US-China Strategic Rivalry under Trump Administration and Its Impacts on A Number of Nations and Regions

Tran Ngoc Hung[1]

[1] Military Science Academy, Ministry of Defence.
Email: ngochung7390@gmail.com

Received on 7 February 2021. Revised on 9 March 2021. Accepted on 12 March 2021.

Abstract: The US-China relationship is one of the focal points of the world and is of great significance in shaping the landscape of international relations in the 21st century. After becoming the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China in 2012, Mr Xi Jinping came up with the "Chinese Dream" strategy to increase China's power and position on a global scale. Meanwhile, the US was increasing the promotion of the "Pivot to Asia" strategy to play an active role and maintain its constant presence in the region under President Barack Obama. In general, the relationship between the two countries is a combination of cooperation and competition. However, China's assertiveness then caused the relationship to turn increasingly to fierce confrontation and competition in all key domains. Especially, under President Donald Trump's tenure, the US-China rivalry was more intense in the context of the world with many uncertainties.

Keywords: US-China, strategic competition, interests, restraining, strengthening.

Subject classification: Political science

1. Introduction

The US-China relationship is generally a mixture of cooperation and competition depending on each historical period, but now the competition is taking the mainstream. After the terrorist incident occurred in New York on 11 September 2001, China expressed its support for Washington's war on terror. In response to this, the US supported China to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in the same year, as well as Beijing's export-oriented economy. That was an important premise for China's rapid economic development.

However, the economic growth has enabled China to expand its influence regionally and globally; whereas threatening the US position and role. Moreover, China has risen faster than any other major powers in the modern history, which led to the US facing a rising power for the first time and

striking a complex balance of competition and cooperation with China itself [3, p.316]. Under President B. Obama, Washington implemented the "Pivot to Asia" strategy - also known as the "Asia Rebalance" - to restrain China. Therefore, during the period, strategic competition in US-China relations was clearly shaped [10]. More importantly, the confrontation became more and more fierce under President Donald Trump and was specifically shown in a number of major domains such as politics, economics, security, science and technology (S&T), cyberspace, and so on.

2. Background

Rivalry between the United States and China has become a common topic in international relations over the years. In general, the US-China strategic competition is in an unstable regional and international environment. Around the world, the emergence of the so-called Islamic State, the fierce war in Syria, the Brexit issue, the escalating tensions in the East Sea disputes, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) intensifying nuclear weapons testing, increasing tendency of nationalism and isolationism, and the COVID-19 epidemic made the international situation more complicated and unpredictable. In addition, while protracted conflicts in the Middle East and Africa have not found a radical solution, many new hotspots are likely to flare up, including the Asia-Pacific region. Although peace, cooperation and development are still the key trends, multilateralism and regional and global mechanisms still face many obstacles. Along with that, the strategic friction and competition for influence among countries in the region continue to be tense, even becoming fierce confrontation in issues of close interests.

It can be seen that the US pivot to the Asia-Pacific since the end of 2011 was aimed at restraining China, thereby maintaining the US leading position in this region. To support the pivot strategy, Washington had actively promoted multilateral fora without Beijing's participation, engaged in maritime disputes in the East Sea and East China Sea, and deployed a defence system in the Republic of Korea (ROK). However, despite still playing a leading role in the world, the US power had been reduced due to its economic stagnation and the Obama administration's indecision. Furthermore, the US power was dispersed at the same time for many fronts to solve problems and to fight against opposing forces on a global scale, thereby creating an unfavourable international environment for Washington. Domestically, Mr B. Obama's administration lost the confidence of many of the American people, leading to Democrats losing control of both the Houses into the hands of the Republicans, so the US pivot strategy did not achieve the desired results [19].

Responding to the US strategy, after taking power in 2012, Chinese President Xi Jinping abandoned Deng Xiaoping's strategy of "hiding our capacities and biding our time" (keeping a low profile), promoting the "Chinese Dream" (China renaissance) to make China a global power. With assertive steps backed by abundant economic resources, taking advantage of the beneficial international context and the US quagmire, Beijing has

significantly increased its global power by intensifying a role in a number of international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the international forum for the governments and central bank governors from 19 countries and the European Union (G20 Summit), even taking lead in some of them, such as the group composed by the five major emerging countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), or investing in and sponsoring projects of huge capital on a global scale. In particular, the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), which Beijing launched, is aimed at strengthening its role and influence on the geopolitical and geo-economic spheres. That has forced Washington to intensify its competition for the regional and global leadership [16].

