 01.08.2024).
10. Cimino-Isaacs D., Kitamura H., Manyin E. Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). *Congressional Research Service. In Focus*, 22.07.2024. 3 p. Available at: [hTTPS://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12373](https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12373) (accessed 01.08.2024).
11. Арапова Е.Я. *Индо-Тихоокеанская экономическая структура: американский ответ ВРЭП?* Российский совет по международным делам, 03.06.2022.  
Arapova E.Ya. *Indo-Pacific Economic Framework: America’s Response to RCEP?* Russian International Affairs Council, 03.06.2022. (In Russ.) Available at: [hTTPS://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/pryzhok-aziatskikh-tigrov-vv-prostranstvo-megaregionov/](https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/pryzhok-aziatskikh-tigrov-vv-prostranstvo-megaregionov/) (accessed 01.08.2024).
12. Саламатов В.Ю., Тангаева А.В., Коломин В.О. Перспективы и место ВРЭП в системе мегарегиональных торговых блоков. *Мировая экономика и международные отношения*, 2022, т. 66, № 2, сс. 23-32.  
Salamatov V.Yu., Tangaeva A.V., Kolomin V.O. RCEP in the System of Mega-Regional Trade Agreements. *World Economy and International Relations*, 2022, vol. 66, no. 2, pp. 23-32. (In Russ.) Available at: [hTTPS://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2022-66-2-23-32](https://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2022-66-2-23-32)
13. Лисоволик Я.Д. *ВРЭП: ключевая веха в развитии мегарегионализма*. Международный дискуссионный клуб “Валдай”, 09.12.2020.

Lissovlik Ya.D. *RCEP: A Crucial Milestone in Mega-Regionalism*. Valdai Discussion Club, 09.12.2020. (In Russ.) Available at: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/rcep-a-crucial-milestone-in-mega-regionalism/> (accessed 01.08.2024).

## SOURCES

1. How China's Development Story Can Be an Alternative to the Western Model. *South China Morning Post*, 03.02.2017. Available at: <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2067512/how-chinas-development-story-can-be-alternative-western> (accessed 01.08.2024).
2. Си Цзиньпин призвал “не запирайтесь в темной комнате протекционизма”. *РБК*, 17.01.2017. Xi Jinping Called for “Not Locking Ourselves in the Dark Room of Protectionism.” *RBC*, 17.01.2017. (In Russ.) Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/economics/17/01/2017/587e04829a79476f6224e9dd> (accessed 01.08.2024).
3. U.S.-China Trade Deficit Hits Record, Fueling Trade Fight. *The New York Times*, 06.02.2018. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/06/us/politics/us-china-trade-deficit.html> (accessed 03.03.2025).
4. China's Huawei, 70 affiliates Placed on U.S. Trade Blacklist. *Reuters*, 16.05.2019. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/business/chinas-huawei-70-affiliates-placed-on-us-trade-blacklist-idUSKCN1SL2W4/> (accessed 01.08.2024).
5. Trump Tariffs: Tracking the Economic Impact of the Trump Trade War. *Tax Foundation*, 13.02.2025. Available at: <https://taxfoundation.org/research/all/federal/trump-tariffs-trade-war> (accessed 14.02.2025).
6. *China to Speed Up Accession to CPTPP*. The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 22.03.2024. Available at: [https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202403/22/content\\_WS65fcddf2c6d0868f4e8e555c.html](https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202403/22/content_WS65fcddf2c6d0868f4e8e555c.html) (accessed 01.08.2024).