

UDC 32**Ukrainian conflict and its impact on regional security in Northeast Asia****Evgenii V. Gamerman**

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Abstract

This article is devoted to a very important and pressing problem of today – military security in Northeast Asia, in the context of the Ukrainian conflict. Events in Ukraine certainly influenced the entire international agenda and security threats both on a global scale and at the regional level. The Northeast Asia region was no exception. The author analyzes, on the one hand, the features of this region, the features of the security structure that has developed in it. On the other hand, the author analyzes the consequences for the military security of the region that have developed recently (after 2022). This region is, in principle, explosive from a military security point of view. However, events in Ukraine have added uncertainty and turbulence and led to major changes in the security agenda.

For citation

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Keywords

Northeast Asia, military security, Ukrainian conflict, China, security architecture, North Korea.

Introduction

In the 1990-2000s, during the collapse of the bipolar system, the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the process of building a new World Order, the illusion began to arise that threats to military security began to fade into the background; that they remained a relic of the past, including number of the twentieth century, but not the twenty-first. Hence the emergence of a large number of theories that substantiate the greater relevance now of non-military threats (in particular, the theory of securitization).

However, as the further development of international relations, especially the second decade of the 21st century, has shown, threats to military security are still relevant and pressing. Moreover, it is still too early to write them off. This became especially noticeable after the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine in February 2022. Of course, there have been other conflicts since the end of the Cold War – the Bosnian conflict, the Gulf War, the Iraq War and others. However, none of them put humanity in a situation close to the beginning of a new world conflict, the resumption of harsh nuclear rhetoric.

Traditionally, the Northeast Asia region includes countries such as China and Taiwan, Japan, North Korea, the Republic of Korea and Mongolia. However, in our opinion, this list must be supplemented with regions of the Russian Far East, which geographically, strategically, and now politically, gravitate towards this region. Northeast Asia is a unique region in terms of world politics, economics, and national, regional and global security issues. The first feature is the small number of countries that are included in this subregion. The second is that Northeast Asia is home to two of the world's three largest economies (China and Japan) and, in addition, three of the four so-called "Asian tigers." The third feature is the complete absence of an institutional framework on regional security issues, and even some of their individual rudiments. Moreover, if earlier this was typical for the entire Asia-Pacific region, now, more than 30 years after the collapse of the bipolar system, only for Northeast Asia (the ARF for security functions successfully in Southeast Asia, the South Pacific is also actively institutionalized with the United States). The fourth feature is the presence in the region of one of the main troublemakers of the last decades and a threat to the military security of the region – North Korea. The fifth feature is the presence of a huge number of territorial disputes between the countries of the region. The sixth feature is the presence of persistent hostility of the countries and societies of the region towards Japan, caused by the particular cruelty of Japanese troops during the Second World War. Seventh – Northeast Asia countries are the largest consumer of energy resources and the main global polluter of the environment; the locomotive of nuclear energy development and the main source of innovation and new technologies.

This scientific work used structural-functional, systemic and hermeneutical approaches, the combination of which made it possible to comprehensively study security threats in their political dimension. Thus, the structural functionalism of T. Parsons made it possible to consider security not only as a goal, but also as a value category for the countries of the Northeast Asia region [Parsons, 1998, 8-24]. P. Ricoeur's hermeneutics made it possible to analyze the regional security system in Northeast Asia as a kind of consensus formed in the course of the struggle of state and non-state actors who differently understand and interpret security threats in a given region [Ricoeur, 2002, 36-39]. The study also used comparative and historical approaches, which made it possible to analyze the features of the formation of the "agenda" for regional security in Northeast Asia, as well as how national approaches to ensuring security in the region were transformed over time and how, in parallel, they themselves changed threats.

The ongoing instability and tensions in Ukraine could have spillover effects on security dynamics

in Northeast Asia. This could potentially occur through shifts in global power dynamics, re-evaluations of alliance relationships, or changes in the behavior of key actors in the region as they respond to the situation in Ukraine. Thus, according to the famous political scientist Robert Legvold, we are currently entering a phase when in the new bipolar world there will be two cold wars at once: between the USA and Russia and the USA and China.

