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CENTER FOR ASIA-PACIFIC STUDIES IMEMO: CREATING A NEW ANALYTICAL PARADIGM

Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) has a well-earned and long-standing high international reputation as one of best think tanks in the world¹. As an academic pathfinder, IMEMO focuses upon the emerging cutting-edge economic, political and security trends in the innovative, anticipatory format. Apart from insights in pivotal international trends, IMEMO develops its theoretical approach aimed to grasp the essence of global development and forecast its further evolution.

In the contemporary world, a timely exercise is the elaboration on a new research direction, namely studies of regionalism, both in theoretical and practical dimensions, within an active phase of globalization. Center for Asia-Pacific Studies (SAPS) as part of IMEMO gives insights in the Asia-Pacific region offering its own conceptualization of regional trends.

This has resulted in three monographs in which critical Asia-Pacific issues seen through the prism of this approach are scrutinized². At present, the fourth

¹ This statement is confirmed by high positions IMEMO holds in international rankings. See: TTCSP Global Go to Think Tank Index Reports. URL:// http://repository.upenn.edu/think_tanks/

² Формирование новой системы транстихоокеанской безопасности и сотрудничества. Научный доклад. Отв. ред.: В.В. Михеев, В.Г. Швыдко. М., ИМЭМО РАН, 2013 (The Establishment of a New System of Transpacific Security and Cooperation. Academic Report. / Ed. by V. Mikheev, V.Shvydko. – M.: IMEMO, 2013

monograph is being prepared³. Besides, this line of research has been tested during numerous conferences and round-table discussions in Russia and in beyond.

The System of the Trans-Pacific Security and Co-Development

CAPS top priority is an innovative conceptualization of a new architecture of Asia-Pacific security. Many factors account for the urgency of this task. The significance of Asia-Pacific for the global economy is rising while the regional issues are rapidly globalizing. Global actors are increasing their attention to Asia-Pacific while, as the South China Sea issue demonstrates, global regulatory mechanisms are unable to effectively respond to the regional security challenges. As a result, an imbalance between the Asia-Pacific development goal and the development mechanisms, mainly regulatory institutions and ideas, is widening.

While elaborating on the System of the Trans-Pacific Security and Co-Development, CAPS premises it upon the idea of hierarchical polycentrism. Practice has convincingly demonstrated that principle of sovereign equality runs counter to the reality, therefore undermining the efficiency of multilateral cooperation.

The System of the Trans-Pacific Security and Co-Development *aims to* establish a regional milieu conducive to keeping regional issues manageable rather than to completely eliminate them. Stating the critical importance of sustainable development, the task not to allow security challenges to destabilize regional cooperation and internal development in the Asia-Pacific countries can be effectively resolved by moving to hierarchical polycentrism.

(in Russian); Дисбалансы транстихоокеанского пространства / по ред. В.В.Михеева, В.Г.Швыдко. – М.: Магистр, 2014 (Asia-Pacific Imbalances /Ed. By V.Mikheev, V.Shvydko. – М.: Magistr, 2014 (in Russian)); Транстихоокеанская безопасность: иерархия силы и ответственности / Отв. ред. В.В.Михеев, В.Г.Швыдко. – М.: ИМЭМО РАН, 2016 (Transpacific Security: the Hierarchy of Power and Responsibility / Mikheev V., Shvydko V., eds. – М.: ИМЭМО, 2016 (in Russian)).

³ Прогнозирование стратегий на транстихоокеанском пространстве (рабочее название). (Prognosis of Strategies in the Transpacific Area (subject to change (in Russian)).

The *research tasks* of the project are as follows:

- To elaborate upon a new theoretical framework and conceptualize its categories – non-destabilizing inequality, imbalances, polycentric smart power etc.;
- To define the hierarchy of regional countries in terms of their power and responsibility;
- To outline the hierarchy of imbalances, as well as contradictions and conflicts which these imbalances generate;
- To offer the hierarchy of ideas about the future architecture of the Trans-Pacific Security and Co-Development in terms of their survivability, attractiveness and practical implementation.

SAPS premises its research upon several initial assumptions. Economic and political imbalances are the natural state of affairs, and imbalances are a logical consequence of the unsynchronized regional development. Regional countries are different in terms of their size, economic and military potential, political influence etc. As a result, the concept of hierarchical polycentrism and non-destabilizing inequality (as opposing to the idea of multipolarity and equality) should become the conceptual framework of an effective Asia-Pacific security system. Lastly but importantly, responsible behavior of regional actors can prevent imbalances from destabilizing.

The strategic necessity to move to an upgraded system of Asia-Pacific security is obvious: the existing forms of cooperation lag behind the evolution of regional security challenges and cannot catch their present essence. This undermines both the economic development of Asia-Pacific and the global cooperative paradigm.