After Mr D. Trump took office as President, the change in US-China relations made the regional security environment increasingly precarious. With its power changed fundamentally and the correlation with the US also changed a lot, Beijing established and strengthened multiple major international mechanisms to counterbalance the mechanisms and frameworks that Washington had built. While the scope of the strategic dispute between the two countries was found throughout the Indo-Pacific region, its focus is Asia. The US remarkable moves were to consolidate relations with key allies; promote cooperation with new partners; establish and expand alliances and multilateral strategic cooperation; and strengthen the military presence, and promote the expansion of joint exercise frameworks in the region. In the same period, China made strong progress of challenging America's position of being a sole super-power, using "soft power" (economic and commercial interests) to gather forces and increase political and security ties to countries in the region. Moreover, through many strategies such as the BRI, "the Asia Security Initiative", "Community of Shared Future for Mankind", Beijing exerted strong impact on the security environment, setting up a security structure under the "flying geese" model[2], to, step by step, push Washington out of and control the entire Indo-Pacific region [1, p.25].

3. US-China strategic rivalry under Trump administration in a number of key domains

3.1. In terms of politics

After taking office, President Donald Trump criticised his predecessor's policies towards China [6, p.1], which [he said] had made the US then facing a big competitor. For the US, the rise of China was considered as an opportunity for Beijing to consolidate, increase influence and compete for the position of the world's leader with Washington, especially via the "Made in China 2025" plan and the "Belt and Road Initiative" [34]. Therefore, the Trump administration has implemented a tougher and more pragmatic diplomacy that focused strongly on protecting the US interests from Beijing. The American political system then considered China a strategic rivalry and attempted to limit the benefits that Beijing could get from the liberal international order [4, p.175]. These views are mentioned

in important US documents such as the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy or the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report. Most Republicans and Democrats are not sympathetic towards China. A survey by the Pew Research Centre revealed that up to 70% of Republicans and 59% of Democrats consider China's rise in economic and military power to be a threat to the US [29].

On the Chinese side, Beijing advocated constructing a "new type of great power relations" with the US President Xi Jinping, in his opening address to 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in October 2017, also stating that China's international profile had been raised to an unprecedented level. Besides, China must take advantage of the "period of opportunity" that is still opened to its ambitions to assert itself and be recognised as a great power [5, p.79]. China, based on its economic strength, seeks to bring many countries into its orbit of influence via economic aids. It also actively invested in development projects and programmes in many countries around the world via bilateral cooperation agreements and linkage mechanisms and initiatives such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and AIIB. Furthermore, China also initiated and promoted the BRI to expand its sphere of influence and comprehensively competed both on land and at sea with the US. In that way, Beijing had been trying to entice countries, even the US allies and partners (such as Japan, the ROK, Thailand, India, Australia, the Philippines) to join the initiatives and strategies.

Having partially controlled the COVID-19 epidemic, China stepped up health diplomacy and anti-epidemic diplomacy, providing "international public goods", supporting other countries with activities such as donating medical masks and ventilators to nations in Southeast Asian and South Asia, as well as a number of European countries. Besides, Beijing said it was also willing to share its experiences of COVID-19 epidemic prevention and control with other countries to counter the US accusation that the origin of the epidemic was China. In addition, it also exerted efforts to use domestic and foreign media to promote its world leading position in the fight against COVID-19 and play down the role of the US.

3.2. In terms of economics

Since the presidential election, Mr D. Trump had vowed to fully tackle the US trade deficit and criticised his predecessor for making the issue uncontrollable. China, the nation that recorded the highest trade surplus with his country, was considered by President D. Trump to have been taking advantage of its trade relationship with Washington to engage in unfair trade practices. That was considered unacceptable to a superpower like the US. It is noteworthy that the US trade deficit with China has continuously increased since Beijing's admission to the WTO.

On the other hand, the tough stance towards Beijing had increasingly received broader support from within the US administration. The most obvious example was the approval of the US Senate to pass a bill requiring Chinese companies to comply with US auditing regulations or to be delisted from the US stock exchanges. Over

the years, it can be seen that the two superpowers had overcome fundamental differences in the political system, not only for peaceful coexistence, but also as a fulcrum for the global economy. Both countries also worked together on many important issues, including climate change and disease prevention. But that era seemed to be over. Now both the rival parties in the US agreed that Washington should take a tougher policy towards Beijing.

In 2017, the US trade deficit reached USD 568 billion, up 12% from 2016 (USD 505 billion). That led to a loss of 3.4 million US jobs [28]. In 2018, the US trade deficit (including trade in goods and services) amounted to USD 621 billion, or 3% of its GDP, up 12.5% from 2017, which is the highest level within 10 years from 2008 [12]. Taking into account the trade of goods alone, the US trade deficit with the rest of the world in 2018 was USD 891.3 billion, of which its trade deficit with China is USD 419.2 billion, accounting for 50% of its total deficit with the world. Due to their different stances in resolving the trade deficit, the bilateral relationship was highly tense, triggering of the US-China trade war. The US-China trade conflict officially broke out in July 2018 when the US tax measures on products imported from China came into effect to prevent what was said to be the latter's "unfair and non-transparent commercial practices". The year 2019 is said to be the culmination of the US-China trade war when Washington imposed billions of dollars in taxes on Chinese goods. The merchandise trade deficit with China fell 17.6% to USD 345.6 billion. By early 2020, the US had imposed a high tax of USD 550 billion on Chinese goods, nearly three times higher than the USD 185 billion of China's retaliation [37].