The war in Ukraine also reduced the differences between the old and new Cold Wars. As the crisis deepens, Putin's loose but threatening talk about Russia's nuclear capabilities has revived fears from an earlier era. In addition, as repression in Russia intensifies, and Putin and his closest advisers preach with increasing passion what they claim are the alien, desiccated values that guide the United States and other Western societies, the cultural chasm separating East from West parallels the ideological one. Cold War animosities. The only remaining difference between the two Cold Wars is scale. The First Cold War left no part of the world untouched and no country free from the force field of US-Soviet rivalry. China, however, wants no part in the new US-Russian Cold War, and as their stance on the Russia-Ukraine War shows; India, Brazil and much of the Global South are keeping their distance. The Cold War between the United States and China, as during the original Cold War, will consume and change the entire international system – its institutions, alliance structures, economic flows, and conflict zones. The two countries have not yet reached this stage of confrontation. Their intensifying rivalry at this point bears no resemblance to either the original or the new US-Russian Cold War; but unless the trends are consciously redirected, this is where they will head [Legvold, 2022, [www](#)].

Northeast Asia is the only region in which all three countries actually border each other, are in direct contact (or indirectly through their allies) and it could become the next platform for a showdown. Thus, the conflict in Ukraine directly affects and will continue to affect the state of security in Northeast Asia.

"Security architecture" and traditional threats to military security in Northeast Asia

First, a few words about the security architecture of the region after World War II. The region has not developed any security and cooperation mechanisms. This is explained by the presence there of territorial disputes and intractable crisis and conflict situations (primarily the situation on the Korean Peninsula), dating back to the Second World War. This is also explained by the harsh confrontation during the Cold War between the USSR and the USA, which resulted first in the Korean War and then in the conflict in Vietnam.

The maintenance of relative balance and balance of power was ensured in the region through bilateral alliances and agreements. Between the USA and Japan, the USA and South Korea, the USA and Taiwan, the USSR and the DPRK, China and the DPRK. After the end of the Cold War, there were repeated attempts to change the situation, to create multilateral structures and security mechanisms in the region, from both China, Russia and the United States. However, this essentially ended in nothing.

Threats to military security in Northeast Asia (potential and real) have been inextricably linked over the past 25 years with North Korea, especially with the rise to power of its new leader, Kim Jong-un. The nuclear missile tests of the DPRK and the nuclear program of this country in general are of very serious concern, first, to its neighbors in the region – Japan and the Republic of Korea, as well as the entire international community. In addition, the nuclear status has actually become for Pyongyang a way of survival, nuclear blackmail, and receiving economic assistance in exchange for a temporary

refusal to test new missiles. At the same time, Pyongyang's unpredictable behavior, the presence of serious economic problems within the country, the reluctance to compromise on the part of the new US administration and the holding of numerous military exercises in Northeast Asia make the situation around North Korea explosive. There are no guarantees that the young leader of the DPRK, in a situation of lack of choice and the reluctance of world powers to negotiate with him, will not use nuclear weapons first, thereby provoking a severe regional, and possibly a world war.

The presence of territorial disputes between almost all states in the region: China with the Republic of Korea and Japan, China and Taiwan with Japan, Russia with Japan, the Republic of Korea with Japan and China, as well as in relation to the jurisdiction of Taiwan. Only North Korea and Mongolia remained aside from the actually identified territorial disagreements. However, North Korea, which considers the entire Korean peninsula as its own territory (as in the opposite direction from the Republic of Korea) is also, de facto, part of the existing disagreements. Perhaps the hottest and most dangerous issue from the point of view of threats to military security is the independence and jurisdiction of the island of Taiwan. In the context of a confrontational 2022, China can risk launching a military operation against independent Taipei, which will inevitably lead to a full-scale conflict, at least at the regional level.

The trend in recent years toward the militarization of the entire region also adds risks and threats to military security. The deployment of US missile defense systems in the Republic of Korea and Japan, in principle, violates the existing status quo and leads to a very serious distortion of the existing system of strategic stability [Ballistic Missile Defense, 2023, [www](#)]. China and Russia are rearming and qualitatively changing their armed forces in the regions located in the border areas. The Northeast Asia subregion holds the record for the number of military exercises.

The impact of the Ukrainian conflict on global and regional security in Northeast Asia

With the beginning of a new stage of confrontation between Russia and Western states, and even more so with the beginning of the Ukrainian conflict, the situation began to change significantly both in the sphere of global security and in its regional dimension in Northeast Asia.

The Ukrainian conflict, which began 10 years ago and moved into the active phase of hostilities in 2022, has very serious consequences for all regions of the globe and for the entire global agenda.

1) Aspects of military, traditional security has again come to the fore. Moreover, non-military threats have somewhat faded into the background.

Therefore, in many ways, it was the Ukrainian conflict that provoked the transition to the active phase of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan regarding Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore, in September 2023, another escalation began, a new round of war, during which Baku received control over the territory. However, there is still no peace treaty (although negotiations about it are underway), and so far it is difficult to consider the conflict to be completed [Markedonov, 2023, [www](#)].

