

**WILL AMERICA EXIT THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION?
CERTAIN PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED BY CHINA IN
THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION. POST-TPP EVOLUTIONS***

MĂDĂLINA VIRGINIA ANTONESCU**

Abstract: *The current paper proposes a critical, objective approach to the strategic moves of the new Trump administration, a perspective which is necessary for a better comprehension of the profound geopolitical changes in the global power play, in order to understand whether it is matter of simple isolated moves of the American foreign policy or a new, clearly shaped doctrine already in place, without being presented in an official document or a speech delivered by president Trump. Understanding correctly the profound meanings of the strategic moves taken in by the American foreign policy is a challenge for any analyst, considering the fact that we are witnessing an ever-changing political order, in which the great global actors reset their foreign policies surprisingly quickly and thoroughly, distancing themselves from their foreign policy, as we know it. We note that there is a tendency for the great actors on the geopolitical stage of the 21st century to reverse roles, with the USA tempted to embrace the doctrine of protectionism, seen as a doctrine of withdrawal from globalism, while other actors (China) make an effort to live up to the expectations, i.e. to be the new global actors of the 21st century and to support an Asian globalization (no matter the costs). One interesting aspect is that the “Pacific Century” phrase, credited by the USA under the Obama administration, is not considered outdated by other actors (China, India, Russia etc.) interested in playing a role in the Asia-Pacific key-region, especially with the USA withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The purpose of the present paper is to start from the reality of the USA withdrawing from the TPP and briefly analyse the consequences of this gesture, the possible American alternatives, as well as the role of the regional challengers in the development of alternate projects for this region. It is a subject of perspective, which we are far from exhausting in the present paper.*

Keywords: *Asia-Pacific region; TPP; rising China; Trump new doctrine; protectionism; Neo-Westphalism.*

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** Scientific Researcher, PhD, Faculty of Law, University of Bucharest; madyantonescu@gmail.com.

*Are the US Withdrawing from the Asia-Pacific Region?
“The Withdrawal Doctrine”*

Ever since his election campaign, Donald Trump made public his objective to withdraw America from agreements considered to be “global”, “inefficient”, even “unprofitable for the Americans”¹. In our opinion, this is not a singular case of the USA expressing its intention to withdraw from a regional agreement of free exchange, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Instead, on a closer look, *it is a complex strategy devised by the United States to withdraw from a cross-regional network of agreements, treaties, partnerships – which certain analysts coined as “a doctrine envisaging USA’s withdrawal”*² from a certain form of globalization, considered too costly and irrelevant for the national interest³.

For other analysts, the strategic move made by the Trump administration, *i.e.* withdrawing from the TPP, whence the impression that America is less interested in claiming the leadership position in a sensitive region, such as the Asia-Pacific region, such a move *would be a wise strategic move, within an ample foreign policy, with the aim to avoid directly challenging and openly confronting China* (according to a study by the Harvard University, *ten out of fifteen cases in history in which the emerging power and the existing power interacted ended up in war*)⁴. In this sense, Trump’s strategic option to reduce the American presence in the Asia-Pacific region (region where China intends to assume a dominant role, as an Asian power) would be *a prudent position, avoiding direct conflict* between the two powers, for supremacy in the Asia-Pacific region.

Maintaining the TPP could have been interpreted as the USA’s continuous intention to maintain China’s economic limitations in the region, therefore being seen as *a direct threat against China’s wish to assume a dominant role, as an Asian power in the Asia-Pacific region. Trump administration signing the TPP withdrawal document can be interpreted as a strategic move, in the search for regional power balance with China, for regional peace, therefore for international peace*, with the USA assuming *the role of peacekeeper, of responsible global leader*, from the perspective of the 21st century order, as it makes *a move of regional compromise* (withdrawing from the TPP). Thus, China becomes less suspicious that the USA may use its agreements and partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region, in order to corner China both economically and strategically, and to determine it to lose its emerging power position. *The measure taken by the*

¹ The slogan used by President Trump during his campaign, ‘America First’, expresses a view opposing the free exchange agreements, while supporting the introduction of tariffs on foreign products and services, stand categorized as protectionist, therefore anti-globalist. A part of the doctrine expressed the fear that the future of globalization should be re-assessed, because “*Trump can cause the regression after decades of global trends*” (according to a Brookings papers). See George N. Tzogopoulos, *Trump, Globalization, and China*, BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 588, September 15th 2017, pdf.

² Prashanth Parameswaran, *What Trump’s TPP withdrawal Means for US Asia Policy*, January 24th 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/what-trumps-tpp-withdrawal-means-for-us-asia-policy>.

³ Dhruva Jaishankar, *What Trump’s TPP Withdrawal Means for India*, January 24th 2017, <https://www.ndtv.com/opinion>.