Notably, the US focused on strongly imposing tariffs on Chinese high-tech products, which was the main field causing its trade deficit with the latter. Technology had been one of the major pillars of the Chinese economy during the first two decades of the 21st century. But now the country also faced a big challenge, which was the heavy dependence on imports of semiconductors from abroad. Although Beijing had invested heavily in the development of its domestic semiconductor industry, there were still many limitations in the processing speed as well as the capacities of graphic design. Therefore, importing semiconductors from abroad was, for it, unavoidable [36, p.90]. Beijing had outlined a plan to increase the percentage of domestically produced semiconductors to meet the production demand of high-tech products by up to 70% by 2025, but its semiconductor manufacturing industry had met only approx. 16% of the production demand by 2019 [21].

In response, China also imposed retaliation measures against the US. After Washington announced the list of tax imposition, Beijing strongly protested and also imposed duties on goods imported from the US. However, China's tariff measures were mostly a response to the US acts of escalating tensions. Besides, it also applied other non-trade measures to minimise the negative impact of the US tax imposition. *Firstly*, China used the exchange rate policy. With the active devaluation of the yuan, the price of Chinese goods on the world market was more competitive, boosting export activities of Chinese domestic

enterprises. Simultaneously, as one of the biggest creditors of the US, China also threatened to sell US government bonds that it held to push up US long-term lending rates, negatively affecting the US government [24]. *Secondly*, China used the judicial measure, taking a lawsuit against the US via the WTO. After Washington imposed tax of 25% on steel and 10% on aluminium imported from most countries including China, as from 23 March 2018, Beijing complained to the WTO on 5 April 2018 accusing the US of violating the principle of non-discrimination, violating the organisation's tariff reduction commitments and taking advantage of protectionism under the guise of national security [9]. *Thirdly*, China released its "unreliable entity list" in retaliation against the US "entity list"; using the media to incite a boycott of US goods and US enterprises operating in China. *Fourthly*, Beijing used administrative measures to cause difficulties to US companies in China such as prolonging the licensing process or revoking business licenses, import and export licenses of US enterprises, applying discriminatory administrative regulations aimed at US businesses.

3.3. In terms of security

Although the competition in the field of security was not a new issue in the US-China relationship, the nature of competition in the overall bilateral relationship changed significantly. The US-China security conflicts had existed for many years, including matters such as the Taiwan issue, the relationship between the US and its allies, China's military modernisation, the proliferation of nuclear weapons or the East Sea issue. In the past, the US and China might seek solutions to manage the differences in security interests, but that had been changed. These differences became increasingly more acute. The new emerging security concerns and the rapid changes in strategic calculations complicated US-China security relations.

In recent years, both the US and China increased spending on the military to gain advantage in strategic competition. The National Defense Authorization Act for 2019, which President D. Trump signed on 13 August 2018, defined China as a main strategic rival of the US military in the future [2, p.426]. Washington increasingly spent on and changed the organisational structure of its military to maintain its superior position and deter Beijing. Specifically, the US budget spending on military operations steadily increased over the years, which reached USD 618.7 billion in 2017, USD 700 billion in 2018, and USD 716 billion in 2019, including the costs of overseas operations and the nuclear weapons programme [30]. In 2020, the US defence budget continued to increase to USD 738 billion, which was equivalent to the total military expenditure of other countries in the world [33]. In addition, Washington restructured and changed the functions of some forces in the direction of seeing Beijing as a primary combat target. On 30 May 2018, the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) was renamed the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) to ensure the connectivity between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Moreover, the Commandant of the United States Marine Corps David Berger announced in March 2020 that he would shift the priority of the anti-terrorism mission to

prevent China from occupying a number of islands in the East Sea and the East China Sea [23].

Meanwhile, China's military expenditure also steadily increased in recent years. It was mainly aimed at strengthening the Chinese Air Force, Navy, and cyberwarfare capabilities - which were the most likely subjects to future conflict. Furthermore, China announced on 5 March 2018 that its defence budget in 2018 was USD 174.5 billion, up 8.1% against 2016 - the highest increase in three years since 2016 [31]. It showed that Beijing's ambitions were not confined in self-defence, but also focused on developing its air force and navy, gradually shifting from the "near seas" to the more challenging "far seas", developing defence technology with modern equipment like third-generation battle tanks, fourth-generation fighter jets, nuclear submarines and the aircraft carrier Liaoning.

