



МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ И МИРОВАЯ ПОЛИТИКА

## Геополитические цели КНР в Арктике

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**Аннотация:** Китайская Народная Республика с каждым днем увеличивает свое влияние во всем мире. Трудно не заметить агрессивную экономическую экспансию, проводимую Китаем в азиатском регионе. Китайское присутствие ощущается в Африке, Южной Америке и даже в Европе. Ввязавшись в торговую войну с США, Китай тем самым бросил вызов самой влиятельной экономике мира, что подтверждает его амбиции мирового лидера. Для удовлетворения подобных амбиций необходимо мощное транспортно-логистическое обеспечение, что породило инициативу «Пояса и пути». Инициатива «Один пояс - один путь» объединяет два проекта: «Экономический пояс Шёлкового пути» и «Морской Шёлковый путь XXI века». Это означает, что помимо традиционных сухопутных направлений Шелкового пути, Пекин прорабатывает морские пути вдоль африканского континента и в Тихом океане. Так как инициатива не имеет четкой стратегии, ставшие в последнее время актуальными северные маршруты также рассматриваются китайскими властями. Поиск альтернативы Суэцкому каналу не раз наталкивал исследователей на мысль об использовании Северного морского пути как торговой артерии, связывающей Европу и Азию, однако климатические условия и технические возможности не позволили реализовать эту идею. Современная ситуация в арктическом регионе позволяет говорить о новых перспективах освоения.

Китай активно интересуется Арктикой: начиная с 2013 года он имеет статус наблюдателя в Арктическом Совете, ведет наращивание своего присутствия в регионе путем организации научных экспедиций, строительством ледоколов, внедрением собственного бренда «Северный шелковый путь», а также инвестируя в такие проекты как «Ямал СПГ». Видение своего присутствия в арктическом регионе Китай изложил в Белой книге, опубликованной в январе 2018 года. Одной из основных целей, которую ставит перед собой Пекин, является многостороннее сотрудничество по развитию Северного морского пути.

Автор статьи анализирует истоки подобного интереса, а также возможные угрозы для России. Исследование также рассматривает позицию европейских партнеров в участии освоения СМП, двухсторонние связи с китайской стороной и соотношение стратегии Европейского Союза, Китая и России на Крайнем Севере. Автор дает геополитическое обоснование китайским инициативам, которые направлены на создание условий для интенсивного судоходства в северных акваториях.

**Ключевые слова:** Арктика, российско-китайские отношения, Северная Европа, Северный Морской путь, Северный Шелковый путь, геополитика

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## Chinese geopolitical goals in the Arctic

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**Abstract:** The People's Republic of China is increasing its influence around the world every day. It's hard not to notice the aggressive economic expansion being carried out by China in the Asian region. Chinese presence is felt in Africa, South America and even in Europe. By engaging in a trade war with the United States, China thereby challenged the most influential economy in the world, which is confirmed by its ambitions as a world leader. To meet these ambitions, a powerful transport and logistics support is necessary, which gave rise to the "Belts and Ways" initiative. The initiative "One Belt - One Road" combines two projects: "The Economic Belt of the Silk Road" and "The Sea Silk Road of the XXI Century". This means that, in addition to the traditional land routes of the Silk Road, Beijing is exploring the sea routes along the African continent and in the Pacific Ocean. Since the initiative does not have a clear strategy, the northern routes that have recently become relevant are also considered by the Chinese authorities.

The search for an alternative to the Suez Canal has repeatedly prompted researchers to use the Northern Sea Route as a trading artery linking Europe and Asia, but climatic conditions and technical capabilities did not allow this idea to be realized. The current situation in the Arctic region allows us to talk about new development prospects.

China is actively interested in the Arctic: since 2013, it has an observer status in the Arctic Council, has been increasing its presence in the region by organizing scientific expeditions, building icebreakers, introducing its own brand "Northern Silk Road", and also investing in projects like "Yamal LNG". China outlined its presence in the Arctic region in a white paper published in January 2018. One of the main goals that Beijing sets for itself is multilateral cooperation in the development of the Northern Sea Route.

The author of the article analyzes the origins of such interest, as well as possible threats to Russia. The study also examines the position of European partners in the participation of the development of the SMP, bilateral relations with the Chinese side and the ratio of the strategy of the European Union, China and Russia in the High North. The author gives a geopolitical rationale for Chinese initiatives that are aimed at creating the conditions for intensive navigation in the northern areas.