⁴ Henry Kissinger, *Ordinea mondială. Reflecții asupra specificului națiunilor și a cursului istoriei*, translated by Adriana Bădescu, Rao Class Publishing House, Bucharest, 2014, pp. 187-188

Trump administration to withdraw from the TPP (January 2017), thus releasing the tension between the two powers, may be the beginning of a new friendship and cooperation relationship between China and the USA, which is necessary for the international peace, as also stated by president Xi Jinping, during his visit to Florida, in April 2017. According to the US State Secretary Rex Tillerson, both parties noted during this visit that significant progress has been recorded in the bilateral relationship⁵. In addition, president Trump's visit to China in November 2017⁶ is considered to be another important moment for the process of improving trust and dialog, as well as cooperation between the two powers. It is important to note that Rex Tillerson uses the phrase "open diplomacy", when referring to the relationship between China and the USA. He considers that the two powers are developing "a constant and very close working relationship"⁷. This perception of a future opening of opportunities, in the relationship between the two powers, was also expressed by the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi⁸.

From another viewpoint, for the new Trump doctrine, in its current form and shape, the global network of partnerships, treaties and agreements (especially those concerning the regional free exchange, covering an already shaped or a shaping sectorial integration perspective) becomes a burden for the American globalism, which is considered too heavy to carry and support, as it leads to a drop in the number of jobs and investments made by the local companies on the American territory.

Certain analysts discuss a *protectionist doctrine*⁹, reapplied starting January 2017, when the new Trump administration occupied the White House. However, in this conversation, the term refers to withdrawing or questioning the utility of maintaining and continuing to massively invest in what we can call "American globalism" (including the *global network of treaties, agreements and organizations*, plus the *proto-integrationist* commercial bodies with regulatory purposes, such as *NAFTA, and TPP*).

It is a doctrine that rejects the pre-eminence of a global free exchange, continuously supported and guaranteed by America, with the purpose of building what we know as "American globalization" (especially from its commercial, financial, regulatory-global perspective). According to certain specialists, America's withdrawal from the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership), from the very beginning of Trump's administration, is a symbol for America's withdrawal from the Asia-Pacific region, considering the political, legal, commercial significance of the TPP for the entire region and as a fundamental pillar for USA's vision, with the

⁵Christopher Booden, *Tillerson in China to discuss North Korea, Trump visit* https://www.yahoo.com/news/tillerson-china-visit-focused-north-korea-trade-055729839.html?tsrc=daily_mail&uh_test=2_14, Associated Press, September 30, 2017, Associated Press writers Joe McDonald in Beijing and Mathew Pennington in Washington contributed to this story.

⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹ <http://www.asianews.it> . <http://news.xinhuanet.com> . <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/the-future-of-the-asia-pacific-security-architecture-as-seen-by-china>.

latter being a dominant actor in the Pacific-Asia region, from *the perspective of the “Pacific Century”*¹⁰ (which a part of the doctrine associates with the Obama administration, as a clearly shaped and consolidated vision).

Signing a document that withdraws the USA from a regional agreement perceived as global (considering that, from the “Pacific Century” perspective, *the Asia-Pacific region is regarded as a region of fundamental, strategic, economic, military and political importance for the 21st century*)¹¹ was inefficient, costly and even damaging to the national American interest, entailing a strengthening of the national economy, as a strategic priority, as well as dropping the investment in the American globalism project at any cost; such moves are part of a *doctrine completely different from the Obama administration*¹². We can talk about *a major rupture in the continuity of the American foreign policy, a reset of the entire US foreign policy*, based on other types of priorities, focusing on strategic objectives different from the objectives pursued by the predecessors of the Trump administration.

The doctrine has yet to analyse sufficiently the consequences of USA’s withdrawal from the TPP, since there is certain timidity when it comes to approaching this subject, *if not a fear*, when discussing the American globalism “taboo”. A part of the doctrine considers that the American globalism is a source of true prestige for America, a clear indication of it being a super-power in the 21st century and having the capacity to be highly influential on the global power play, in a determining manner, through the global network of treaties, agreements, commercial, financial regulations with an investment component etc.

As noted by the specialists, the moment when the USA withdrawal pact is signed marks *the end of an entire glory era of global liberalism*, in which American companies have been encouraged to invest in the most diverse areas of the globe¹³ (which was subsequently *criticized by the new Trump administration, as the latter wants the major American economic actors to focus their activity internally, on the priority objective to reconsolidate the national economy*).

Paradoxically, an essential aspect to note in Trump’s doctrine (*as a doctrine assumed visibly and assumed as “protectionist”*) is *an element specific to the*

¹⁰ In 1900, former US state secretary John Jay wrote that “the Mediterranean Sea was the ocean of the past, the Atlantic Ocean is the ocean of the present, while the Pacific Ocean is the ocean of the future”. See Patrick M. Cronin, Darshana M. Baruah, *The Modi doctrine for the Indo-Pacific Maritime Region*, December 2nd 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/12/the-modi-doctrine-for-the-indo-pacific-maritime-region>. Also see *The United States and the Asia-Pacific Region: Security Strategy for the Obama Administration*, February 2009, www.cnas.org/files/document.