However, it can be seen that the Trump administration no longer remained neutral and stood apart from disputes in the East Sea as the US did during President B. Obama's tenure. Specifically, not only did the US strengthen the relations with its traditional allies and other regional countries in order to restrain China, but also cooperated with its partners outside the region (such as Japan, Australia, India, the UK, France). The security cooperation aims to facilitate Washington's increase of the intensity and level of patrol activities within the 12-nautical mile sea area of islands and rocks which Beijing illegally occupied and accreted in the East Sea. Besides, the US enlisted regional security organisations, structures and fora, like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), etc. to make tough statements on China's actions. Moreover, at the Shangri-La Dialogue held in Singapore on 2 June 2018, US Secretary of Defence James Mattis accused China of threatening neighbour countries and deploying advanced weapons in disputed waters in the East Sea [13]. In addition, the Trump administration actively exploited the Taiwan issue, which is related to the China's "core interests", as a tool to counter and contain China. President D. Trump took actions to support and strengthen relations with Taipei such as selling packages of weapons worth 1.4 billion USD to the territory, signing the Taiwan Travel Act which allowed senior officials of the US and Taiwan to visit each other. In response, China reacted harshly in order to threaten the US. Mr Li Kexin, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Chinese Embassy in Washington, said in 2017: "The day that a U.S. Navy vessel arrives in Kaohsiung is the day that our People's Liberation Army unites Taiwan with military force" [26].

While the US consolidated the relations with its allies and partners in the region, China also strengthened mutual interests with other countries, built new forms of security cooperation through the strategic partnerships. So far, Beijing has established about 70 "strategy partnerships" or "cooperation partnerships" in different forms, including those with ASEAN, the ROK, Cambodia, Thailand, and even including many American allies, such as the UK, France, Germany and Italy. Through these partnerships, China tried to undermine the US network of allies and partners in the

Asia-Pacific region. In addition, Beijing also advocated and promoted the establishment of the "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" [36]. All of the moves were aimed at minimising and neutralising the security and economic networks created by Washington to encircle and contain China.

3.4. In terms of S&T and cyberspace

During the second half of Mr Trump's tenure, the US continuously made anti-Beijing moves in all areas, from economics and technology to national security. Washington, for example, threatened to delist Chinese companies from the US stock market, banned the two most popular Chinese apps WeChat and TikTok, punished Chief Executive of Hong Kong Carrie Lam and shut down Chinese consulate in Houston, Texas. Of course, some of these moves were essentially in response to Beijing earlier actions such as passing a wide-ranging new security law for Hong Kong or forcing US companies to transfer technology when doing business in China [11]. Besides, US social networks and apps were also not allowed to operate freely on Chinese territory. Furthermore, Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi also requested the US to stop interfering in China's internal affairs, and to stop limiting China's legitimate rights and interests.

4. Impacts of US-China strategic rivalry on a number of nations and regions

It can be seen that the struggle for power and influence had impacts not only on the US and China themselves, but also on a number of countries, territories and regions in the world, such as Japan, the ROK, India, Russia, or even Taiwan and Southeast Asia. These were the factors directly related to the strategic competition between Washington and Beijing along the Indo-Pacific belt under President Trump.

As for Japan, although China's growing power threatened Japanese security in many ways, Tokyo still sought to avoid making decisive choices between the US and China in the context of the ongoing strategic competition. Japan is the staunchest US ally in Asia, in part because it had few other options for protecting its security in the face of China. But Tokyo also still depended on Beijing for its economic prosperity, so the US-China rivalry posed a dilemma for Japan. Certainly, Japanese policymakers applauded the fact that Washington considered China's rise as a strategic challenge [22]. Japan also showed its response by increasing its military capabilities, to be more resolute against China's claims to a disputed group of islands, and tightened security cooperation with the US, strengthening partnerships with other powers in the region such as India and Australia, providing alternative possibilities for Indo-Pacific countries for investments in Beijing's "Belt and Road Initiative", and even diversifying economic investments out of China to the extent possible. Besides, fearing that Mr D. Trump's specific policies could lead to hasty compromises with both China and the DPRK undermining Japan's interests, Tokyo pursued a variety of hedging strategies [27]. Although Japan clearly acknowledged that the US would remain its principal external protector and as such would decisively side with Washington in any crisis involving

China, it was likely that Tokyo still sought to avoid falling into the US-China confrontation, which easily harmed Japanese interests.

For the ROK, the impact of the current US-China competition on Seoul was said to be even more complex than Japan. Seoul was still looking to defuse the dangers posed by DPRK (a country that still believed in China's protection), manage the ROK's recently growing problems with Japan and avoid regarding China as a threat despite Beijing's response to the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) and US perceptions of China as a revisionist power. In addition, the difficulties in formulating a rational strategy in such complex circumstances were exacerbated by the deep divisions within the ROK's internal politics [17]. Therefore, Seoul also fell into a dilemma in the US-China competition. Balancing trade relations with China while strengthening the alliance with the US became a huge challenge for President Moon's administration.