**Keywords:** Arctic, Russian-Chinese relations, Northern Europe, Northern Sea Route, Northern Silk Road, Geopolitics

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## INTRODUCTION

The fact of China's economic predominance became obvious, and if the demarche under the banner of Marxism-Leninism to capitalism already gives China the opportunity to resist the USA in the trade war, it's a signal for the final collapse of hegemony and the beginning of a natural multipolar world. Economic expansion of Beijing can be noticed in every corner of the world, even in the Arctic region, where changes of climate situation give opportunities in mining and logistic spheres.

There are many Chinese companies that want to develop the Northern Sea Route for trade with Europe and extract minerals in the region and their number is constantly growing. For example, in July 2016, the Chinese transport giant Cosco announced plans to send six additional ships to the Arctic. China invests considerable funds in the development of Greenland. Last year, Shenghe Resources bought 12.5% of Greenland Minerals and Energy A / S shares and became its largest shareholder. According to the agreement, Shenghe has the right to increase its share in the flagship project of the Greenland uranium mining company in Kwanfjelde to 60%. Beijing in the North is also presented by a number of diplomats in Chinese Embassy in Iceland (population of country is 350 000 habitants). The publication by the Administration of Maritime Security of the Ministry of Transport of the People's Republic of China in April 2016 is also significant that it is in Chinese.

The declaration of intention was a recent attempt to buy the former Danish military base by Chinese businessmen [1]. After the closure of the base in 2014, it got private ownership. The government of Denmark returned it to the state property, so it avoided Chinese purchase. Using such tools as scientific diplomacy and the realization of ambitious economic goals creates a serious platform for the development of the region. The Polar Research Institute in Beijing forecasts that in 2020, 5% -15% of the country's export can be carried through the Arctic and this figure will grow, as the exploitation of waterways will provide access to the resource base of the Arctic, thereby accumulating the transportation of goods [2].

Last January China published its first official strategy for the Arctic presence, which targets national companies to develop traffic through the Northern Sea Route (NSR), and to invest in infrastructure-based Arctic projects. The Chinese government realizes that Russia is currently the main player in the northern latitudes and therefore Russian-Chinese relations can provide a push for the development of the region.

## RUSSIA AND CHINA

Joint development of mineral assets implies the development of infrastructure on the ground and ports for the transportation of raw materials, which makes it advantageous to use the Northern Sea Route. The Yamal-LNG pro-

ject may become a main engine for development of the northern territories together with the Middle Kingdom, the share of Chinese is 29.9% (National Oil and Gas Company 20% and Silk Road Fund 9.9%). July 19, 2018 two tankers - gas carriers "Vladimir Rusanov" and "Eduard Tolle" went to the port of Jiangsu County Zhudong. Ice class tankers Arc 7 passed the ice part of the NSR from the port of Sabetta to the east without icebreaker escort, and they did it in record time. (The net travel time was 19 days compared to 35 days of delivery along the traditional route through the Suez Canal and the Malak Strait). The next LNG project Arctic LNG-2 on the Gydan Peninsula is at the design stage.

The "trade war" of the US and China affected the supply of LNG from the United States. Despite the long-term contracts signed with the Chinese industry giants, the volume of American natural gas supplies to China fell to a minimum in 2018 and amounted to 130 thousand tons in July this year. At the same time, LNG supplies have been increased by Russia, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea [3]. By 2030, China is expected to increase LNG imports to 52 billion cubic meters, that gives the ground for thinking about the activation of the development of northern deposits.

Dixon port, Tiksi port and Pevek port can become the starting points for transportation of coal, timber, metals and hydrocarbons. Initially, the Chinese experts did not touch upon the issue of the implementation of the Northern Silk Road project, which in fact runs through the NSR, but the released strategy (White paper) makes clear about China's primary tasks in the Arctic. The gradual integration of Beijing into the Arctic-interested countries by obtaining observer status in the Arctic Council, by the development of deposits in Greenland and by the establishment of relations with the

Nordic countries proves China's great interest in the division of the "melting Arctic pie".

Russia remains the main player in the Arctic region. Beijing is aware of it and strives to improve relations with its northern neighbor. However, it should be noted that the new Russian policy of pivot to Asia began to take place at the expense of the regional balance of dependence: China was replaced by Europe, which was too much betted. Asymmetric economic power of Russia and China in the past was mitigated by the diversification of ties. Excessive dependence on the southern neighbor could undermines Russia's neutrality regarding the contradictions between China and Japan, which will negatively affect Russian-Japanese ties, which in turn will further exacerbate its dependence. A rapprochement with an Asian partner can lead to another heavy uneven partnership. Russia can agree with China's economic leadership as an inevitable reality, but it should not allow China to dominate. This is especially true concerning Chinese intentions in the Arctic region, the development of which for Moscow is a task of federal significance.