¹¹ See the doctrine’s opinion, European Institute for Asian Studies, *Event Report, Asia’s Future – Challenges and opportunities*, EIAS Briefing Seminar, 31 January, 2013, www.eias.org, accessed on May 25th, 2015. Also see the ADB report (2011), *Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century*, Mandaluyong City: ADB. Also see D. Dollar, *Asian Century or Multi-Polar Century?* World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, 4174, 2007.

¹² Mercy A. Kuo, *Trump and Asia Pivot: Post-TPP Outlook*, November 30, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/11>.

¹³ One of the central ideas of global liberalism is the use of financial, economic, and investment instruments, in order to create a global network of free trade mechanisms, with transnational rules, regulations, institutions and companies, able to ensure its operation. The free market is considered to encourage interdependence among nations and to prove the futility of war. According to Graham Evans, Jeffrey Newnham, *Dicționar de relații internaționale*, transl. Anca Irina Ionescu, Ed. Universal Dalsi, 2001, p. 316.

globalist era, which is not noted as such, but which exists: an interconnection between the internal and the foreign policy, with an increasingly weaker border between these policies¹⁴, between the national objective to encourage American investments in the country, re-launching the American economy, and the moves of the USA foreign policy, i.e. withdrawing from various agreements and regional/global agreements or from agreements which can become global, seen as impacting the objective to consolidate the national economy. According to the specialists, this interdependency between the internal and the foreign policy is an effect of globalization; thus, separating the internal policy from the foreign policy becomes impossible¹⁵ (hence the specific nature of the 21st century diplomacy).

Thus, we cannot regard the USA's withdrawal from the TPP, in January 2017, as an isolated, inexplicable case, not justified by a specific and assumed doctrine. *It accompanies similar moves, such as USA's withdrawal from other regional or global agreements, some of symbolic value for the international community and the traditional UN system¹⁶ (USA's withdrawal from UNESCO, a strategic move started in 2017)¹⁷ or for the international community facing global challenges (e.g. climatic changes – USA's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on climate changes).*

It is interesting to note that, from the very beginning, the Trump administration initiated *a selective approach to the global issues, without embracing the strategy of fully and automatically rejecting any global issues, for the mere reason that they are global* (i.e. they would oppose *ab initio* the national interest of the USA, which is no longer regarded as *global*, as supporting the American globalism). Thus, the Trump administration considers that *countering the Islamic terrorism* (an issue which can be added to the list of *global issues* regarding the security of the international environment) is *a priority of the USA foreign policy* (without denying or questioning the *global* nature of this challenge, while implicitly

¹⁴ David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Golblatt, Jonathan Perraton, *Transformări globale. Politică, economie și cultură*, translated by Ramona-Elena Lupașcu, Adriana Ștraub, Mihaela Bordea, Alina-Maria Turcu, Polirom Publishing House, Jassy, 2004, pp. 79-81.

¹⁵ David Held *et al*, *quoted op.*, p. 81.

¹⁶ See Graham Evans, Jeffrey Newnham, *quoted op.*, pp. 316-317. Also perceived as “expressions of global liberalism”, idea derived from the complete rejection of the use of force in international relations, aspect criticized by the realists. *For global liberalism, the institutions of the UN system are intrinsic elements of a global legal, institutional order; which is based on a global mechanism of collective security (the UN)*, instead of considering individual self-defence to be sacred. At the beginning of the 21st century, *the UN has become an organization of globalization, treating security as a common, pre-eminently collective responsibility of the states (through the UN Security Council), in relation to which the right to self-defence of the states (although not denied by the UN Charter) must observe its pre-eminence. Global liberalism is based on the idea that states belong to a global legal regime, that they observe a global body of regulations, in various domains, hence the fact that the realists tend to reject this trend and the treaties or agreements perceived as global, as well as the fact that they leave institutions such as the UN, which are perceived as parts of the global legal obligations of the states. The global dimension of the UN becomes the fundamental perception of the 21st century world, proving the transformation of this multilateral organization into an authentic universal mechanism to promote typically liberal-globalist values. Hence we notice the realists' tendency to question this role of the UN, through the Trump doctrine, to impose a UN reform or to exit various bodies within the UN system, as a method to promote a realistic perception of the early 21st century world order.*

¹⁷ Colum Lynch, *US to pull out of UNESCO, again*, October 11, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/10/11/u-s-to-pull-out-of-unesco-again>. Xinhua, *Spotlight: What's behind abrupt US withdrawal from UNESCO?*, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/13/c_136677360.htm.

acknowledging that Islamic terrorism is a *global threat* against the stability of the international world, build on the democratic values, on observing the human rights and the UN principles)¹⁸; on the other hand, it does not consider that other *global* issues, such as climate changes, are a priority or it rejects them openly. In addition, the intention of the new administration to *withdraw from NAFTA as well, or to negotiate the terms of the agreement* is caused by the same new strategic objective, *i.e.* economic protectionism, seen as a form of liberation from the constraints of an excessive globalist liberalism, which would overburden the American economy.

Under these circumstances, we can talk about a *moderate and selective doctrine, which rejects globalism*, any form of globalism. *Pragmatism* is a better suited term for Trump's doctrine, adding a *high level of unpredictability* to the understanding and tracking process, in the analysis of the US foreign policy, under the Trump administration.