Like Japan, India was also directly threatened by China's assertiveness, including its territorial disputes with Beijing, the BRI, Beijing's support for Pakistan and South Asian neighbours, and the growing penetration by Beijing into the Indian Ocean. Accordingly, New Delhi welcomed the Trump administration's policy against the rise of China because balancing with Beijing has long been a part of India's foreign policy. India was not as heavily dependent on trade with China like Japan, so it was easier for New Delhi to favour Washington's fight against Beijing by strengthening its military partnership with the US to achieve that goal. However, Indian policymakers still wondered about the Trump administration's approach to confronting China as they were also targeted in Washington's globalisation war [25].

In principle, Taiwan could be the biggest beneficiary of the US-China competition. Given Taipei's enduring problems with Beijing and the fact that the current leader of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) sought to distance it from China, the US-China competition clearly had advantages for Taiwan. Despite the remaining trade disputes with Taiwan, the Trump administration encouraged more leadership interactions with Taipei, permitted the sale of advanced weapons, and strengthened defence cooperation to prevent potential Chinese military attacks. However, besides the positive factors, Taiwan still faced a number of problems. In addition to a stark domestic political divide between the DPP supporting the protection of the identity of an independent Taiwan and the Kuomintang (KMT) still hoping for peaceful reunification, Taiwan's economy depended on cooperation with China [14]. Taiwanese companies remained important suppliers of electronic components to the Chinese industry and were unable to retreat at will, and many of them were affected by US tariffs. Therefore, Taiwan was also unable to pursue policies that would provoke China and increase risks to its security.

The impact of US-China competition on Russia and other countries in the post-Soviet space had similarities as well as substantial differences from the impact on other regions of the world. Russia is a competitor to the US, and the Trump administration considered it a revisionist country in the international system. In

recent years, Sino-Russia relations deepened as Washington persisted in its efforts to limit Moscow's influence in Eastern Europe and Central Asia [18]. While China's growing interest in both of these regions was likely to undermine Russia's traditional role, the way that both China and Russia viewed the US as the most important threat led to Sino-Russia relations skilfully handled with a focus on the common goal of undermining US power. The partnership between Moscow and Beijing could be seen as fine. The escalating US-China strategic competition had in fact provided new opportunities for Russia to exploit its own competition with Washington. If Russia's position was testament to the saying "the enemy of my enemy is my friend", the attitudes of East European and Central Asian nations reflect the dilemma that happened in Asia. Those countries recognised the benefits of Chinese investment (Beijing itself focused on the region as part of the BRI), but at the same time also hoped to have a closer partnership with the US to protect their security against Russia [8].

For Southeast Asia in general and ASEAN in particular, the US-China competition was not only strongly influencing the peace, stability and development of the region, but also creating opportunities and challenges for countries in the region. In the current world political situation, Southeast Asian countries had the opportunity to increase their role in their relations with powers, as well as maintain ASEAN's central role and position as a key driving force in a new regional structure that was taking shape, ensuring peace and stability for the region as well as each of the member state. The fact that China and the US actively promoted economic and trade relations and investment with Southeast Asian countries contributed to promoting the development of the prosperity of the regional countries [6].

In particular, Southeast Asian countries basically all considered the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) strategy of President Donald Trump's administration to be an opportunity to develop, create stability in themselves as a country and in the entire region, improve their position in the international community (though they earn different positions in the US plan). However, while strengthening relations with Washington, especially in the fields of security and defence, the countries did not want to miss chances for trade exchanges with the world's second largest economy, China. Along with this point of view, in order to minimise the economic dependence on Beijing, ASEAN member states all chose to increase market diversification. Giving up the current China-based global supply chain would cause a lot of difficulties, but countries have been showing moves to help their businesses shift investment away from China. Besides, while participating in multilateral cooperation mechanisms, countries in the region attached great importance to the role of ASEAN. ASEAN countries recognised that confronting Beijing was not an appropriate option when its strength was proving to outperform the rest of Asia. Moreover, the countries in Southeast Asia still maintained a cooperative relationship with each other despite the tendency of division (in terms of force gathering) in the region dominated by Washington and Beijing. In other words, the trend of gathering forces between nations occurred

in a more flexible and pragmatic way. A pro-US and a pro-China country could be friends as long as the interests of the parties were guaranteed.

