THE GEOPOLITICAL GAME FOR DOMINATION IN THE INDO-PACIFIC IN THE THIRD DECADE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

ABSTRACT

The adopted aim of the publication is to present the role of the Indo-Pacific reservoir in the politics of global and regional players. It was assumed that this reservoir is the central area of this rivalry, encompassing the economic, political and military spheres in the form of building the ability to present power (the ability to operate in the sea). Proved that the area known as the Indo-Pacific, due to its transport importance, plays a fundamental role in the global rivalry of powers. It is the site of Chinese - American rivalry, but Russia and the regional powers also participate in it. The axis of the dispute is competition for regional economic influence and control of the basin, especially its shipping routes. Also proved to China’s maritime activity is gradually shifting to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea, which is considered a security threat by regional powers, especially India, Australia, Indonesia and Japan. They are striving, also due to the scope of economic cooperation with China, to lead to independent maritime activity in the region, which is complemented by cooperation with the United States.

Key words:
Indo-Pacific, Indo-Pacific region, maritime policy, maritime strategy, sea player

INTRODUCTION

The adopted aim of the publication is to present the role of the Indo-Pacific reservoir in the politics of global and regional players. It was assumed, that this reservoir is the central area of this rivalry, encompassing the economic, political and military spheres in the form of building the ability to present power (the ability to operate in the sea). Recognizing the Indo-Pacific as currently the most strategically important reservoir in the world, in article presents the evolution of the policy of maritime powers in relations to this region.
and discusses the manner of conducting maritime activity of regional maritime powers. India, Indonesia, and Australia were considered as such.

Proved that the area known as the Indo-Pacific, due to its transport importance, plays a fundamental role in the global rivalry of powers. It is the site of Chinese - American rivalry, but Russia and the regional powers also participate in it. The axis of the dispute is competition for regional economic influence and control of the basin, especially its shipping routes. The priority of American maritime activity is the control of the basin, focused on limiting Chinese economic expansion combined with the expansion and deployment of military potential in the region. Some activities are carried out in partnership with allies (Australia, Japan, New Zealand) and countries defined as partners (Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia).

Also proved to China’s maritime activity is gradually shifting to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea, where it successfully attempts to build a military capacity to control shipping, which is considered a security threat by regional powers, especially India, Australia, Indonesia, and Japan. They are striving, also due to the scope of economic cooperation with China, to lead to independent maritime activity in the region, which is complemented by cooperation with the United States.

The conducted analyses were based on a variety of research material. The strategic documents of states and supranational organizations relating to their maritime activity played a fundamental role. These were the assumptions of their maritime policies, security strategies, or defining the processes of development of maritime forces and maritime industries. The theses contained in various expert opinions and scientific studies of experts dealing with the issue of the use of sea basins and the analysis of the strategical situations in selected regions played an important role in the development of conclusions and inferences. It was supplemented by information and press materials, as well as quantitative and statistical data. However, in relation to the presentation of theoretical assumptions, the achievements of geopolitical thought and theorists of marine strategy were used.

Due to the adopted assumptions, in the process of preparing this study, the realistic paradigm was adopted as the basic research paradigm, which allows for the description and interpretation of the policy pursued by maritime players. Being aware that it does not, however, take into account geographical space as an important determinant determining the manner of conducting politics and the place where the political player’s own interests are located, it was considered justified to simultaneously take into account the geopolitical paradigm understood as an analysis of the situation in a given space and an assessment of the political consequences of geographical location in the present and future. The constructive paradigm in the form of the possibility of building scenarios for the development of the situation was also taken into account.
GEOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INDO-PACIFIC

The area known as the Indo-Pacific plays an essential role in the global rivalry of powers. Its range covers the western and central part of the Indian Ocean and the central part of the Pacific. Over the years, it was the term used to describe a body of water in which there was a great similarity in the distribution of marine fauna and flora and used mainly in biological sciences. Since 2011, it has also been used in political science analyses and in the description of geopolitical processes. It is also not a clearly separated area and there are different versions of the boarders of this territory. Asian regional powers (Indian strategists were the first to use this concept in 2007 to describe the political and economic situation), and behind them, and most international players recognize that this area covers the entire Indian Ocean from the east coast to Africa and the Central and South Pacific to the coast of both Americas. The subject of the discussion is whether it is an integral economic and political area (the position of Japan, Australia, India, EU, France, and Germany) or only a region of broad economic cooperation (ASEAN countries and China). On the other hand, the United States equates the Indo-Pacific area with the waters of both oceans, but in its security policy it focuses on the area closer to the former concept of the Asia-Pacific region, i.e. drawn from the west coast of India to the south near the Diego Garcia island and including the body of water under the Command of the Indo-Pacific.