In an ever-changing geopolitical order, an order oriented towards a *new multilateralism*, the Trump doctrine proposes economic protectionism as a way to revitalize the national economy, currently seen as weakened and even damaged by a sustained globalist burden, hence the slogan "*Make America great again*".

Another open issue, in terms of *analysing the effects* of USA's withdrawal from the TPP and from other regional agreements (with proto-integrationist dimensions), is the issue of the *current difficulty in estimating* whether the new administration intends to *replace the TPP with another agreement or a bilateral network* of special agreements, for the Asia-Pacific region, or to *simply leave a power vacuum in this region*.

What might America's withdrawal from the TPP signify? USA's *total and final withdrawal* from the role of leader in this region which, not long ago, it has categorized as "the key-region of the globe", in terms of geopolitical, strategic, military and economic importance (part of the "Pacific Century" vision)? Or will it be a *partial* withdrawal (solely from one type of regional agreement), as the USA decide that the region continues to be of key importance for the entire 21st century, therefore for America as well (its total extraction from such a key region would be a strategic mistake on the long run), with the TPP renegotiated in *bilateral regional* forms, in this hypothesis, *or replaced by another regional agreement*, which meets America's economic and strategic objectives and which guarantees its involvement in this key-region, for decades to come?

Or, in a third scenario, if the new Trump administration decides to withdraw from the TPP, *without replacing it*, the USA will have to accept that *they leave a leadership vacuum behind*, which one of the great regional competing powers will strive to fill. We are taking into account *the strategic option to completely*

¹⁸ One of the ideas maintained by the global liberalism is the expansion of democratic institutions worldwide, as a method to ensure international peace. We note here a *liberal root not abandoned by the Trump doctrine* which, when stating its determination to counter an issue such as *Islamic terrorism*, implicitly acknowledges its *global character*; as well as the fact that international peace is ensured by spreading the values of democracy and democratic institutions, while intervening for the observance of human rights worldwide. See Graham Evans, Jeffrey Newnham, *quoted op.*, p. 316.

*withdraw from the region (with the TPP denounced without any other alternative or optional project provided by the USA, in which its TPP partners would have to find their place, being thus obligated to reconsider their strategic options, focusing on other great regional powers and their projects in the Asia-Pacific region). Senator John McCain warned that the strategic option to abandon the American strategic positions opens a window of opportunity for China and other regional powers, to claim leadership in the region*¹⁹. In this case, the power vacuum left by America's withdrawal *would entail the USA having no commercial, strategic and security offer for its partners in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as depriving the American investors (farmers, workers, companies) from the strategic opportunities to benefit from the momentum of the fastest-growing region in the 21st century world*²⁰.

In this context, the associations of American investors have insisted that the new administration *continue to maintain commercial agreements in the Asia-Pacific region*, thus providing America with a competitive advantage against its commercial rivals, such as China and the European Union, which propose alternatives to the TPP, *i.e.* their own trade agreements with the countries in the Asia-Pacific region²¹. Under these difficult circumstances, *i.e.* America withdrawing from the region (*by withdrawing from the TPP*), *without offering an alternative to the TPP for its TPP regional partners, and considering that other actors (Russia, the EU, China) have openly stated their intention to affirm their position in the region, the USA must adjust to this global game, with the Asia-Pacific region at its centre, where America is no longer a leader.*

An interesting observation is that, even if the USA refuses to assume the “American Pacific Century” vision (proposed under the Obama administration), under the new Trump administration, *it does not mean that all the other actors competing in the region (Russia, Japan, China, India, the European Union) will not have their own political-strategic perspectives of how power is projected over the Asia-Pacific key-region and that these actors will not show interest in shaping their own version of “Pacific Century” (which can be a “European Pacific Century”, based on a regional mega-agreement proposed by the EU, an “Eurasian Pacific Century”, based on a common Russian-Chinese project, an “Asian-Chinese Pacific Century”, based entirely on a mega-regional agreement, proposed by China)*²².

With the USA's withdrawal from the TPP, *all these strategic scenarios concerning the Asia-Pacific region and its leadership in the 21st century world are open and credible.*

According to White House spokesman Sean Spicer, *the new administration does not intend to leave a power vacuum in the Asia-Pacific region, following*

¹⁹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-01-23/trump-said-to-sign-executive-order-on-trans-pacific-pact-monday>. Also see Manoy Joshi, *White Paper on Asia-Pacific Security Reveals China's Regional Ambitions*, January 14th 2017, <https://thewire.in>.

²⁰ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-01-23/trump-said-to-sign-executive-order-on-trans-pacific-pact-monday>.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² Sevasti'yanov S., “China's integration projects in Asia-Pacific and Eurasia”, *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya*, 2016, Vol. 60, No. 4, pp. 5-12. <https://www.imemo.ru/en/jour/meimo/index>.

its withdrawal from the TPP, as there is *the option to sign bilateral trade agreements with the countries in the region*, solution which would *increase America's negotiation power*, in comparison to the treaties with a large number of states (which entail larger groups of negotiators)²³.