The tactical necessity stems from the following reasons:

- “The Trump factor”. An upcoming strategic reshuffles in the Asia-Pacific region are more than obvious;
- Russia’s factor. So far, Russia’s pivot to Asia has been a bilateral pivot to China. An urgent task is to explore how Russia can use its potential for the common – pan-Asia-Pacific – good;
- China’s factor. Under the present trends, a timely exercise is to give insights in what China's project One Belt, One Road (OBOR) will mean for Asia-Pacific security;
- New trends in Japanese foreign policy. The question of whether the Asia-Pacific region see a more assertive Japan is more than timely;
- India, Republic of Korea, ASEAN take more proactive approaches to on regional problems. This also should be conceptualized in terms of likely repercussions for Asia-Pacific security.

While at present in the Asia-Pacific region multilateral dialogue platforms are in overabundance, they lack *self-reproducing* (emphasis added) mechanisms to achieve desired results. If so, new approaches aimed to re-organize the existing cooperative frameworks are needed.

The research is timely not only because of its urgency. No less important factor is that the establishment of this system is now possible. In relationship between the Asia-Pacific countries the ideological factor is missing. Russian-American relationship in Asia-Pacific is not an obstacle to economic cooperation. While Asia-Pacific is relatively isolated from the global instability, this can change owing to the ISIS factor, the upcoming China-US confrontation and others, a reality perfectly understood by all regional countries⁴.

The specific point upon which CAPS places the emphasis is imbalances as a political phenomenon that has not been conceptualized so far.

⁴ This point was repeatedly made during two seminars organized by IMEMO and IISS in March 2014 and November 2015

Asia-Pacific Imbalances

In the broad sense, imbalances stand for lack of congruence between the necessity to maintain a high level of economic dynamism as the fundamental precondition for security and sustainable development, a perception shared by all Asia-Pacific actors, and the resources available to them.

Taking into account the Asia-Pacific specificity, in the conceptual dimension imbalances can be outlined as follows.

The functional dimension:

- Lack of congruence between the evolution of the problems and the development of mechanisms to keep them manageable. This is exemplified by North Korean nuclear issue and low effectiveness of multilateral efforts aimed to resolve it;
- Lack of harmony between the instruments of these mechanisms. This is seen by the degree of progress in tackling non-traditional security challenges in the South China Sea and a more “narrow” format – Four-Party patrols of the Malacca Straits;
- The emotional dissonance between the values and motivations of regional actors. Political contradictions, fueled by the emotional factor, prevent Northeast Asian countries from strengthening and institutionalizing economic ties (in spite of rising necessity). This undermines prospects for region-wide economic projects like Free Trade Area in Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

“The influence” dimension:

In this realm, the imbalances can be characterized as non-destabilizing, potentially destabilizing or destabilizing (critical). Without giving insights into non-destabilizing and potentially destabilizing imbalances (as they are non-threatening), the critical state of imbalances has three main features.

- The system cannot be kept in manageable bounds. Again, this is exemplified by the results of negotiations focusing upon North Korean nuclear issue;
- Prerequisites for a large-scale escalation of instability strengthen. Here, North Korean missile and nuclear tests matter;
- A multiplying effect (negative) is in place. Territorial disputes in Northeast Asia are exacerbated by the historic memory of these states.

The key Asia-Pacific imbalances are numerous. While exemplifying them, a note that their conceptualization is work in progress should be made.

- An imbalance between the block approach to maintaining Asia-Pacific security and the rising trend to globalization in regional affairs;
- An imbalance between the visions and values of various Asia-Pacific countries upon the international and domestic issues. As a result, the US wants to maintain the ideological homogeneity in the Asia-Pacific region while China and Russia consider this an interference in their internal affairs (by means of the cultural and ideological expansion). This imbalance accounts for lack of congruence in understanding what the term “democracy” stands for (democracy *within* or *between* states);
- An imbalance between the economic development and the tempo of institution-building. As a result, many de-facto existing economic practices are not yet institutionalized;
- An imbalance between the rising energy consumption demands and possibilities to satisfy them without ecological damage;
- An imbalance between the extents of internationalization of various economies. This generates differing preferences in the expansion of economic institutions and their functions.

Imbalances should be analytically distinguished from contradictions. The latter can be exemplified by a contradiction between the processes of economic

globalization, including in the sphere of finance, and the priorities of national financial systems, a contradiction between the priorities of the multinationals that establish their supply-production chains and the interests of sovereign states etc.

Apart from conceptualizing imbalances, CAPS elaborates upon safety mechanisms that prevent imbalances from becoming potentially destabilizing or critical. These mechanisms are both inherent to the problems and created (often intuitively) by regional actors.