The importance of this area results from the contemporary economic potential of the countries in the region and the role of maritime transport systems leading to the nine largest ports in the world. This region produces 37% of the world GDP, and the interconnectedness of the leading economies determines the level of the global economic situation and the economic situation of individual countries. For example, for the USA, China, Japan, and South Korea are the second, fourth, and sixth trading partners. The situation in the region is strongly influenced by the military potential, as it is home to seven out of ten military powers in the world, including five states that have nuclear weapons. Formally, both the states of the region and those locating their interests in this body of water are in favour of the peaceful use of this body of water. They also accept the principle that maritime activities should be carried out on the basis of the UNCLOS convention, and thus coastal states should exercise their sovereign rights in a way that does not infringe the freedom of navigation and the exploitation of the high seas. This position is emphasized in particular by Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, and the United States. This power, noticing the fact that as a consequence of economic processes and the increasing role of transport routes, the Indo-Pacific reservoir is becoming the main transport route for Eurasian trade exchange, recognized it as a reservoir of political and economic im-
ificance comparable to the transatlantic routes. It was also recognized that the domination of both waters not only reduces China’s chance to engage in effective political and economic rivalry with the US, but is also a significant measure of influencing Chinese economic processes (the role of mine raw materials supplies and the impact of exports on Chinese GDP). On the other hand, the domination of this reservoir by China makes it possible to pursue a policy of economic ties not only of Southeast Asia, but also of the entire African continent, and to gain significant economic and political influence in Europe. It also makes it possible – limited, but real – to vassal the regional powers of the region, especially India, South Korea, and Japan. These conclusions and the resulting recognition by the Chinese authorities of the control of shipping in this area as an important element of the economic security of the state to the greatest extent determine the geopolitical importance of the sea and constitute the source of the political and economic rivalry taking place there.

The Indo-Pacific region and the basin referred to as this is a place of China-American rivalry, but Russia and the regional powers also participate in it. These are mainly India and Australia, but some activities also involve Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and European players (France, Great Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany, and – to an extent limited mainly to economic issues and shipping safety – the European Union). The main axis of the dispute is the form of competition for regional economic influence and control of the basin, especially its shipping routes. Due to the subject matter of the study, the issue of economic rivalry, which affects the geopolitical role of the reservoir, will be outlined, but will not be an important subject of analysis. These will be focused on the concept of using sea basins. Its strategic importance also results from the ability to control intercontinental trade and China’s economic expansion. An important role in the concept of controlling this exchange is played by the nodal points of the maritime communication system located in this area. The role of Eurasian shipping routes and the Straits of Hormuz, Malacca and Singapore, as well as Bab al-Mandab are widely emphasized, however, routes leading from Australia to China, Japan, South Korea, and India play an equally important role in the regional transport system. They can be inspected in the Indonesian Sunda, Makassar, and Lombok straits.

These routes are the main transport routes for China, Japan, and South Korea, limiting the possibility of shipping is a serious threat to the economic security of these countries (they import from 70 to 90% of energy carriers by sea). They run through waters that are the subject of territorial disputes and covered by sea piracy, which is important because in some societies of Asian countries, piracy is not considered strictly criminal. These conditions have led to the recognition of maritime activity aimed at controlling shipping and combating piracy as a natural and lawful form of influencing the policy of countries.
dependent on the continuity of supplies by sea (US policy) and recognition by importers of raw materials (mainly China, but also Vietnam) that this poses a serious threat to their economic security. As a consequence, regional players undertake maritime activity aimed at applying the policy of the presence of maritime forces in selected waters, combating piracy and carrying out activities in waters under the jurisdiction of other countries.

THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN ACTIVITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC NAVIGATION