Considered to be the focal point of USA's global strategy in the Asia-Pacific region, with the fastest economic growth in the world, the TPP (trade agreement among 12 states, to liberalize trade between the USA and the states in the Pacific region, including Mexico, Japan, and Singapore) has an unclear future (Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe considers that "a TPP without the USA would be meaningless"); however, certain countries such as Vietnam and Australia intend to maintain this agreement, even in the absence of the USA²⁴.

Another strategic move of the new Trump administration is to *renegotiate a new regional agreement, with a clear integrationist dimension, such as NAFTA*, in which the USA is interested in its neighbours, Canada and Mexico, when renegotiating issues such as immigration and border security²⁵.

USA's strategic move to withdraw from UNESCO, its intention to renegotiate NAFTA, as well as its withdrawal from the TPP are interconnected moves, in a coherent strategy, applied by the new Trump administration, strategy included in what certain analysts consider to be the "*withdrawal doctrine*", i.e. denouncing the *already existing* forms of multilateralism, considered inefficient, caduceus and costly for the USA, as well as redefining its national interest.

This new doctrine of redefining USA's role in the 21st century world, from a protectionist and selective perspective (which includes dropping the American globalism, as well as the well-established forms of multilateralism, *criticized for being excessively bureaucratic and costly, far from their initial purposes*)²⁶, includes the act of distancing itself from well-consolidated symbols of multilateralism (such as UNESCO), withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on climate changes and from the TPP, plus the criticism against the nuclear agreement with Iran.

Considering another side of the doctrine, *one must not mistake* Trump's tendency to embrace the formula of multilateralism for a "rejection of globalism" (although selective, too). USA's strategic moves *to withdraw from well-established dialogue frameworks* (such as UNESCO), *from agencies of a universal system of multilateralism* (such as the UN) *must not be seen together as a strategic, distinct move to "reject globalism"*.

On the contrary, *the Trump doctrine focuses mainly* on favouring and applying the *multilateralist* formula of *bilateral and multilateral* agreements (distinct from integrationist agreements, such as NAFTA and TPP, or global agreements

²³ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-01-23/trump-said-to-sign-executive-order-on-trans-pacific-pact-monday>.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ Colum Lynch, *US to pull out of UNESCO, again*, October 11, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/10/11/u-s-to-pull-out-of-unesco-again>. Xinhua, *Spotlight: What's behind abrupt US withdrawal from UNESCO?*, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/13/c_136677360.htm; <http://www.asian.news.it/news-en/us-and-israel-leave-unesco>.

such as the Paris Agreement). UNESCO would represent a case of failed multilateralism, on account of bureaucracy and inefficiency²⁷, which does not contradict the doctrine which favours multilateralism in principle, Trump's doctrine (as a viable formula and alternative to globalism). Instead, *it would lead to an option to reform the UN, its agencies* (including UNESCO), from the perspective of a different type of multilateralism.

The new Trump doctrine considers that the UN itself is a traditional form of multilateralism, obsolete, costly and inadequate, incapable of dealing with the 21st century challenge, therefore in great need of reformation.

Trump's doctrine *takes into consideration the reality that the 21st century world has a predilection for a multi-pole structure* and does not hide the fact that *it searches for a new method of applying multilateralism, besides the existing ones*. Rejecting or criticizing the *existing* multilateral frameworks, on account of bureaucracy, corruption or poor management (objection raised by the USA, in UNESCO's case)²⁸ *is not related to the essence of the Trump doctrine, which refers to introducing the multilateral and bilateral formula on a large scale* (at international level), *as an alternative to everything seen as a form of globalism or regional integration*.

Other experts are *confused* about the TPP agreements (seen as "*global and multilateral*" *at the same time*, although we are talking about two *different* models of negotiation and agreement settling). *The alternative to these agreements would be concluding bilateral agreements with other nations, as the new Trump administration considers that individual agreements are a priority*²⁹.

China, an Ascending Power: Towards an "Intensified Involvement" in the Asia-Pacific Region

USA's withdrawal from the TPP is regarded as an opportunity for other competitors, such as Russia and China, to enter the Asia-Pacific region, in order to take leadership over this key-region³⁰.

As an emerging power, China is directly interested in becoming involved in the power play in what is considered to be the region with "the fastest economic growth on the planet, the region which will have a geopolitical, geo-economic and security influence over the entire 21st century"³¹.

In other words, we can speak about a *persistence of the geo-political paradigm* of the "Pacific Century" (initiated by the Obama administration, as a key-element of USA's global vision for the 21st century); however, this time (given the USA's strategic move to withdraw from the TPP) we cannot exclude the hypothesis that this paradigm is *borrowed by other countries competing against USA*, for leadership

²⁷ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/13/c_136677360.htm.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ <https://sputniknews.com/politics>.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ Turloch Mooney, *China's trade and transport projects lift Asia-Pacific outlook*, Global Ports, January 13th 2016, <https://fairplay.ihs.com/commerce/article>.

in this area. Thus, we must consider the *consequences of corroborating* the paradigm of “China’s ascension” to the “Chinese Pacific Century” paradigm, both paradigms leading to the idea of a “*Post-American Pacific Century*”.