The system of Trans-Pacific Security and Co-Development should be established by synchronizing the economic integration and the security cooperation. The measures to strengthen regional security should take into account the elements of economic and institutional integration in the Asia-Pacific and vice versa.

In the current circumstances, any attempts to build a uniform security system based upon rules equal to all states and institutions, as well as consensus decisions, are doomed to fail. This will result in the functional paralysis of institutions. ASEAN-led multilateral dialogue venues have demonstrated it more than convincingly.

The only realistic option is the polycentric hierarchy. This means the priority of agreed decisions between those regional actors that exert the strongest influence upon the regional security and sustainable development, at the same time providing small states with a reasonable accommodation of their interests.

The Smart Power Dimension

In the SAPS interpretation, smart power accounts for the promotion of ideas and conceptions in the expert and the political communities to make the elites consider and later on adopt relevant decisions. Ideally, these decisions should become part of official concepts.

The spectrum of smart power is narrower than that of soft power. The smart power instruments are research and social projects. At this juncture, the stage of the development of such projects is no less important than the stage of their implementation.

Smart power is not only a set of miscellaneous ideas but a new philosophical paradigm. In the present global politics, an actor is competitive not only if it accepts the best ideas, but also if it is able to effectively generate them. This allows this actor an expanded access to others' intellectual resources and, by implication, to combine international experience with the local specificity.

The main priority for the Asia-Pacific countries is to develop attractive ideas and concepts that allow making partners receptive to the expectations of the "idea-generating center". In practical terms, this means developing a competitive set of values, as well as an ideological support of foreign policy actions, based upon attractiveness rather than coercion or intimidation.

Part of CAPS approach is the study of Asia-Pacific processes through the prism of categories "power" and "responsibility". Several factors make this necessary.

In terms of power, its hierarchy can be defined relatively easily. It depends upon the overall economic, military, innovative etc. potential various countries possess. Within the "power" dimension, the smart power is prioritized.

At the same time, the category "responsibility" is growing in significance. Regional problems are becoming more and more complicated and cannot be left unattended. Taking into account rising significance of non-traditional security challenges – terrorism, climate change etc. – without responsibility any power, be it hard, soft or smart, is unlikely to be long-lasting. Lastly but importantly, China's plans to develop the project One Belt, One Road (OBOR) cannot materialize without addressing this subject. The reality substantiates this assessment: while some time ago, China tried to dissociate itself from issues related to its

responsibility while implementing OBOR, at present major shifts are on the way. Since 2014, at the political and expert level, China has been discussing the parameters of its present and future responsibility associated with OBOR. At the same time, the categories China appeals to – “Chinese wisdom, Chinese historical values” etc. – still look vague. As a result, China’s partners fear that as long as the project OBOR is developed, China’s economic influence might generate political predominance. As a result, the responsibility dimension of OBOR should be clarified.

The category “responsibility” is based upon two questions. The first is “responsibility to whom – to the world, the region, their country/countries etc.”, and the second accounts for “responsibility for what – for security, development, stability etc.” Ideally, “your place in the hierarchy of power defines your responsibility – not only for your policy, but mainly, for the development of your neighbors”. This opposes to the previous interpretation of responsibility as an area of predominance. The experience of the Cold War amply demonstrates that it is an intellectual deadlock.

The key idea beyond this line of thought asserts that it is necessary to formulate national interests and foreign policy strategies in both categories of power (“what I can do”) and the categories of responsibility (“what I should do and why”). Although in practice not much has been done yet, the ideas should be developed in advance. A concomitant but no less significant task is to promote and advertise these ideas in the global mass-media and the intellectual milieu.

Conclusions and Prospects

By means of strategic engineering along with the 2nd and the 1,5 tracks, CAPS aims to shape the expert and political thinking in Asia-Pacific in a cooperative manner. First, this means analyzing the ideas which are already adopted and discussed, like the project One Belt, One Road, the ASEAN

Community etc. Then, it is important to forecast their evolution outlining the degree of survivability, attractiveness etc. Lastly, the supertask is to outline new ideas which would stem from those already being developed.

This can result in the “doctrine chartering” in terms of where new ideas can appear and what contents they might have. Consequently, the polycentric smart power can become a reality.

As the ultimate goal, CAPS priorities the Russian dimension of its research. Imbalances in relations between Russia and its regional partners, Russia’s soft power, responsibility and other components associated with Russia’s policy in Asia-Pacific are of the uppermost significance.

Although at present the monopoly for the smart power, as well as for innovative ideas, belongs to the United States, Russia can offer a consolidating intellectual agenda shared and accepted by its partners. The above-discussed polycentric smart power will be developed with the participation of Russia as its important intellectual contributor.