The American actions in the Indo-Pacific waters are formally focused on combating the phenomenon of maritime piracy and all attempts at unlawful seizure of sea basins. Initially, they were conducted in the waters around Indonesia and Malaysia, and then in the Gulf of Aden. China’s policy of economic expansion, coupled with the expansion of the shipping control system across this area, redefined American policy. The first phase (2005-2010) focused on preventing the increased activity of Chinese naval forces in the Indian Ocean. To achieve this goal, mainly political instruments were used in the form of preventing the construction of permanent bases on the territories of the countries of the region. This led to a revision of Chinese policy and the temporary abandonment (postponement) of the concept of competition with the US for control of this ocean. Pirate actions became the pretext for China’s military engagement again, the dynamics of which increased over 2012 and 2015 enough to force a reaction of state-owned sea users. The Chinese, and in practice Chinese-Russian, involvement in combating this phenomenon were concentrated in the Gulf of Aden, but the formula of the activities carried out created a real possibility of gaining the ability to permanently maintain the presence of these countries’ navies in the Indian Ocean. As a result, the then-president Barack Obama modified the policy of engaging in Asia (Trans-Pacific Partnership – TPP) implemented during both terms of office from classic economic and political cooperation to political and economic influence, with an unequivocal definition of American interests and their discrepancy with those of China. The non-ratification of this agreement by D. Trump turned out to be – in the political dimension – a serious mistake, as it allowed China to propose an agreement on economic cooperation (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership). It was directed to 16 countries of the region, including 10 ASEAN countries, as well as Australia, India, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand. The agreement was signed on November 15, 2020, and only India resigned from membership. The third factor that caused the American policy to change in the Indo-Pacific basin was the Chinese-Russian economic expansion and the expansion of the homing system, carried out under the pretext of implementing the sea thread project of
the One Belt One Road project. The new policy launched in 2017 referred to
this region literally, as evidenced by both the provisions of the US security and
defense strategy and decisions regarding the transformation of the US armed
forces. In the strategic documents, the “Asia-Pacific” area was replaced with the
concept of Indo-Pacific (National Security Strategy p. 11), it was also indicated
that the strategic goals in this region had changed. The priority was to counter-
act China’s economic and political expansion along with the expansion and de-
ployment of military potential in the region. Some of the activities were to be
carried out in partnership with allies (Australia, Japan, New Zealand) and coun-
tries referred to as partners (Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malesia). Particu-
lar importance was attached to cooperation with countries considered strategic
allies, which was reflected, among others, in the return, in 2017, after a ten-year
break, to consultations on regional security in the so-called Quad Format (USA,
Japan, India, and Australia), and then by concluding an Indo-Pacific military
alliance with Australia and Great Britain (AUKUS agreement was signed on Sep-
tember 15, 2021 and formally it is a contract for the construction of nuclear
powered submarines for Australia). The scope of cooperation between the USA-
Australia-Great Britain triangle will be determined by the end of 2022, but it
should be assumed that it will be focused on controlling shipping and counter-
acting penetration – especially – of the South Indo-Pacific by the Chinese fleet.
On the other hand, activities in the Quad format include two forms of coopera-
tion – economic and military. The first part assumes the development of eco-
nomic relations with the countries of the region in a way that eliminates the
possibility of their economic and political binding by China. An important ele-
ment of these activities is the increase in mutual trade, which indirectly forced
the involvement in activities for the safety of navigation and the freedom of
navigation. As a consequence, these countries, with the support of US maritime
forces (and Australia and New Zealand), take measures to combat the phenom-
emon of maritime piracy and respond to natural disasters, which limits the legi-
timacy of the presence of extra-regional maritime forces in these waters. The
military dimension consists of classic actions in the form of the presentation of
force (military deterrence) focused on developing the potential of anti-missile
defense systems deployed in Japan and South Korea, and building an anti-
Chinese agreement on a political and military dimension. India (the main part-
ner in the region) and the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singa-
pore were offered to participate in this specific regional system. It should be
emphasized, however, that the offer addressed to these countries mainly relat-
ed to ensuring the safety of shipping (control of shipping routes and combating
maritime piracy), as well as combating terrorism and conducting intelligence
activities (National Security Strategy 2017 p. 45-47, Summary of the National
Defense Strategy, p. 11.). Building the deterrence potential is a project imple-
mented by increasing the combat potential of the 2nd Fleet and the entire Indo-
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Pacific Command component (missile launchers, remote refuelling units, and classic weapons) and conducting joint patrol and training missions with the armed forces of the region’s states. However, from 2020, greater importance was attached to expanding the scope of economic cooperation with countries associated in APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Community) and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). However, the leading role in American politics is played by the Quad initiative, which is focused on the issues of maritime security and securing the functioning of the supply chain, which is synonymous with the control of Indo-Pacific shipping routes, coordination of diplomatic activities and cooperation in the field of technology development. However, the key role is played by maritime safety issues, especially the possibility of using the potential of these countries’ naval forces and the possibility of diplomatic influence on other countries in the region (Lendon). However, it should be emphasized that by the end of 2022, the AUKUS Alliance will play a comparable role, and its importance will gradually increase with the introduction of other contracted nuclear submarines to the Australian Navy.

**CHINESE MARINE ACTIVITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC**

China’s maritime activity in the Indo-Pacific region is part of the concept of global economic expansion and ensuring the continuity of supplies of raw materials and semi-finished products for its own economy (Made in China 2025, p. 2-4). The Indian Ocean together with the Arabian Sea were considered to be the area of maritime activity and perceived as an area of significant security threats (interruption of supply continuity). The Central Pacific is perceived in the Chinese strategy as a basin with a lower level of threats to state interests (National Defense 2006. p. 22-23, 35-36). The awareness of the difference between the maritime potential and the USA meant that since 2015 a significant part of Chinese activity in this area has been conducted in cooperation with the Russian Federation. On the other hand, the policy of economic expansion in the region is being implemented independently, with the approval of Russian attempts to attract recipients of energy carriers. The scope of Russian-Chinese cooperation in the Pacific and Indian Oceans is largely determined by the process of increasing the potential of Chinese naval forces. It is also a consequence of the limited commonality of interests of both countries¹ and the policy pursued by Beijing, which is controlled and limited to the necessary minimum, by

¹ Since 2017, the phrase "strategic partnership" has frequently appeared in the Russian media (Sputnik) and in statements by President Putin. On the other hand, in the statements of the Chinese leaders, there is information about “deepened relations”. It was only in the Xinhuaten agency’s account of President Xi Jinping’s visit on June 5, 2019 that a phrase about the desire to build a strategic partnership appeared.
Russian political and military activity in the region. The aim of the political and military cooperation is to strive to shape the state of political and economic relations in continental and south-eastern Asia, desirable for both countries, and to limit American domination in the waters surrounding these regions. Its limitation is the need for naval forces to carry out activities in waters located at a considerable distance from their own naval bases and to use sets of ships that their military fleets do not have (aircraft carrier teams).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>Capabilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Pacific, especially the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea, the</td>
<td>Yellow Sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippine Sea, the South China Sea, some waters around Indonesia</td>
<td>East China Sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partly the Philippine Sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Ocean, especially Andaman Sea, Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Laccada-</td>
<td>temporary presence in a selected body of water</td>
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<tr>
<td>dive Sea</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean Sea</td>
<td>temporary presence in a selected body of water</td>
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*source: own study*