Concerning the *projects developed by China for the Asia-Pacific region*³², meant to fill the power vacuum left by the USA, when it withdrew from the TPP, as well as by the lack of a coherent strategy for the Asia-Pacific region, we must note *the Silk Road Chinese project (OBOR)*, designed to extend from East Asia’s maritime routes, through Central Asia, to Europe. Especially under the circumstances of USA’s withdrawal from the TPP, *i.e.* a weakening in the American presence and leadership in the Asia-Pacific region (with the TPP perceived as the strongest and the most coherent regional partnership in which the USA became involved, given its integrationist regional nature), *the maritime part* of the “Silk Road” Chinese project (the so-called Maritime Silk Route) is an element important for *ensuring the connection between the Asia-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean*.

According to the analysts, implementing the Silk Road initiative (worth USD 40 billion) in SREB (Silk Road Economic Belt) and MSR (Maritime Silk Road) results in “*ensuring the connection between China and South-East Asia*, redefining the regional geopolitics, resetting the economic Indonesian equations in Europe, as well as guaranteeing the creation of a new security architecture designed to counter terrorism and separatist threats”³³.

In other perspectives, China’s projects to support the transport infrastructure and regional development plans, together with the initiation of regional free-trade agreements, setting grounds for China’s entry in the Asia-Pacific region, with a model of development different from the American model, must be taken into consideration; however, this economic and investment momentum of China in the region is facing some risks, according to the experts³⁴.

Other Chinese initiatives, such as creating the AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) or the *Silk Road Fund*, the new infrastructures which finance the Asian power markets, as well as *bilateral* Chinese frameworks to finance the engagements of various Asian countries, China’s partners in the region, next to the *great One Belt, One Road project*, guarantee China on a leading position in the region, *marked* by the USA’s decision to withdraw from the TPP³⁵.

According to the experts, by leaving the TPP, the USA loses both the economic and the strategic benefits which it may gain from a regional freetrade agreement such as the TPP, as well as the opportunities to maintain its regional leadership

³² Certain analysts talk clearly about the development of *an alternate Chinese model of integration*, for the Asia-Pacific region, without the US involvement, a post-American hegemonic model. It is the model expressed by Xi Jinping, the “*Asia-Pacific Dream*”, in which China intends to renew its global and regional policies. According to Sevasti’yanov S., “China’s integration projects in Asia-Pacific and Eurasia”, *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya*, 2016, Vol.60, No.4, pp.5-12, <https://www.imemo.ru/en/jour/meimo/index>.

³³ Shastri Ramachandaran, *Asia-Pacific: What China’s Silk Road Project Aims At*, <http://www.global-perspectives.info/index.php/international-edition/2014>.

³⁴ Turloch Mooney, *China’s Trade and Transport Projects Lift Asia-Pacific Outlook*, Global Ports, January 13th 2016, <https://fairplay.ihs.com/commerce/article>.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

and to “make the rules in the 21st century”³⁶, by maintaining its influence in this region, which is considered to have the potential to be the most prosperous and dynamic region of the 21st century.

In addition, the analysis must consider the growth potential of China’s influence in the region, as well as the fact that *China uses the RCEP initiative* (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) *for its own interests*. RCEP is an ASEAN initiative, which also includes states with FTAs (free trade areas) with regional groups (India, Australia, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand)³⁷. *The USA is excluded from the RCEP project*, which leaves more space for China to expand its influence progressively within the RCEP and to convert it from an initiative led by ASEAN into an initiative led by China.

A notable aspect regarding the South Pacific, when analysing the “rising China” paradigm in the Asia-Pacific region is the increased financial support provided by China to the countries in the region, which also increases China’s involvement in the South Pacific, beside other supporting countries which have influence in the region (Australia, New-Zealand)³⁸. China’s support in the region has increased continuously, currently recording almost 218 projects in various domains, from agriculture to communications, education, power industry, healthcare, infrastructure, and humanitarian assistance³⁹.

The doctrine considers that for China the Indian Ocean and the China Sea are increasingly “*interesting territories from the viewpoint of energy security*”, as well as the South Pacific⁴⁰. China’s presence in these regions has increased progressively, as well as China’s financial support for the countries in the region, considering the fact that many island-countries in the Pacific (Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu) maintain diplomatic relationships with Taiwan, as noted by the observers⁴¹. However, the island-countries in the Pacific are important for China, in its strategy to develop its blue-water navy capabilities, which results in China requesting more access for its ships, in the Pacific ports⁴². In this strategic framework of regional security, it is more and more important for the Chinese diplomacy to cultivate and consolidate strong relationships with the countries in the Pacific Islands and to maintain its regional leadership after the USA’s withdrawal from the TPP⁴³. President Xi Jinping’s 2014 visit to Fiji

³⁶ *On the contrary*, according to the US military experts, the Trump doctrine entails *the continuous* strategic presence of the US in the Asia-Pacific region, continuation of the US military diplomacy, *through strategic bilateral partnerships*, which become more important in this new doctrine. See Lt. Gen. Robert M. Shea, USMC, ret., President’s Commentary: Military Diplomacy Matters in Asia-Pacific Region, <https://www.afcea.org/content>.