However, maintaining a central role in the security structure in the region was not an easy task for Southeast Asian countries when the current world and regional situation had many complicated and unpredictable developments. In the process of competing for influence in the region, the US and China tried their best to impact the political world, thereby causing conflicts between the two ways of being "pro-US" and "pro-China". That created fierce competition and caused instability in the politics of the countries [15]. Thus, Washington and Beijing's tension and competition for influence in this region had a negative impact on the bilateral relations between some countries as well as the consensus in ASEAN, causing the organisation's role and reputation to decline, thereby affecting the region's common security. The fact that China took drastic military actions in the East Sea continues to be a test for the cohesion among several countries in Southeast Asia in an effort to resolve territorial sea disputes and bring a peaceful and stable environment to the region. Besides, economic development cooperation initiatives such as the "Belt and Road Initiative" and "2 + 7 Cooperation Framework" between ASEAN and China could be used by Beijing to entice ASEAN member states in the gathering of force to serve its geopolitical purposes. In addition, the US-China trade conflict affected the total amount of trade exchanges between Southeast Asian countries, the US and China, thereby negatively affecting the economic development of the countries in the region. The decline in the demand for imports of goods from Washington and Beijing would negatively impact ASEAN's growth, especially in the export-dependent economies with high export turnover [20]. In addition, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on world politics in general and US-China relations in particular made it more difficult for the countries to choose their policies. Neither the US nor China denied the opportunity to take advantage of this pandemic to gain an advantage. The COVID-19 pandemic might not change the power relationship between Washington and Beijing, but would generally deepen tensions between the two countries, thereby increasing the pressure on countries to take sides.

5. Conclusion

In general, the trend of strategic competition between the US and China under the Trump administration was extremely tense, focusing on all key domains from politics, economics, security, to S&T and cyberspace. The cooperation that Washington and Beijing established a long time before was no longer the same as it had been, because of the change in Beijing's trend of reform and opening-up, with a shift from the aim at prosperity and development, which is in line with the contemporary order, to the creation of a new order; and, in addition, China's policies on the East Sea, East China Sea, and Taiwan also made its relations with the US more difficult. The previous US administration's moves towards China took place in a hasty, methodical and systematic manner. That could be the prelude to the

US process of reorienting all of its policy positions towards China and reshaping all Washington's relations with Beijing.

However, the climax of confrontation between the US and China somewhat slowed down after Mr D. Trump's defeat to Mr J. Biden in the US election campaign that took place in late 2020. Although President J. Biden is a traditionalist and held many leadership positions in the US government apparatus, there was no rule out that the overall Washington's policy towards Beijing will not change, and the relations between the two countries will not return to the type similar to what was under President B. Obama's administration. Competition will remain a major trend in the US policy, but there are some differences in the approach. We predict that the Biden administration will behave subtly, not as harshly as the Trump administration.

On the trade issue, the Biden administration will perhaps continue to pressure on China, but it is unlikely that the US will impose more tariffs or launch a trade war with Beijing. In terms of security, the administration will increase the level of interest, more likely to promote the exploitation of issues such as Taiwan, the East Sea, the East China Sea, or even choose to use the China - India competition. In addition, President J. Biden will use multilateral mechanisms, drawing allies to exert pressure on China. Previously, Beijing repeatedly expressed its desire for the two sides to resume dialogue and build US-China relations in line with the new model of "no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation" [35]. China even actively contacted the team of President-elect Joe Biden. Accordingly, the US-China strategic competition under President J. Biden will be less tense than under his predecessor, with both Beijing and Washington having the desire to "re-design" the bilateral relationship after the past four years of ups and downs.

Notes

[1] Translator: Tran Ngoc Hung. Language editor: Ta Quang Dong.

[2] "Flying geese" is a term originated by Japanese economist Kaname Akamatsu. Accordingly, the country that plays the leading role (the leader) will use its power of economy, security and influence to "invest" in less developed countries in order to control and entice the members to follow the orbit of and depend on the leading nation. Furthermore, the manipulation is specifically stratified, creating the structure with layers shaped as an inverted "V" letter, which resembles a flight of geese.

References

[1] Đỗ Lê Chi (2020), *Việt Nam trước tác động của cấu trúc an ninh tại khu vực châu Á - Thái Bình Dương*, Nxb Chính trị quốc gia - Sự thật, Hà Nội. [Do Le Chi (2020), *Vietnam in Face of Impact of Security Architecture in Asia - Pacific Region*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi].

[2] 115th Congress Public Law 232 (2018), *John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019*, The U.S. Government Publishing Office.

[3] Campbell, K. (2016), *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia*, Hachette Book Group.

[4] Fulton, J. (2018), "The Gulf between the Indo-Pacific and the Belt and Road Initiative", *Rising Powers Quarterly*, No. 3 (2).

[5] Niquet, V. (2018), "Sino-US Strategic Tensions under Xi and Trump: Old Issues, New Approaches", *Japan Review*, No. 1 (3).

[6] The White House (2020), *United States Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China*.

[7] Woetzel, J., et al. (2019), *China and the World: Inside the Dynamics of a Changing Relationship*, McKinsey Global Institute.

[8] Avdaliani, E. (2020), "As US-China Competition Unfolds, Russia Watches Closely", *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies*, https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/us-china-russia-competition/, retrieved on 16 September 2020.

