

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

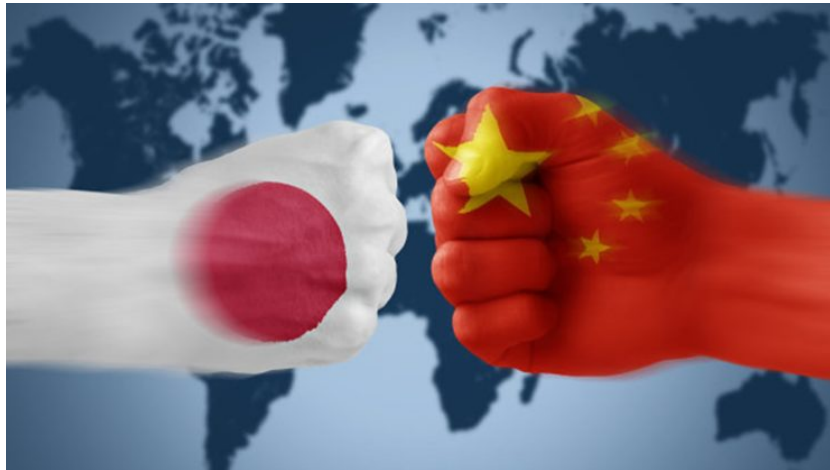
European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

Author: [Vladimir Terehov](#)

02.08.2024

China and Japan are becoming more active in the Pacific Ocean



A number of recent events have indicated the increased diplomatic activity of China and Japan, two leading Asian powers, with island countries located in the Pacific Ocean.

The role of Pacific countries in global political processes

From the standpoint of Euro-centric historiography, the ‘place’ of these countries turned out to be quite significant already during the ‘discovery’ of the island archipelagos of the Pacific Ocean, to which the centuries-old Franco-British geopolitical confrontation was immediately transferred. As new ‘poles’ emerged (Russian Empire, the United States, Japan), they also joined the struggle. The islands of the Pacific Ocean (with the ‘aborigines’ inhabiting them) also were not left unaffected by world wars, which these ‘poles’ unleashed twice in the last century. This is especially true for the Second World War.

As for the struggle for influence unfolding over the already independent states of the central and southern parts of the Pacific Ocean, which has been going on for the past few years, it may well be considered one of the notable signs of yet another period of deterioration of the global situation as a whole. Although the confrontation between the current ‘poles’ is still mainly taking place in the political and economic spheres, the [mutual saber-rattling](#) is becoming louder and louder.

In this regard, the frequent associations of the current global situation with the early-mid 30s of the last century are not without reason. In particular, attempts to block the expanding influence of a new global player, i.e. China, on the island states of the Pacific Ocean, are clear. They are initiated by Beijing’s main geopolitical opponent – Washington – and take the form of forming various configurations of an obviously anti-Chinese nature. For example, the creation of Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP) in early 2023 is aimed against the PRC. It is a platform with the stated goals of ‘ensuring economic and diplomatic ties with the island nations of the Pacific Ocean’. Four ‘Anglo-Saxon’ countries (USA, Australia, UK, New Zealand) and Japan became its participants.

It is exactly the latter that the current leader of the ‘Anglo-Saxon world’ is trying to put at the forefront of the attack against the PRC in the Indo-Pacific region in general and in the waters of the Pacific Ocean in particular. What was the real reason for the concerns on the part of this ‘leader’?

China and the Pacific states

Answering the above question briefly and in the most general way, we can say: as in other regions of the world, China is bringing its global Belt and Road Initiative project. Which, in turn, is the practical embodiment of the general philosophical concept of the current Chinese leadership regarding the need to create conditions in the world for building the ‘Community of Common Destiny’. The BRI format solves key interrelated problems of participating countries, such as poverty and illiteracy of the population, devastating epidemics, underdevelopment of infrastructure and general economic backwardness.

Several branches of BRI are being implemented in various Indo-Pacific countries, including those located in the Pacific Ocean – though not without costs. As of December 2023, there were around ten such countries on the [list of BRI member countries](#) (including, by the way, New Zealand). This is more than half of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) configuration, initiated in 1971 by Washington to ensure control over the important subregion. The solution of this problem became particularly relevant in the context of the escalating cold war. Note, however, the extreme diffused nature of the mentioned configuration, in which Australia is

entrusted with the role of ‘policeman/controller’. Canberra’s special position in PIF was fixed in 2000 by a special document.