In the second half of 2023, a new round of Israel-Palestinian conflict began. Hamas on October 7, 2023 began a military operation against Israel called "Storm al-Aksa." The country was subjected to massive missile shelling; the militants penetrated the border cities. Later they were knocked out of there. Israel went into a state of war and began the operation "Iron Swords" in the gas sector. Air strikes are applied to the region. On October 27, Israel announced the "expansion" of the scale of actions; its military entered the north of the Gaza sector. In early December, they began the operation in the south.

This stage of the conflict was marked by special cruelty, including to the civilian population on both sides [RBK, 2023, www]. In addition, feeling support from Moscow, resumed aggressive rhetoric and the leader of North Korea, who already threatens to begin the process of occupation of the Republic of Korea in an inspired.

2) The entire existing system of international law and security architecture is threatened. We stand on the verge of chaos and anarchy in international relations.

Therefore, the conflict in Ukraine again showed the inefficiency of the UN and other international organizations and mechanisms, in the issue of ensuring military security, and preventing endings. In addition, an agreement on ordinary armed forces in Europe actually sunk into oblivion and again, troops began to focus on the borders between Russia and NATO countries [Nikitin, 2023, www]. In fact, the nuclear deterrence system ceases to exist. The only remaining part of the patchwork control regime for nuclear weapons created over the previous fifty years is a new agreement to reduce strategic offensive weapons, which is also at risk.

3) The arms race begins again, which in modern conditions of globalization can have the most unpredictable consequences

This item is inextricably linked with the previous one. The actual disappearance of international, interstate agreements and agreements on holding up the arms race, removed all barriers. In addition, Russia is in the process of not only a qualitative improvement of weapons and equipment, but also turned to the quantitative growth of both the armed forces and weapons and equipment. There is a modernization of the country's armed forces in all military districts.

China also is in the process of unprecedented growth of the PLA, reequipment of weapons, construction and commissioning of aircraft carriers and fighters of a new generation. Beijing is arming itself like never before. Quantitative and qualitative changes are taking place in the field of weapons and equipment in China, which cannot but worry neighboring states in the region.

Japan has adopted a new, revolutionary to make a national security strategy. In accordance with the new document, Japan will double the military expenses. It is clarified that over the next five years, the defense budget will increase by about \$ 315 billion. In addition, Tokyo is conceived on the concept of applying counterattacks on enemy territory. In accordance with the adopted documents, Japan will spend about 5 trillion yen on the creation and acquisition of long -range missiles, which should be deployed in 2026. For this, for this, Mitsubishi for this Heavy Industry will finalize and launch the Japanese anti-shipbreaking Type-12 ground-ship-based anti-ship missiles, bringing their range to 1000 km, and the Ministry of Defense will purchase American Tomahawk missiles and a long-range air-air missiles. At the same time, the plans and filling of arsenals have been announced by other types of modern weapons, including hypersonic weapons and unmanned vehicles, as well as the creation of the sixth generation F-X, which should be commissioned in 2025, together with England and Italy [Gamza, 2022, www].

4) Increasing levels of conflict in various regions of the globe (the most recent examples are Nagorno-Karabakh and the Gaza Strip)

5) Increased risks of man-made, environmental and humanitarian disasters.

Therefore, during the conflict in Ukraine, the question arose very acutely about the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant - the largest nuclear power plant in Europe and one of the 10 largest in the world.

Magate repeatedly called for demilitarizing the territory of this station, but this was not done. Russian troops use the territory of nuclear power plants as a military base and firing at the position of the Ukrainian military with it. To protect themselves from return fire, the Russian military placed heavy

weapons and ammunition in the immediate vicinity of the buildings of the reactors and the storage of the worked out nuclear fuel. In addition, the territory around the station is mined. All this creates situations of the potential danger of nuclear infection, which will lead to a humanitarian and environmental disaster not only in Ukraine, but also in most of Central Europe and in the western regions of Russia [Novosti OON, 2023, [www](#)].

6) The beginning of a new stage of the Cold War or Cold War 2.0, which could lead to a new world conflict.

Many political scientists are inclined to call the events that are currently taking place with a new Cold War, or Cold War 2.0. Thus, the already mentioned Robert LeVold believes that in the new world there will be two cold wars at once - between Russia and the USA, and between the USA and China. The famous political scientist Stuart Ford also published work on a new Cold War in 2023, stripping it with the previous confrontation [Ford, 2023, 423-477].

In fact, Russia has opened a "Pandora's box" that greatly influences the entire global security agenda; it will face even more chaos, unpredictability and instability. If we turn directly to the North-East Asia region, then the consequences for the sphere of military security are also very noticeable here. In addition, which become extremely dangerous for the situation in the region.