[9] Baschuk, B. (2019), "China Accuses U.S. of Abusing WTO National Security Exceptions", *Bloomberg*, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-05-28/china-accuses-u-s-of-abusing-wto-national-security-exceptions, retrieved on 16 September 2020.

[10] Blackwill, R. D. (2017), "America Needs an 'Engage and Contain' Strategy for China", *The National Interest*, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/america-needs-engage-contain-strategy-china-19791, retrieved on 13 September 2020.

[11] Bradsher, K. (2020), "How China Obtains American Trade Secrets", *The New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/15/business/china-technology-transfer.html, retrieved on 16 September 2020.

[12] Bryan, B. (2019), "Trump Made Shrinking the US Trade Deficit a Major Goal of His Trade War, But It's Instead Ballooned to $621 billion - the Highest since 2008", *Business Insider*, https://www.businessinsider.com/us-trade-deficit-trump-trade-war-tariff-scorecard-hits-highest-since-2008-2019-3, retrieved on 18 August 2020.

[13] Chandra, N. (2018), "Mattis Warns of 'Consequences' if Beijing Continues with 'Intimidation and Coercion', *CNBC*, https://www.cnbc.com/2018/06/01/james-mattis-on-south-china-sea-north-korea-and-taiwan.html, retrieved on 16 July 2020.

[14] Chen Yun-yu, Liu Kuan-ting, & William Yen (2020), "U.S.-China Competition to Continue: Academic SinicaScholar", *Focus Taiwan*, https://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/202011080006, retrieved on 22 September 2020.

[15] Chongkittavorn, K. (2018), "ASEAN's Role in US Indo - Pacific Strategy", *East - West Center*, https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/asean s-role-in-the-us-indo-pacific-strategy, retrieved on 15 January 2021.

[16] Deepak, B. R. (2014), "'One Belt One Road': China at the Centre of the Global Geopolitics and Geo-economics?", *South Asia Analysis Group*, http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/1672, retrieved on 16 September 2020.

[17] Kim, J. (2020), The U.S.-China Competition in South Korean Public Eyes, *The Asan Institute for Policy Studies*, http://en.asaninst.org/contents/the-u-s-china-competition-in-south-korean-public-eyes/, retrieved on 9 September 2020.

[18] Lynch, I. J. (2020), "What Are the Implications of China's Growing Security Role in Central Asia?", *The Diplomat*, https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/what-are-the-implications-of-chinas-growing-security-role-in-central-asia/, retrieved on 30 November 2020.

[19] Lyon, R. (2015), "America's Real Problem in Asia: Beware of the 'Assurance' Dilemma", *The National Interests*, https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/americas-real-problem-asia-beware-the-assurance-dilemma-13856, retrieved on 9 September 2020.

[20] Lê Minh (2020), "Các nước ASEAN nỗ lực khôi phục nền kinh tế hậu COVID-19", *Vietnam Plus*, https://www.vietnamplus.vn/cacnuoc-asean-no-luc-khoi-phuc-nen-kinh-te-hau-covid19/648348.vnp, truy cập ngày 25 tháng 6 năm 2020. [Le Minh (2020), "ASEAN

Countries Striving for Recovery of Their Economies after COVID-19", *Vietnam Plus*, https://www.vietnamplus.vn/cacnuoc-asean-no-luc-khoi-phuc-nen-kinh-te-hau-covid19/648348.vnp, retrieved on 25 June 2020].

[21] Naderi, B. (2019), "China's Semiconductor Industry Shifts into a Higher Gear, Here's Why", *China Daily*, https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201912/18/WS5df97fb7a310cf3e3557edc2.html, retrieved on 16 September 2020.

[22] Nagy, S. (2020), "Accommodation versus Alliance: Japan's Prospective Grand Strategy in the Sino-US Competition", *The Asan Institute for Policy Studies*, http://www.theasanforum.org/accommodation-versus-alliance-japans-prospective-grand-strategy-in-the-sino-us-competition/, retrieved on 16 October 2020.

[23] Newsham, G. (2020), "US Marines Revamp amid China's Growing Threat", *Asia Times*, https://asiatimes.com/2020/05/us-marines-revamp-with-china-front-of-mind/, retrieved on 19 September 2020.

[24] Lê Quốc Phương (2018), "Chiến tranh thương mại Mỹ - Trung: Nguyên nhân và phương thức các nước áp dụng", Tạp chí *Tài chính*, http://tapchitaichinh.vn/tai-chinh-quoc-te/chien-tranh-thuong-mai-my-trung-nguyen-nhan-va-phuong-thuc-cac-nuoc-ap-dung-301016.html, truy cập ngày 24 tháng 10 năm 2020. [Le Quoc Phuong (2018), "US-China Trade War: Causes and Methods Applied", *Review of Finance*, http://tapchitaichinh.vn/tai-chinh-quoc-te/ chien-tranh-thuong-mai-my-trung-nguyen-nhan- va-phuong-thuc-cac-nuoc-ap-dung-301016.html, retrieved on 24 October 2020].