The above limitations are eliminated by the use of nuclear submarines (PRC), which, however, creates certain political tensions in the region and the reaction of other maritime players with negative consequences for both countries. An example of such a reaction is the AUKUS alliance and the expansion of the maritime potential, including an increase in the number of submarines and the development of systems for monitoring the underwater situation by India and Indonesia. Simultaneously carried out actions to eliminate these limitations include the expansion of the potential of the naval forces (Chinese aircraft carrier construction projects) and the expansion of possible places of their base (the PRC and Russia). Due to this fact, the Chinese navy in the Indo-Pacific region is mainly involved in activities that can be described as flag presentation, peaceful sea control focused on monitoring shipping routes and anti-piracy activities, conducting anticrisis and humanitarian activities (participation in evacuation activities in Yemen) and hydrographic surveys. A feature of this activity is the successive, resulting also from the process of expanding the homing system, maintaining the presence of Chinese ships in a given area, but despite the significant expansion of the Chinese navy and the possibility of basin it, it is not prepared to project power in the Indo-Pacific and to dominate the control system of its shipping lines (Becker, p. 14). Currently, it is estimated the Chinese have naval bases that allow the presence of a maximum of 18 ships in the Indian Ocean, but the main limitation of their combat capabilities is the lim-
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...limited ability to protect them against air attack and the use of submarines. A realistic assessment of the potential of the Chinese navy, the ability to base it and the defense potential of the countries in the region allows us to conclude that China will focus its presence in the Indian Ocean only on protecting its own communication lines, sanctioning maritime presence and obtaining the possibility of introducing a sea blockade in selected sea areas. On the other hand, the forces conducting maritime activity in order to apply a possible blockade of the water area will be submarines. This is due to the assessment of the specificity of marine activity in waters, conducting hydrographic surveys covering a total area of approximately 500,000 km², but concentrated on routes leading to the Malacca and Sunda Straits, i.e. the main Indo-Pacific shipping routes. The way they are conducted (the use of guided underwater vehicles steered from hydrographic units) indicates that their purpose is both to conduct hydrographic research aimed at the preparation of maps for submarines and the reconnaissance, especially of the Indian system of monitoring their movement.

Map 1. Area of concentration of Chinese hydrological research in 2019-2021

RUSSIA IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Russia does not have the ability to compete with the US and China in the Indo-Pacific. It is also not its goal, and the involvement can be defined as building the position of a regional player alternative to these two countries. Its activity in this area is determined primarily by the concept of expanding economic cooperation (supply of energy carriers and processed fuels) to the countries of the region and the implementation of the task of protecting interests in the Mediterranean Sea in the Persian Gulf basin. An important role is also played by the need to present the ability to operate in ocean waters. It is therefore concentrated in the western Indian Ocean (the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea and, to a lesser extent, the Arabian Sea) and on the shipping lanes along East Africa. In the Central Pacific, on the other hand, it pursues a policy of supporting Chinese activities rather than independent activity.

Map 2. Development plan of the system of basing the Russian naval forces in the Indo-Pacific

access: 12.03.2021
The resulting Russian activity takes the form of maritime exercises and activities aimed at sea control and combating criminal activities in sea areas. However, the security strategy explicitly emphasized that this involvement in the Indo-Pacific would be carried out in the international system, within the UN system or at the request of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and ASEAN (Decree [Указ] № 640 от 30.11.2016). A realistic scenario is also the use of Russian submarines to block the strategic Indo-Pacific straits and carrying out, jointly with the Russian-Chinese, activities aimed at restoring the continuity of navigation and counteracting forms of limiting the exploitation of open sea areas. On the other hand, in the waters of the western part of the Indian Ocean, Russia’s maritime activity has an individualistic dimension and is to a greater extent shaped by competition with the US in the Black Sea and Mediterranean regions and the concept of expanding economic cooperation with the countries of the region adopted in the Economic Security Strategy. By carrying out this task, since 2017, the state has been conducting an independent maritime activity which includes strictly political and political-military activities. The former led to the signing of bilateral agreements on military or maritime cooperation with several countries in the region, including Egypt, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Sudan. The right to station a Russian navy in the ports of Madagascar, Mozambique, and Sudan was also obtained. At the same time, the Russian navy is conducting independent activities, focusing on presenting the possibilities of taking action in the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf and around the Cape of Good Hope (exercises conducted in 2019 and 2021 with Iran and South Africa in which Chinese naval forces participated). An important element of it is hydrographic and satellite research, treated as intelligence. An important form of this activity are also courtesy visits to such countries as Madagascar, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, South Africa, and Sudan. Cooperation with Sudan and Myanmar plays a special role in this policy. In both cases, the goal is to be able to station a navy, including nuclear submarines, at strategic points in the westerns Indo-Pacific.

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2 The joint Chinese-Russian naval manoeuvres carried out over the course of 2015-2019 took the form of offensive tactical episodes in the form of amphibious operations aimed at capturing or retaking islands, conducting artillery and missile fire on surface units, fighting submarines and seizing shipping vessels.