The symbol of the rapid spread of China’s influence in this subregion, which began in the second half of the last decade, was the [tour](#) of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in May-June, 2022, to 8 PIF member countries that are also involved in the BRI project. Beijing’s global-regional opponents described this tour as an [‘ambitious blitz’](#).

Although it was, in fact, an act of probing the situation in the subregion, which is gaining increasing and multidimensional importance for the PRC. Such probing is carried out more or less constantly, including in the process of exchanging visits at the highest level. Of the latest visits, we will mention the successive visits to the People’s Republic of China by colleagues from the Republic of Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands at the invitation of Prime Minister Li Qiang in mid-July this year.

Note that both of these countries (but not only) in recent years have been portrayed by anti-Chinese propaganda as those members of the PIF, where the notorious “Chinese military bases” have almost already been built.

No traces of even one ‘Chinese base’ have been found anywhere in the Pacific Ocean, although such projects are almost certainly being studied at the Chinese military headquarters. But this is the usual peacetime work of any military headquarters, which should always be ready to give a quick and reasonable response to urgent requests from the country’s political leadership.

The point, of course, is not in the ‘bases’, but in the fact that Beijing has encroached on ‘the holiest of the holy’, i.e. on the overwhelming predominance of the ‘Anglo-Saxon world’ in influencing events in the Pacific Ocean. France decided to play along with this time, taking advantage of the fact that it controls three island archipelagos in these waters. New Caledonia has recently become particularly famous.

Japanese moves in the Pacific Ocean

Once again, Washington is putting forward a key regional ally – Japan – for the role of the main US ally in the Indo-Pacific region in general and in the Pacific Ocean in particular. In this regard, both the tour of Wang Yi and then-Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, which took place a month after the aforementioned tour, and her [joint event](#) in memory of one of the fiercest battles of the Pacific War period, held together with the Deputy Minister of Defense of Japan in the Solomon Islands, became symbolic.

This event may be considered the beginning of heightened Japanese attention towards the affairs of island states of the Pacific.

The main tool in this process (for the PRC as well) is conditional upon the fact that Japan has long been one of the leading economies in the world almost by all quantitative and qualitative indicators. It is certainly interesting for the countries of the 'Global South' as a partner in the development of bilateral relations.

An important role in this process is played by the special government programme Official Development Assistance (ODA), launched in 1954 to provide various kinds of assistance to the countries of the 'Global South'. By the way, China was once among the almost 190 recipient countries of this aid (totalling about \$400 billion). Japan's general role in the economic development of China in the 60-70s was significant.

In the aforementioned set of tools, the process of increasing Tokyo's role in the international arena, a component generally characterised by 'defence', has been increasingly clearly identified as one of the aforementioned tools.

A valid reason confirming the increasing importance of this component in Japan's foreign policy was the 75th anniversary of the formation of the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) on July 1, 1954. This euphemism still refers to the country's quite modern armed forces. In the annually updated Defence White Paper released on this date, Japan's main interests (and, consequently, the concerns of the SDF) are designated as being in the 'western part of the Pacific Ocean', stretching from the eastern coast of the Asian continent to the so-called 'Second Island Chain'. This latter runs from North to South in the middle of almost the entire Pacific. Consequently, most of the island states located here fall into the zone of those Japanese interests/concerns.

This should be taken into account in relation to the tenth Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) format, which was held in Tokyo on July 16-18 with the participation of the Prime Minister of Japan, on the one hand, and representatives of 16 PIF member countries at various levels (including ministers from Australia and New Zealand), on the other hand. This time, four of them were represented at the highest level, including the Republic of Vanuatu, whose Prime Minister had visited Beijing only days earlier.

As a result of PALM-10, a Declaration was adopted, the essence of which can be summarized as follows: 'for all the good and against all the bad'. In the [comments](#) from Yomiuri Shimbun on this matter, special attention is paid to the proclaimed 'balancing' by colleagues in the negotiations with Japanese Prime Minister F. Kishida. A few days before this event, it was [reported](#) that the Japanese Navy command intended to increase the intensity of visits by warships to ports in some Pacific countries.

The very fact that another PALM forum took place, and especially the behaviour of Japan at this event, **resulted** in the expected reaction from China. In turn, this reaction clearly shows – to put it mildly – the difficulties in relations between the two leading Asian powers in general and in the Pacific Ocean in particular.

01.08.2024

Vladimir TEREKHOV, expert on the problems of the Asia-Pacific region, especially for the online magazine “[New Eastern Outlook](#)”