[25] Pande, A. (2020), "Will India Choose a Side in the Competition Between the U.S. and China?", *World Politics Review*, https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29241/how-will-u-s-china-competition-affect-india-foreign-policy, retrieved on 28 October 2020.

[26] Pickrell, R. (2018), "A US Navy Ship Stopped at a Port in Taiwan, and China is not Happy", *Business Insider*, https://www.businessinsider.com/a-us-navy-ship-stopped-at-a-port-in-taiwan-and-china-is-not-happy-2018-10, retrieved on 20 October 2020.

[27] Sahashi, R. (2019), "The US-China Competition and Japan", *Society of Security and Diplomatic Policy Studies*, http://ssdpaki.la.coocan.jp/en/proposals/21.html, retrieved on 29 October 2020.

[28] Scott, R. E. & Mokhiber, Z. (2018), "The China Toll Deepens", Economic Policy *Institute*, https://www.epi.org/publication/the-china-toll-deepens-growth-in-the-bilateral-trade-deficit-between-2001-and-2017-cost-3-4-million-u-s-jobs-with-losses-in-every-state-and-congressional-district/, retrieved on 8 October 2020.

[29] Silver, L., Devlin, K. & Huang, C. (2019), "U.S. Views of China Turn Sharply Negative Amid Trade Tensions", *Pew Research Center*, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/08/13/u-s-views-of-china-turn-sharply-negative-amid-trade-tensions/, retrieved on 17 September 2020.

[30] Duy Sơn (2018a), "Lý do Trung Quốc lo ngại Đạo luật Quốc phòng mới của Mỹ", *VnExpress*, https://vnexpress.net/ly-do-trung-quoc-lo-ngai-dao-luat-quoc-phong-moi-cua-my-3792698.html , truy cập ngày 24 tháng 10 năm 2020. [Duy Son (2018a), "Reasons Why China Concerned about New US Defense Act", *VnExpress*, https://vnexpress.net/ly-do-trung-quoc-lo-ngai-dao-luat-quoc-phong-moi-cua-my-3792698.html, retrieved on 24 October 2020].

[31] Duy Sơn (2018b), "Chìa khóa giúp Trung Quốc ganh đua sức mạnh quân sự với Mỹ", *VnExpress*, https://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/the-gioi/quan-su/chia-khoa-giup-trung-quoc-ganh-dua-suc-manh-quan-su-voimy-3793249.html , truy cập ngày 24 tháng 10 năm 2020. [Duy Son (2018b), "Key That Helps China Compete in

Military Might with United States", *VnExpress*, https://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/the-gioi/quan-su/chia-khoa-giup-trung-quoc-ganh-dua-suc-manh-quan-su-voimy-3793249.html, retrieved on 24 October 2020.

[32] Tạp chí Tài chính (2020), "ASEAN trở thành đối tác thương mại hàng đầu của Trung Quốc", http://tapchitaichinh.vn/tai-chinh-quocte/asean-tro-thanh-doi-tac-thuong-mai-hang-dau-cua-trung-quoc-325718.html, truy cập ngày 20 tháng 7 năm 2020. [Review of Finance (2020), "ASEAN Becomes China's Lead Trading Partner", http://tapchitaichinh.vn/tai-chinh-quocte/asean-tro-thanh-doi-tac-thuong-mai-hang-dau-cua-trung-quoc-325718.html, retrieved on 20 July 2020].

[33] Teller Report (2019), "Shoigu: US Military Budget for 2020 Is 16 Times Larger than the Russian", https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2019-12-24---shoigu--us-military-budget-for-2020-is-16-times-larger-than-the-russian-.BygLJ5OJJI.html, retrieved on 16 September 2020.

[34] Minh Trung (2016), "Nhìn ra sao về sự trỗi dậy của Trung Quốc", *Tuổi trẻ Online*, https://tuoitre.vn/nhin-ra-sao-ve-su-troi-day-cuatrung-quoc-1181334.htm, truy cập ngày 16 tháng 9 năm 2020. [Minh Trung (2016), "How to Assess China's Rise", *TuoiTre Online*, https://tuoitre.vn/nhin-ra-sao-ve-su-troi-day-cuatrung-quoc-1181334.htm, retrieved on 16 September 2020].

[35] Xi Jinping (2015), "Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1305051.shtml, retrieved on 16 September 2020.

[36] Xinhua Net (2020), "Commentary: Why President Xi Strongly Advocates Building Community with Shared Future", http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/22/c_139388123.htm, retrieved on 20 September 2020.

[37] Wong, D. & Koty, A. C. (2020), "The US – China Trade War: A Timeline", *China Briefing*, https://www.china-briefing.com/news/the-us-china-trade-war-a-timeline/, retrieved on 16 September 2020.