3 Especially with Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Seychelles, Sudan, South Africa, and Pakistan.

4 In contrast, Egypt, the Central African Republic, and Madagascar, Mozambique and Sudan have granted the Russian air force the right to use their airspace.
INDO-PACIFIC IN THE REGIONAL POWER POLICY

The activity of the powers with ambitions to conduct global maritime activity determines the functioning of regional maritime players. A special role should be assigned to India, Australia, Indonesia, and Japan. Three of these countries are partners of the US in the *Quad* format (Australia also AUKUS), but also due to the scope of economic cooperation with China and pursuing a policy of sanctioning the status of an important regional player, they conduct independent maritime activity in the region, which is complemented by cooperation with the United States. Basically, they do not engage in unequivocally anti-Chinese projects, recognizing that the Indo-Pacific reservoir is to be a place of unlimited, other than the law of the sea, maritime activity and economic cooperation. Its principle is inclusiveness, which is understood as not limiting the right to take it by any state that complies with the legal regulations relating to the conduct of maritime activity. An important element of this regional cooperation is the expansion of trade routes and the communication infrastructure itself, which is treated as support for less developed countries (improving their ability to participate in regional trade in goods) and limiting Chinese hegemony in this area (One Belt One Road project). Australia plays a key role in these endeavours, along with New Zealand, which implements the mutually coordinated *Step-up’ in the Pacific* and *Reset* programs, and India (a joint project of the *Asia Africa Growth Corridor* with Japan). A special feature of the policy of regional powers is the recognition that ASEAN, not the United States, should be the guarantor of regional stability. This position is mainly presented by Indonesia. On the other hand, within the framework of mutual relations, India, Australia and Indonesia, using both their economic and political potential and strategic location, recognize themselves as the most important co-creators of regional policy, with which countries engaged in political and economic activity in this region should obligatorily cooperate.

**India as a Regional Maritime Power of the Indo-Pacific**

India, in its policy relating to the Indo-Pacific, focuses on assessing Chinese involvement in the region and the consequences of the increased activity of the country's navy. The manner of this involvement and the expansion of the scope of economic and military cooperation with Pakistan is perceived by Delhi as actions threatening the security of the state. At the same time, however, they do not oppose the Chinese presence in this area, demanding that it focus solely on the issue of ensuring the safety of navigation on the routes that this country conducts trade with African and European countries. The Indian maritime
strategy for the Indian Ocean has not changed significantly since 2004\(^5\). The strategic goal is to co-create (as required by the status of a regional power) the safety of navigation in this area, especially in the area from the African coast through the Red and Arabian Seas, the Bay of Bengal to the Strait of Malacca and exits from the Indonesian Sunda and Lombok Straits. The evolution of the concept of sea control between 2004 and 2021 is recognition as a strategic region of vital importance not only to the northern but also to the central Indian Ocean and the South China Sea as a region of interest. In both cases, this change is dictated by the assessment of the form of military activity (its significant increase) by China, Russia and the USA. The result of the assessment of this involvement of the above-mentioned sea players is also a redefinition of the status of allied states. Indian authorities have recognized that American activity in the region is not always consistent with Indian interests, focused on containing China’s expansion. It also destabilizes the situation in the Indian Ocean, especially the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. For this reason, they decided to abandon trilateral cooperation with the USA and Australia in favour of bilateral cooperation with specific partners and in a specific subject area. Economic and political cooperation aimed at building ties with the countries of the region and counteracting Chinese activity is carried out bilaterally or in the form of joint Indo-Japanese projects directed at the countries of the region. Japan itself has been recognized as a strategic partner, the scope of cooperation is focused on the economic sphere, although it also takes into account the issue of security (cybersecurity, nuclear weapons proliferation and stabilization of the situation in the region)\(^6\). The second important partner is Australia, and the goal of joint activities is primarily the control of the southern and central parts of the Indian Ocean, formally aimed at ensuring the safety of shipping and combating the phenomenon of maritime piracy and terrorism at sea, but its important part is also monitoring the movement of submarines in the form of joint exercises naval forces (Framework for Security)\(^7\). On the other hand, cooperation with the United States has been limited by giving it a strictly defensive dimension, focused on increasing the Indian ability to control the sea. To a large extent, it is the purchase of military technology enabling this control\(^8\) and activity under the DoD Maritime Safety Initiative (Framework for Security).

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\(^5\)In 2004, the first maritime doctrine was developed, and in 2007, a maritime strategy.

\(^6\)It is formally regulated by the declaration on global partnership of September 1, 2014, but by 2022 some 30 detailed agreements on equal forms of cooperation have been signed.

\(^7\)The agreement also covers economic cooperation, exchange of experiences in the field of countering illegal immigration and terrorism, and cooperation in the field of cyberspace protection.

\(^8\)In 2018, India obtained the so-called Level 1 Strategic Trade Permit, which in practice is an unlicensed right to purchase US military technology and dual use.
However, activities in the area of security are largely carried out independently or in partnership with the states concerned by the maintenance of regional stabilization, but without the participation of the US. The activity carried out independently takes the form of a political and military reaction to the process of widening the Chinese “string of pearls”. The main instrument of influence is the process of establishing economic cooperation with countries in the zone of Chinese interest (Burma, Vietnam, East African countries) and increasing the possibilities of controlling the Arab Sea (Kandaba naval base). International cooperation is undertaking multinational or bilateral maritime exercises. Their aim is to monitor the shipping situation and exchange experience in combating attempts to disturb it. Both countries from the region (Indonesia, Thailand, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Vietnam) and countries traditionally present in the Indian Ocean (France, Great Britain, West Germany) participate in them. The same dimension was taken by the cooperation with the Persian Gulf (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman), which was focused on the Arabian Sea and the Gulf itself. Its purpose is also to present the ability of the countries in the region to counteract possible Chinese (and American) attempts to appropriate the Indo-Pacific control system, which could be conducted under Indian leadership.