Despite the seeming goodwill of Russia to Chinese investors, in fact, the global projects that have been proposed recently to Beijing are either difficult to implement or unprofitable, for example, the "Belkomur" railway project and the port in Arkhangelsk after the Chinese refused to invest for a long time remain unnecessary. Another example is the idea of privatization of "Sovcomflot". Following the results of the first half of 2017 "Sovcomflot" showed the decline in net profit 11 times, to \$ 15.2 million [4]. The successful cooperation in the "Yamal LNG" project has its prehistory. Initially, it was aimed at meeting the country's own needs, however, the review of the contract for the "Strength of Siberia" project for the price of gas supplied and "enticement" of

Beijing by American LNG suppliers spurred the creation of an alternative export offer.

PRC pragmatically considers Russian proposals to invest in projects to develop the Arctic region, that is why, after a long analysis of the prospects for the construction of the Belkomur railway, the Chinese company Poly Technologies, Inc refused to invest 5.5 billion dollars, refocusing on Europe.

### CHINA AND THE EU

By positioning itself as one of the leaders of the multipolar world, China shows interest in all transport projects, it cannot be said that the Arctic is the main sphere of Beijing's interests, and the construction of the icebreaker is not the opening of the race for the development of the region, but it should be stressed that the only exit from the South China Sea is under the control of the United States, China needs an alternative option, since there is a possibility of growing tensions between the two powers. There is no need to talk about the near intensive use of the NSR: the ice situation is not stable, the northern seas are shallow, no return cargo is provided, but even if these factors can be worked out, the question remains about the status of the NSR. Russia is unlikely to agree to make the sea route international, as it runs through the territory of inland waters and it is simply not profitable. Unfortunately, with increasing interest in the Arctic, the northern countries, including the US, are asking about the legitimacy of the legal status of the NSR. China is not in that number, but the Chinese way of doing foreign policy activity does not reveal its true goals. It is obvious that the presence of an icebreaker fleet, specialized military units in the Arctic and Russia's principled position of preserving its leading role make international actors act cautiously in this region.

It is noteworthy that the unfolding "trade war" between China and the United States and the recent vague tour to Europe by D.Trump

pushes the European countries towards China, thereby allowing the process of realizing not only the land "Silk Road" but also the "Northern Silk Road". In this process, the countries of Northern Europe are actively involved. So, for example, Finland and Norway decided to jointly develop a railway construction project that would connect Suomi with the Northern Sea Route. As a destination point for exports and imports of goods from/to Finland was proposed a port, which is located 15 km from the border on Russia. "This is also a great day for China, which will receive a new entrance ticket to Europe," said Kenneth Stolsett, head of the Norwegian research organization Sør-Vanganger Utvikling, in his interview with the Norwegian edition of E24.

Currently there has been a trend of economic absorption of Europe by China, during one year, business representatives from the Middle Kingdom, in whole or in large shares, acquired 309 large European companies. Including 68 German, 47 British and 34 in France and Italy, whereas ten years ago China invested only 51 enterprises in Europe [5]. The growth of Chinese investment to enterprises on which the economic and technological power of European countries is based ultimately leads to an increase in the lobbying of investors' interests on the political mechanism at all levels - from local to federal, including Brussels. This complicates the EU's awareness and formation of its own geopolitical subjectivity. More recently, for the first time in history, the German Cabinet voted to block the potential purchase of the German machine tool maker Leifeld Metal Spinning AG by the Chinese company Yantai Taihai Group, which proves the serious concern of European politicians regarding such a rapid advance of the Middle Kingdom.

### «SNOW DRAGON» OR «ICE SNAKE»

After the intensive process of evolution of foreign policy doctrines, China is close to

forming its own school of geopolitics, where Western approaches are integrated in such pillars of China as the Great Silk Road and the Great Wall. A similar trend may affect the “Northern Silk Road”. This is the “anaconda principle” developed by the American researcher A. Mahan. This formula requires almost absolute superiority at the sea, and therefore, huge funds invested in all its components. At the same time, it allows us to establish control over the World Ocean and to close any paths along which the economy and the enemy’s army can be supplied.

The attachment to international trade allowed using the “anaconda principle” in order to cut any state from the sea. In our time, without access to the seas with subsequent access to the World Ocean, no single power can consider itself great. So, the “anaconda principle” is still effective.

In the Civil War in the United States, the “anaconda principle” was successfully applied against Southerners by General D. McClellan [6]. His troops consistently cut off the southern agricultural states.