³⁷ Prashanth Parameswaran, *What Trump’s TPP Withdrawal Means for US Asia Policy*, January 24, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/what-trumps-tpp-withdrawal-means-for-us-asia-policy>.

³⁸ Grant Wyeth, *What to Make of China in South Pacific?*, September 29, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09>.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

must analysed from this perspective, as well, since it is a proof of China's clear interest in becoming more actively involved in the Pacific region⁴⁴.

President Trump signing the memorandum regarding USA's withdrawal from the TPP was interpreted by certain analysts as *a withdrawal of the strategy initiated by the Obama administration (to counterbalance an "Asia-Pacific strategy" applied by other countries in the region, to improve the free trade among the USA allies and to corner China from the economic standpoint, particularly by creating economic partnerships with an integrationist component, in the region with the fastest development in the world, i.e. Asia-Pacific)*. All these strategic aspects have been removed when the USA made the strategic decision to withdraw from the TPP, according to the analysts⁴⁵.

From another perspective (a realistic perspective), the strategic move made by the Trump administration, i.e. withdrawing from the TPP (interpreted as withdrawal from the integrationist evolution of the Asia-Pacific region), results from the decade-long evolution of an element of diplomatic strategy found in the Roosevelt doctrine, i.e. the global balance of power ensured by the USA. Thus, according to T. Roosevelt, the USA must be part of a fluid ever-changing balance, as an active factor which ensures this balance⁴⁶. Roosevelt's vision is different from Nixon's view (who sees the USA as a simple component of the global power balance, without wanting the USA to take on the responsibility to maintain the global power balance)⁴⁷. According to T. Roosevelt, it is necessary for one to assert one's power as a political actor determined to promote one's interests at global level, even by subtly showing/warning the potential rival that one relinquishes one's capacity that the rival knows one has, without being affected by this⁴⁸.

If we look at USA's withdrawal from the TPP from this perspective, we note that it is closer to Roosevelt's perspective (the USA as an actor actively influencing the global power balance, even by using the withdrawal strategy, instead of cornering its rivals). Thus, the potential rival is challenged to become involved too much and too sudden, which weakens it, especially at internal level. *Such lack of pressure on the rivals (emerging powers) becomes a strategy to pressure them into entering the power vacuum, to become increasingly involved even by starting regional or global conflicts over supremacy, from which the USA decides to withdraw (isolationist doctrine) or in which it decides to become involved as a balancing factor, in the power game (implicitly, being reconfirmed as a global leader).*

On the other hand, we must pay attention to the Trump administration's intention to replace the TPP with a network of regional bilateral agreements, which means that the USA may use the Roosevelt doctrine part which entails solely warning the potential rival about the possibility to relinquish a capacity

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ George N. Tzogopoulos, *Trump, Globalization and China*, BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 588, September 15th, 2017, pdf.

⁴⁶ Henry Kissinger, *quoted op.*, p. 245.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, pp.244-245.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 245.

(the TPP), which is the USA's regional instrument of supremacy, *without this move affecting its capacity to become involved in the region* (replacing the TPP with *bilateral agreements*, which means that the USA maintains its position of *regional leader*). This would mean that *the USA threatens* its potential rivals in the region with an *apparent* withdrawal from the region (by withdrawing from the TPP), while making diplomatic moves *to replace the TPP with bilateral agreements with the countries in the region* ("*the USA stays in the region*"). Withdrawal from the TPP would be solely a *warning* given by the USA that it is sufficiently capable and flexible, being able to become involved in the region in various ways and *to continue to be a regional leader without the TPP, therefore without the obligations specific to an agreement such as the TPP (a strategic move, found in the Roosevelt doctrine)*.

On a different note, this could also entail that *the USA's withdrawal from the TPP would be a strategic move to deceive its potential rivals in the Asia-Pacific region* (which may think that the USA is withdrawing from the region, thus being encouraged to attempt an overly costly involvement and being caught in "*the strategic trap of the regional leadership*") – a strategic move *specific to the new Trump administration, which is an original element of the Trump doctrine*.

Regarding China's presence in the region, it is not a new one, nor is it triggered by the Trump administration's new strategic move. On the contrary, China's influence in the region has seen an increase before the Trump administration, being based on *regional integrationist* projects such as the FTAAP (creating an Area of Free Trade in the Asia-Pacific region), as well as the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), which is now an authentic plan of regional integration, supported by China, which entails an element of connection to APEC (organization controlled by China, which is meant to provide an alternative to the TPP)⁴⁹. The challenge faced by China when providing alternate solutions is that of supervising and responding to the reactions of the 11 partner countries in the TPP, after USA's withdrawal, to their intention to continue this agreement without the USA⁵⁰.