The concept of maintaining the ability to control the situation in the Indo-Pacific region proposed to the countries of the region assumes a limited acceptance of the presence of China’s naval forces (including aircraft carrier teams), because – as the Indian Navy commander emphasized – “Bandera always follows trade”\textsuperscript{9}. It was also recognized that any attempt to counteract it could lead to an escalation of political and military tensions already shaken by the Chinese-American rivalry. For this reason, Chinese activity in the field of monitoring shipping routes should be accepted by regional maritime players, while simultaneously carrying out control activities in this area. These should be created mainly by the Indian fleet as the country with the greatest combat potential. On the other hand, Indian politicians are seriously concerned about the expansion of the Chinese submarine’s potential and the possibility of its deployment in the northern and north-western part of the Indian Ocean. The hydrological research carried out by this country, located especially near the Indonesian straits and the Bay of Bengal, is perceived as a preparation for operational activities. The prevailing Strait of Lombok, the hydrological condi-

\textsuperscript{9}In the opinion of Admiral Karambir Singh, China is focusing on creating aircraft carrier teams with a structure adequate to the solutions used by the US Navy. It is a natural consequence of building the capacity to counteract the possibility of disrupting the continuity of navigation. This statement took place at the Thracian Raisin Dialogue conference. It is the most important Indian conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics, aimed at solving the most difficult problems faced by the global community.
tions allow it to pass through in an underwater position, which is not possible in the Strait of Malacca. The solution therefore enables China to conduct a covert penetration of the Indian Ocean and to mark out passage routes for warships and commercial units in the event of a blockade of the Strait of Malacca. On the other hand, the expansion of ports in the Pakistani Gwadar and Djibouti as well as the location of elements of Chinese surveillance systems on the island of Feydhoofinolhu (Maldives) is perceived as a stage of building bases for submarines. The Indian plan to counter the potential threat from Chinese submarines was based on the concept of expanding the anti-submarine fleet of the same type (OP ZOP). They are to be able to dominate the underwater space of the Indian Ocean. These activities are focused on the waters subjected to hydrological research by China (around the Andaman and Nicobar archipelagos). An important element is to conduct of underwater observations around Djibouti and – jointly with airborne reconnaissance units – monitoring of the central part of the Indian Ocean from the Lombok Strait to Madagascar. These activities are also coordinated with similar projects carried out by Australia and Indonesia and undertaken in a bilateral formula with the naval forces of these countries.

**Indo-Pacific in the Australian Policy**

Australia’s vision of the Indo-Pacific in the 21st century was set out in the 2012 White Book called *Australia in the “Asia century”* and detailed in another 2017 one (White Paper). The main strategic goals of Australian policy are not to become involved in the forms of rivalry between the PRC and the US and to prevent the emergence of a regional power in the Asia-Pacific region, pursuing a hostile policy towards Australia. The aim of this policy is also to prevent the deployment of elements of military potential in the Indo-Pacific region by countries potentially interested in pursuing activities that are contrary to Australia’s strategic interests and to maintain the political status quo in relation to the maritime borders and EEZ zones of Southeast Asian countries. These assumptions also define the objectives of the regional policy as the role of the Indo-Pacific region itself. Australia is a country of primary production exports, which determines the perception of the principle of freedom and continuity of shipping and the very safety of shipping. An additional factor contributing to the importance of the safety of sea basins in Australia’s policy is the system of subsea connections of global, regional and national10 importance and the role of

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10 About nine cables are laid around Australia, connecting Australia with Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Western Europe (Perth) with New Zealand, Fiji and the United States, and
individual industries around the sea (sea fishing, maritime tourism and the extraction of energy resources) in the Australian economic system. For this reason, the stabilization of the political and economic situation in the region is a priority, and the main instruments of influence invariably remain:

- the ability to create regional economic and political cooperation based on the principle of economic freedom and a multilateral system of political forces,
- cooperation with India and Indonesia in the area of maritime activity and universal observance of the law of the sea;
- alliance with the US in the field of security.

The role of sea basins in Australian policy is determined primarily by the scope and directions of exports, focused on the supply of mine raw materials in China, India and Japan (White Paper, p. 26-30) and – considered a significant threat to regional security – China’s rivalry and USA (White Paper, p. 26-30, p. 3-4). As a result of priority treatment of the issues of shipping safety and the freedom to conduct economic cooperation, a special feature of Australian policy is an attempt to take action to limit the scope of the Indo-Pacific rivalry between the US and China. This goal is achieved by engaging both global players in the process of building a regional economic area, conducting political activities for the universal application of the principle of dispute settlement based on the norms of international law and observance of the sovereign rights of international players (especially those with less political power) to exercise sovereign jurisdiction over their respective seas (White Paper, p. 26-30, p. 37-39). This policy is conducted in partnership with India and Indonesia, but some activities are also carried out in the Quartet formula and bilaterally with Japan, South Korea and France.