Pay attention to the “Northern Silk Road”. Here we see coverage of about 90% of the water areas of the coast of Russia. The development of this water corridor provides an excellent opportunity to apply the principle of Mahan in practice, the cornerstone of it is transport vessels, ports with goods and cheap labor.

If Mahan’s formula had three components: the navy, the merchant fleet and military bases, then in the Chinese interpretation, where the economic component is at the head, it is the same merchant fleet, the means for economic absorption and the human resource.

Analyzing the “anaconda principle” in its classical application, the creation of military bases, the use of color revolutions and “low intensity conflicts”, as, in case of Russia, they were the instruments in the North Caucasus re-

gion. Such approaches contradict the principle of peaceful development of the PRC. Given economic component, the Middle Kingdom is closer to buy foreign companies, to provide loans for the use of “debt trap”, to send its “peace contingent” as diplomats, migrants and even tourists.

With the emerging cooperation of Russia and China in the development of the Arctic region, there is a threat of becoming completely dependent on the PRC, which neutralizes any attempts by the Kremlin to stay on the distance from China.

Even in the case of Moscow refusal to cooperate with its partner in the northern latitudes, Beijing can organize a coalition consisting of European countries to assign the international status of the NSR by force.

It is worth noting that the EU was sluggish regarding the development of the Arctic region, but recently due to Finland, Brussels has joined the process and in 2016 presented a comprehensive strategy in the region. In the field of international cooperation, the EU rely on organizations such as the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Northern Dimension Program, and so on. But given the latest trends, Beijing may be the main partner of Brussels in the Arctic.

Thus, in the case of the EU / PRC bundle, the only significant actor in the international arena that can support the preservation of the status of the NSR is the United States. Unfortunately, in the rhetoric of the “Cold War” between the US and Russia it is difficult to imagine that the American establishment will advocate preserving the status of the NSR with the aim of seeing a strong Russia, as Hillary Clinton said once in her interview to a Russian television channel.

China can seriously resort to the “anaconda principle” in the Arctic, it takes a lot of effort and money to implement the plan, and it will take much time, which is, it is fair to say, in

the spirit of Chinese politics. Several articles of Chinese researchers are devoted to favorable conditions for the development of the NSR because of the cancellation of the moratorium on fish production in the Arctic Ocean in 15 years, which confirms their foresight.

In December 2017, the VII International Arctic Forum was held in St. Petersburg, where a small report was made by a Singaporean researcher. The main idea of his report was the creation of “monotown” on the water, which can exist autonomously in the Arctic Ocean. Attached to one of the glaciers “monotown” will be protected from the storm and be autonomous for a long time, the glacier acts as a breakwater and a source of fresh water. Perhaps in 15-20 years, China will borrow this idea and the issue of the status of the NSR will cease to be relevant, the “Northern Silk Road” will pass through several such port cities without going into the internal waters of Russia.

## CONCLUSIONS

Russian policy in the Arctic is difficult to call a protection policy, rather a balanced approach. Without investments and cooperation with China, the Arctic region will not develop profoundly. The demonstration of military potential in the northern latitudes gives a clear signal to the whole world that this region is very important from the point of view of not only economic development preferences but also to ensure the country’s security, so any attempts to shake Russia’s position in the Arctic region will have an immediate reaction.

Considering the Arctic without the Far East is a one-sided position, especially if it concerns

the NSR project. The Russian Government is taking measures to develop the Far East - the creation of free trade zones, the territories of advanced development, the “Far Eastern hectare” program and important international events, such as the Eastern Economic Forum. The program of cooperation between the regions in the Far East of Russia and the north-east of China signed in 2009 by the heads of states Dmitry Medvedev and Hu Jintao ends this year and is likely to be extended on the EEF. The question how much the Russian side is ready to open its doors this time remains relevant.

China’s economic expansion is becoming an ubiquitous phenomenon that has to be taken for granted. Nevertheless, one cannot afford to get into the “debt trap”[7], which Middle Kingdom actively uses as part of the implementation of the “Belt and the Road”, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have already paid for it selling their companies, ports and even territories. It is obvious that Russia can pay its debts to the Chinese side, but if it comes to such projects of a planetary scale as the development of the NSR, it will take a long time to pay off.

Another tool is the tourist flow from China, which is growing every year. Now it is aimed at the Arctic region. Orientation to the consumer is a natural process in any business, so if in 5-10 years you can see inscriptions in the Chinese language in the Russian Arctic territory, then the “anaconda ring” has begun to constrict and all the efforts that are now being implemented in the northern latitudes are in vain.

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