An active process of rapprochement between Russia and North Korea has begun. The North Korean leader became the only head of state who not only supported Moscow's actions, but also recognized the new territories that became part of Russia as Russian. This situation opens up a whole window of opportunity for Pyongyang. Overcoming the negative consequences of international sanctions, receiving economic assistance, as well as financing further nuclear missile development and testing. In recent years, there has been progress in resolving the Korean nuclear program and minimizing the threats posed by this country. Now all these efforts will be nullified with the help of Russia and China.

There has been a tendency to transform bilateral alliances in the region into trilateral ones. On the one hand, the process of forming the Moscow-Beijing-Pyongyang alliance has begun. On the other hand, the United States will strive to create a triple alliance Washington – Tokyo – Seoul, with the unification of two Missile Defense systems located in these countries [THAAD, 2020, [www](#)].

China's military rhetoric regarding the island of Taiwan has intensified. It is unlikely that Beijing will decide to begin military operations in this direction, but an increase in the level of tension and conflict potential is taking place. This leads to sub-regional military build-up, constant military exercises, etc. China has stepped up efforts to re-equip its army and navy, as well as to create a network of its military bases outside China's borders.

In 2022, Japan dramatically changed its military doctrine. Tokyo has openly proclaimed a course towards creating an offensive capability that would make it possible to strike the territory of China and the DPRK. To create a threat to its neighbors, Tokyo intends first of all to purchase Tomahawk cruise missiles from the United States as quickly as possible. At the same time, Japan will modernize its own ballistic missiles, increasing their range to more than a thousand kilometers. In the 2030s, Tokyo intends to equip its troops with its own hypersonic weapons. This is a very important event for the region. Japan, which had remained pacifist for almost 80 years, began to arm itself again. At the same time, the region still remembers very well the atrocities that Japan carried out during the war, and this event is perceived with caution.

Northeast Asia is a region with a very high potential for military security threats. In the presence of territorial disputes, disputes and discussions about modern international relations, in the context of the conflict between Russia and Western countries, the trade war between the United States and China,

the threat of military conflicts has never been higher. It is necessary to continue efforts to create multilateral security institutions and reduce tension in the region.

Conclusion

The trend in recent years toward the militarization of the entire region also adds risks and threats to military security. The deployment of US missile defense systems in the Republic of Korea and Japan, in principle, violates the existing status quo and leads to a very serious distortion of the existing system of strategic stability. China and Russia are rearming and qualitatively changing their armed forces in the regions located in the border areas. In addition, it looks quite likely that China and the Far Eastern regions of Russia will deploy their own national missile defense systems, aimed both against potential adversaries from overseas and, perhaps in the near future, against each other.

In addition, the Northeast Asia subregion holds the record for the number of military exercises and the involvement of countries in the region. They run practically non-stop all year round, and all countries participate in them (with the exception of Mongolia and Taiwan). All of the above suggests that the level of threats to military security is very high, and they are not even potential, but real.

Northeast Asia is one of the most complex and explosive parts of the world, capable of instantly plunging most world powers into regional or global conflict. This predetermines the need for increased attention to the problems and threats to the military security of NVA. Since the end of the Cold War, military threats have not disappeared. They just transformed and became less accentuated. However, at the same time, they are less predictable and almost uncontrollable. Adds to the state of uncertainty and the lack of the necessary (proper) institutional environment, which exists in other regions of world politics. Recently, the "security architecture" has been changing. Judging by the current trend, bilateral alliances will be replaced by trilateral alliances in the region, and with an openly military orientation.

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Украинский конфликт и его влияние на региональную безопасность в Северо-Восточной Азии

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена очень важной и актуальной на сегодняшний день проблеме – военной безопасности в Северо-Восточной Азии, в контексте украинского конфликта. События на Украине, безусловно, повлияли на всю международную повестку дня и угрозы безопасности как в глобальном масштабе, так и на региональном уровне. Не стал исключением и регион Северо-Восточной Азии. Автор анализирует, с одной стороны, особенности этого региона, особенности структуры безопасности, которая в нем сложилась. С другой стороны, автор анализирует последствия для военной безопасности региона, которые сложились в последнее время (после 2022 года). Этот регион в принципе взрывоопасный с точки зрения военной безопасности. Однако события на Украине добавили неопределенности и турбулентности и привели к серьезным изменениям в повестке дня безопасности.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Северо-Восточная Азия, военная безопасность, украинский конфликт, Китай, архитектура безопасности, Северная Корея.

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