These assumptions defined the formula of maritime activity, which in the Indo-Pacific area focuses on creating a political situation along the northern part of the country (from the Arafura and Coral seas to the East China Sea), and especially the control of shipping routes in the waters surrounding Malaysia and Papua New Guinea. This task is seen in conjunction with measures to combat the illegal entry into Australia of living organisms, including immigrants. An important goal, but implemented in a limited way, taking into account the role of China in the overall trade, is to maintain the continuity of navigation in the South China Sea. This requires addressing the problem of states’ claims to this reservoir, but Australian policy is to raise the principle of freedom of navigation on the disputed waters. The main task of the maritime forces is to conduct activities for the universal observance of the regime of the law of the sea, including combating sea piracy and the forms of limiting the right of navigation and

with Guam, Japan and Asia (Sydney), as well as with Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and New Caledonia.
The militarization of the basin used by state actors. These activities are carried out on a multinational basis, but the above goals mean that the United States remain a strategic partner in the field of ensuring safety at sea, and Indonesia and India are important partners. However, while the USA is a partner in the Indo-Pacific waters, cooperation with other countries is limited to its separate waters. This is due to the political ambitions of these three regional maritime players and the differences in assessing the strategic role of the various parts of the body of water. The cooperation of the Australian and Indian naval forces is concentrated on the waters of the East China, South China and the Gulf of Thailand, and with the Indonesian Navy in the areas around the Lombok and Sunda straits and the Timor, Banda and Arafura seas. On the other hand, independent activities are concentrated in the Oceania area between the eastern coastal state and French Polynesia (Andrew, Cooper, p. 4-5). On the other hand, the establishment of the AUKUS alliance heralds the expansion of Australia’s activity in the waters of the southern and central Indian Ocean and most likely in the South Ocean. The adopted scope of cooperation will make it possible to increase the operational range of Australian naval and air forces.

**Indonesia as a Regional Sea Player**

Indonesian maritime activity is a consequence of several conditions, the most important of which are the archipelagic physical system of the country\(^{11}\), separatist tendencies in regions, ongoing territorial disputes and the desire to play the role of an important regional player. The scope of activity in the Indo-Pacific waters was defined in the doctrine of “Global Maritime Fulcrum”, which was to be the concept of achieving the status of a regional power. However, the document announced in 2014 was not transformed into a specific action plan, and its assumptions were only implemented until 2018 in a selective manner\(^{12}\). The focus is on three main issues, which are:

- Chinese expansion into waters deemed to fall under Indonesian jurisdiction;
- issues of state security and the role of maritime forces in ensuring it;
- classic sea control focused on counteracting its illegal exploitation and combating selected forms of economic criminal activity.

The forms of its implementation resulting from these goals are maritime diplomacy, including activities in the sphere of co-creation of the sea control

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\(^{11}\) Indonesia comprises over 17,000 islands and over six million square kilometres of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

\(^{12}\) After 2018, it is not even cited as a geostrategic document. Indonesian, Australian and American analysts agree on the subject.
system, focused on such activities as the presentation of the flag and force, as well as undertakings aimed at ensuring the security and territorial integrity of the state. The Navy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are jointly responsible for this part of maritime activity. On the other hand, the task of combating criminal activities at sea and the protection of sea areas considered under this jurisdiction (including 7 disputed waters) and the rights to exploit the resources is the responsibility of the Ministry of Maritime Economy Coordination and the Coast Guard. This division of competences and the lack of coordination of conducted activities limit the effectiveness of conducted maritime activity, and thus the role of Indonesia as a significant maritime player. The consequence was also the concentration of this activity on the southern part of the South China Sea and the Java Sea, with only declarative activity in the Indian Ocean.

The concept of activity in this ocean was formally announced in 2015 as one of the goals of the Indonesian Presidency of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), but in practice this activity is focused mainly on the Pacific waters. They include a range of projects undertaken for the sustainable exploitation of living resources, with particular emphasis on the implementation of solutions related to sea poaching, which is considered one of the most serious challenges for the country’s maritime activity. The goal is the widespread use of solutions by the Indo-Pacific countries to eliminate the so-called IUU, i.e. conducting illegal, unreported and unregulated sea fishing. However, counteracting these forms of resource exploitation is directed mainly to the countries bordering the South China Sea, especially China, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Thailand (Parameswaran, Sudoyo).13

The second subject area of maritime activity related to combating crime at sea is activities aimed at combating maritime piracy and acts recognized as maritime terrorism. They are run by all maritime players in the Indo-Pacific, both as part of ASEAN as well as multilateral and bilateral cooperation. However, Indonesia has a limited cooperation in this area and acts differently from other maritime players. This attitude is due to the fact that acts of maritime piracy in Indonesian and nearby waters are generally carried out by the population of this country. In practice, they are his internal problem, and due to the social consent to conduct this type of activity, it is not considered a priority. Especially since this phenomenon is concentrated in the Strait of Malacca and the southern part of the South China Sea, and to a greater extent concerns vessels operating on routes to and from China, Japan and South Korea than Indonesia. Following these conditions, the Indonesian naval forces are used to

13 This is one factor that creates regional tensions, as the coastguard has the power to confiscate or sink fishing vessels. However, this problem, especially with regard to Chinese fishing vessels, is being dealt with by political methods (catch limitations and elimination of allocated allowances).
The geopolitical game for domination in the Indo-Pacific in the third decade...