As the protectionist doctrine develops under the Trump administration, we witness the development of *a new trend in China's foreign policy, given that so far it has focused explicitly on protecting the multilateralist formula and the UN principles* (based on the pre-eminence of the principle of observing the sovereignty of the states, protecting territorial integrity⁵¹, as well as on the right of each state to self-determine its economic and political system; such principle is construed as *an anti-globalist principle*, which opposes the sovereignty of states to the economic interdependence brought on by the age of globalization).

This time, we note that *China is facing a paradox of its diplomacy*: either it continues to pursue the strict observance of the *UN principles* (which are

⁴⁹ George N. Tzogopoulos, *Trump, Globalization and China*, BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 588, September 15, 2017, pdf.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ Jiemian Yang, ed., *Chinese Diplomacy. Theory and Practice*, World Century Publishing Company, NJ, 2014, pp. 40, 184.

sovereignty, Westphalian principles, having nothing in common with globalization) by the states, at international level, or it initiates a Chinese globalist project, by making the strategic move to strengthen its international presence and asserting its position as “the new global leader”, “initiator of an Asian globalization”, “protector of globalization and free trade benefits”, as well as open “opponent to protectionism”⁵².

According to the analysts, an interesting aspect is the *difference in perspective over globalization, between the USA and China*. If for China the role of global leader would entail the obligation to become promoter of democracy and observance of human rights at global level⁵³, based on the globalization model implemented so far by the USA, such a role would be a *serious challenge for China’s internal policy, first of all*. Thus, although it does not drop the idea of becoming global leader of guaranteeing a global order, *China rejects global leadership responsibilities stemming from the model of American globalization (promoting liberal democracy, observing the human rights, humanitarian interventions)*⁵⁴, which would contradict the traditional tone of the Chinese diplomacy, *i.e. following the UN principles of non-involvement in internal affairs, sovereignty and equality of rights among all the states. Nothing seems more challenging to China, up to the point where it becomes a strategic trap, than an USA doctrine of protectionism, i.e. the USA stepping down from the role of global leader*. China and any other emerging power would have to take on this global leader role, to develop, support (from the military and economic standpoint) its own form of globalization, to develop a global diplomacy, a global network of legal regimes, institutions and agreements, which it would have to support financially.

The burden of alter-American globalism would become an authentic trap for any emerging power, with the current global leader, the USA, stepping down from institutions, agreements, mechanisms, global visions which have supported it so far. Traditionally, China’s policy has focused on the vision of pre-eminence of states’ sovereignty, when compared to the policy implemented by the western states, *i.e. observing the doctrine of observing the universal human rights. It is difficult for China to fill a power vacuum at global level, left by USA’s withdrawal from the global agreements, and to assert its position as new responsible superpower, which promotes what the international community is accustomed to (values of economic liberalism, democracy and human rights). For China, this is not only an economic challenge, but also a strategic and ideological challenge, raising a global strategic dilemma*.

We could say that, *by implementing the protectionist doctrine, the Trump administration creates one of the greatest challenges for all the emerging powers of the world, when it comes to taking on the role of global leader and the specific responsibilities (economic and ideological, as well)*.

⁵² George N. Tzogopoulos, *Trump, Globalization and China*, BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 588, September 15, 2017, pdf.

⁵³ Henry Kissinger, *quoted op.*, p. 188.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

Instead of conclusion

The world order is undergoing a complex reset process, with the great powers seeking the most appropriate strategies and projects for their national interest. The USA seems to relinquish its position as leader of globalization, as well as supporting a costly global order. Instead, it chooses protectionism, withdrawal from the global agreements, rejection of the regional integrationist tendency and free trade at global level.

We could say that *the USA redefines its position as defender of sovereignty, Westphalian principles (since we can categorize the Trump doctrine as a doctrine of Neo-Westphalism), while China chooses to create a new global order, a Chinese globalization model, for a doctrine of global free trade which allows it to become involved in alternate networks of global and regional agreements and treaties, in various regions of the planet, which determines the implementation of a doctrine which visibly opposes protectionism (a turning point for its foreign policy).*

An even more interesting aspect, China's opening towards the world can be construed as China fully exploiting a "post-American century", in which it is challenged to support financially the burden of the global order, to maintain peace and security at international level, as "a global leader". This role, *as well as the USA encouraging China to take it on can also be a strategic trap to intentionally weaken China's rising power, by encouraging it to take on the burden of providing multi-dimensional support to a global order, to replace the network abandoned by the USA with its own network of global agreements and to supply the world with a Chinese model of globalization, as an alternative to the American one.*

However, this huge challenge can be the downfall of China, from the economic standpoint and from other perspectives, as it has to support its own economy and a viable global economic order, at the same time, to reset all the existing institutions or to create its own set of global and financial institutions, capable of ensuring the proper functioning of this "Chinese global order".

The "Chinese century" paradigm could be a far too great a challenge for China, even from its "emerging power" position ("rising China"), starting from the specific challenge in the Asia-Pacific region.

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