...a limited extent to conduct anti-piracy activities in a supranational system. They engage only in activities aimed at preventing illegal trade in goods, especially in crude oil and its products, sometimes resulting from pirated activities or carried out in order to omit the international embargoes. On the other hand, all extremist activities, including separatist aspirations and known attempts to smuggle members of terrorist organizations operating in mainland Asia by sea, are treated as acts of terror at sea and fought under the comprehensive counter-terrorism program (Hwang). These threats are concentrated in five waters surrounding Indonesia, namely:

- south-west coast of Sumatra,
- southern part of the South China Sea,
- south coast of Java,
- the Sulu Sea, the northern shores of the Ambon and Sulawesi islands, where economic criminal activities are taking place.

They take the form of acts of maritime piracy and poaching, as well as illegal drug trafficking and human trafficking. On the other hand, the waters surrounding the Tanimbar islands and the south-western shore of Merauke on Papua Island are dominated by the last two forms of criminal activity (Morris, Paoli).

The most serious problem of Indonesian maritime policy, which in practice determines the form of its maritime activity, is the Chinese policy of appropriating the waters of the South China Sea and the country’s activity in the waters surrounding the Indonesian archipelago. This applies especially to the exploitation of the resources of the Natuna Sea and claims to the waters of the South China Sea. They cover an area of approximately 83,000 km² of the Indonesian EEZ zone north of the Natuna Islands. The specificity of the hydrographic research in the Indo-Pacific waters by Chinese maritime units is also a significant controversial problem. This applies in particular to research conducted in the Java Sea and the strategic Sunda and Lombok Straits, which can be used both for the assessment of resources and for charting shopping routes, including for submarines. The scale and form of Chinese activity resulted in the abandonment of the policy of diplomatic dispute resolution. The adopted

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14 An example is the media-publicized detection of illegal oil transhipment between tankers on January 24, 2021. The Indonesian Coast Guard discovered two oil tankers carrying out illegal oil transfers with hidden national flags and disabled AIS systems and radios. The Indonesian authorities identified the vessels as belonging to the National Iranian Tanker Company and Shanghai Future Ship Management Company. An Iranian tanker was carrying around 280,000 tons of oil, and another was to take over the cargo.

15 During 2019 and 2020, Indonesian naval forces located and seized three underwater vehicles for hydrographic research.

16 Indonesia has proposed a region state to sign the Code of construct on the South China Sea. It was rejected by China.
formula of Indonesian actions to defend sovereign rights in sea areas is the presentation of strength (development of military potential and response to border incidents). In 2010-2018, it was assumed that these projects would be supported by cooperation with the USA and selected countries (France, Great Britain, Russia, Japan), but the prestigious and political factor (the status of a regional power) and recognition of the One Road One Belt (Gindarsah, A. Priamarizki) as a project in line with Indonesian economic interest, caused that a large part of it was reduced to the purchase of weapons, training of commanders and conducting joint exercises. The alternative solution adopted is cooperation with India and cooperation with Quad countries, but on the assumption that India is the most important partner. The agreement concluded by both countries in 2018 assumes that it will be based on military exercises, hydrographic surveys and activities aimed at reducing the threats to the safety of navigation. Joint activities focused on patrolling the Strait of Malacca, but an important part of it is the sharing of naval bases, which extends the area of operations in the form of the presentation of the flag and force by both countries. A similar formula of cooperation was undertaken with Australia, but to a greater extent it is carried out by the Coast Guard (BAKAMLA).

CONCLUSIONS

1. The area defined as the Indo-Pacific due to its transport importance, comparable to the Atlantic, plays a fundamental role in the global rivalry between powers.

2. The Indo-Pacific region, like the basin itself, is referred to as the site of Chinese-American rivalry, but Russia and the regional powers also participate in it. The axis of the dispute is the competition for regional economic influence and control of the basin, especially its shipping routes.

3. The Straits of Hormuz, Malacca, Singapore, Sunda, Makassar, Lombok and Bab al-Mandab play a special role in the water control system and navigation.

4. The priorities of the American maritime activity are the control of the basin and the limitation of Chinese economic expansion, combined with the expansion and deployment of military potential in the region. Some activities are carried out in partnership with allies (Australia, Japan, New Zealand) and countries defined as partners (Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia).
5. China’s maritime activity in the Indo-Pacific region is part of the concept of global economic expansion and ensuring the continuity of supplies for its own economy. The Indian Ocean together with the Arabian Sea were recognized as the area of maritime activity and perceived as the area of significant security threats (interruption of supply), considering that the Central Pacific is a basin with a lower level of threat to the interests of the state. In this area, they attempt to build a military potential that would allow them to control selected parts of it.

The activity of powers with ambitions to conduct global maritime activity determines the functioning of regional maritime players. A special role should be assigned to India, Australia and Indonesia, as well as Japan. Three of these countries are partners of the USA in the Quad format, but also due to the scope of economic cooperation with China or the desire to sanction the status of an important regional player, they conduct independent maritime activity in the region, which is complemented by cooperation with the United States.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


