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CHINA'S ENERGY INDUSTRY AS A DETERMINANT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN ASIA

Thesis

The state of energy relations in the South-East Asia and Middle East depends on China's world-power ambitions. It is a common perception that the People's Republic of China is increasing its sphere of influence, ensuring the country's energy safety by subordinating smaller and "weaker" neighbours. It can be said without any doubt that China's energy policy will determine future international relations in Asia and, indirectly, influence the shaping of a new, global order. The thesis formulated in the present article is that China's aggressive energy policy has caused drastic changes in international relations in Asia and is bound to have a negative effect on the country in the nearest future.

Key words

Energy industry, China, energy policy, South-East Asia

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China's energy-related challenges

The energy safety strategy was first recognized as part of the Chinese state's official political doctrine relatively late. It was in 2004, in China's defence white paper, that the first regulation on the broadly understood energy industry was introduced. Two years later the country's energy policy was formally elevated by Beijing authorities to the level of national concern (*guojia liyi*) and issue significant from the point of view of the national development (*guojia fazhan liyi*) (J-P. Cabestan, 2013:156). This does not mean that the Chinese government had not identified any energy-related problems before. Just the opposite. In

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1993, when the People's Republic of China became an oil importer, a debate arose among Chinese decision-makers (initially only within the Politburo and the highest rank military officers) on the possible ways of assuring constant sources of energy. Interestingly enough, members of the People's Liberation Army were the first to suggest that energy-related topics deserved a careful consideration. And the reason for that was an expected conflict in the Taiwan Strait and the lack of fuel transport routes in the south-eastern provinces.

A gradual increase in China's awareness of the need to devise a coherent energy policy stemmed from three major factors. First of all, the strategy of peaceful development, consistently implemented by China from the mid 70s, which later on took the form of confirming the country's world-power ambitions, was based on the idea of a steady economic growth. As a result of these transformations, China's energy needs started to increase rapidly. Today, despite the lowest GDP rate in 14 years, which at the end of 2013 amounted to "just" 7.7%, China's demand for energy is growing. The Chinese economy is centered on coal (over 77%), oil (10%), natural gas (4%) and, in nearly 11%, on nuclear, solar, water and wind energy (Ł. Gacek, 2012:39; International Energy Agency 2014).

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In 2013, when China dropped to the second place on the list of the world's major oil consumers (outdistancing Japan, one of its biggest rivals in the region), the growing demand for energy forced the authorities to launch a big campaign aimed at developing a coherent national energy policy.

Secondly, along with the economic transformation came profound demographic changes. In pursuit of better jobs and a higher life standard, the Chinese started to inhabit urban centres which, in turn, would gradually grow into vast megalopolises – two or three metropolises combined into borderless urban areas. Importantly, out of the nine currently identified mega-cities two are located in China (and several more are predicted to develop). The first one, situated in the valley of the Yangtze river, encompasses Nanjing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Suzhou, Ningbo, Nantong, Wuxi and Shaoxing, bringing together as many as 88 million inhabitants. The second one, located along the Pearl river and including Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Dongguan, has a population of nearly 50 million people. If we add to that dozens of "smaller" Chinese cities, we get an extremely energy-consuming mosaic that needs to be constantly supplied with energy¹. Of significance for China's demo-

¹ To make this equation complete, we should add to it the energy used by China for heavy industry which remains the driving force of the country's economy.

graphic shape is the social policy implemented by the People's Communist Party. Indeed, the authorities promised the citizens that the level of their lives would be gradually increasing, believing that fulfilling their responsibility in this respect would make the system survive. Yet the fact is that it will be impossible to keep the promise without energy-based production.

And thirdly, the need for the diversification of energy sources forced the Chinese authorities to start seeking for them abroad. Eastern, South-East and Central Asia came as the most obvious destinations. With time, China's ever more aggressive policy of sourcing raw materials brought about, on the one hand, an increase in tensions and a growing energy-related opposition on the part of the neighbours. On the other hand, it made it necessary to come up with a formula for regional cooperation².

Corporate-based strategy of broadening influence in the field of energy

In the process of developing the country's energy safety the party's officials took advantage of China's three biggest state-owned oil and gas companies, which since 2010 have been closely controlled by the National Energy Commission. From the very establishment of NEC, its leader has been Wen Jiabao, the PRC's former Prime Minister and one of the key figures among the highest rank officials of the Communist Party of China. Apart from devising the strategy and coordinating energy programmes in the country and abroad, the Commission monitors the implementation by oil companies of economy-related directives and fulfilling the aims formulated by central authorities (EastAsiaForum.org,2010)³. The Commission was established to enhance the country's overseas expansion and monitor the ever more powerful corporations. Indeed, all key Chinese enterprises, including those operating in the raw materials sector, remain under strict control of the

² The economic policy employed by China in African countries remains for its neighbours one of the most important lessons to bear in mind in the future. Indeed, the Chinese investments and the way in which the Chinese are gaining access to raw materials in Africa are commonly referred to as a new form of colonialism. It appears that China's increasing world-power ambitions imply similar, yet in this case even more severe, consequences to be observed directly along its borders.

³ To fully understand how absolutely crucial for the country's policy is NEC, one needs to realise that, as pointed out by *East Asia Forum Quarterly*, a prestigious, opinion-forming magazine, among the Commission's members are only the biggest figures from the party and government circles, including: ministers from the State Council, representatives of the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Finances, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Head of the Ministry of Public Security, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army, Heads of banks, and analysts working for the government think-tanks.

authorities, all nominations for executive positions being purely political decisions. Such a system allows for conforming to the will of the party's officials, though not always. On the other hand, such a separation from the state administration, even if purely symbolic, makes Chinese enterprises more credible in the eyes of international partners.

China Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), Sinopec (former China Petrochemical Corporation) and China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) constitute today three pillars of the country's interior and exterior policy. It is hard to precisely delineate the scope of responsibilities of each of them for they often overlap. Yet one can easily point out the main areas of their activity. CNPC manages the majority of pipelines and petrol stations in 28 provinces and 3 autonomous regions. As a result of the company's reorganization in 1999, PetroChina – a subsidiary company – was created whose main objective is to search for oil outside China, and then, refine, manufacture and market it. Interestingly enough, PetroChina is one of the companies with the highest market value in the world, being ranked as one of 12 biggest global corporations (Młynarski, 2011:222; Mehta 2014). It is through PetroChina that CNPC fulfils a great part of its main objectives. CNPC's great ambitions are best illustrated by the fact that it is now conducting big-scale exploration projects in 29 countries (Iraq, Iran, Syria, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Sudan and others⁴).

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When China National Offshore Oil Company was established in 1982, its underlying aim was to gain control (in cooperation with international partners) over the extraction of oil and gas on the Chinese Sea. With that, CNOOC became the biggest, next to PetroChina, investor realising energy-related projects outside China. According to the original plan, the CNOOC group was meant to constitute a stronghold of the communist state's careful overseas energy policy. What came as a proof of the company's expansion potential on the world markets was the loud case of the failure to acquire the California-based UNOCAL oil company. In 2005, CNOOC entered the race against the American giant CHEVRON in which the purchase was at stake of the deteriorating enterprise for the exorbitant amount of 18.5 billion dollars. Americans suggested an amount lower by nearly 2 billion dollars. And when it seemed that UNOCAL was to be acquired by CNOOC, American congressmen got involved in the issue. They convinced President G.W. Bush that the danger existed of a hostile transaction in the energy sec-

⁴ To learn more about the CNPC's investment, visit the enterprise's official website: <http://classic.cnpc.com.cn/en/cnpcworldwide/> (As for: 10.05.2014).

tor crucial for the country's economy, which, in the end, prevented the operation from being completed⁵.

Another strategic group is the Sinopec Group established in 1998. It controls the Chinese state, the scope of its operations including: industrial investments, production, storage, transmission and processing of energy resources, as well as manufacturing chemical products and extracting energy supplies from renewable sources. One can learn a lot about the type of activity performed by this group from their official website, where they offer trade consulting and share with external bodies good practices and technological solutions, except for those who are prohibited by the authorities or officially reserved for other state entrepreneurs (i.e. CNPC and CNOOC) (S. Rabinovitch, 2013).

Continent's energy mosaic

The key to understanding China's energy policy is the region located several hundred kilometers to the country's southern border. The Strait of Malacca, the shortest sea route from the West to China and the most important transport "artery" in this part of the world. The Strait connects the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, with 80% of all the oil imported from Africa and the Middle East to China being transported through it (T. Młynarski, 2011:234). In the (not quite probable today) case of the blockade of this strategic point, an interruption in the hydrocarbon supply would take place, which would strongly affect the entire country. Importantly, the role of "the police" controlling the sea waters in this region is being performed by officers of the American navy, which only fuels the anger of Beijing authorities and motivates them to take advantage of alternative supply methods. Two, consistently developed projects, came as a solution to this situation. The first one is based on the idea of intensifying the collaboration with the republics of the former Soviet Union rich in oil and natural gas deposits. Central to the second one, on the other hand, is the concept of "the string of pearls", i.e. the construction of sea infrastructure (ports and transshipment terminals) and overland pipelines as an alternative to the Malacca route.

⁵ Along with the UNOCAL scandal the discussion took place on the limits of the USA's economic freedom. Indeed, UNOCAL actually turned out to have a low strategic and market value, providing energy for only 1% of Americans. It can be argued, then, that the act of disabling the purchase was preventive in nature and revealed Americans' paralysing fear of the Asian "dragon."

In the eyes of the Chinese leaders, apart from the large deposits of energy resources, Central Asia possesses one more asset. Thanks to its location, it can also be used as a land track for the transit of products and raw materials from China to the Middle East and further to Europe (T. Młynarski, 2012:232). This vision is being embodied by the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation’s (CAREC) projects financed by international institutions such as the Asian Development Bank, the European bank for Reconstruction and Development or the Islamic Development Bank. The programme aims to create a transnational network of transport links between the main economic centres in Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Far East.⁶ China ensured that three out of six “corridors” cross its territory to finally reach Europe and Russia, running through Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan (CAREC 1); the Mediterranean Sea – through the Caucasus (CAREC 2); and Afghanistan, having crossed Kirgizstan and Tajikistan (CAREC 5).

RRS. 1 Asia’s six transnational economic cooperation corridors

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Source: <http://therearenosunglasses.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/carec-corridor-map.jpg> [16.02.2014].

⁶ More at: <http://carecprogram.org/>.

When compared to highly engaged Russia and the United States, China shows great moderation with regard to becoming involved in enterprises other than local. And while the two other global powers collaborate with the post-Soviet republics, entering into political (CIS), trade (Customs Union) and military-political alliances⁷, the Chinese are intensifying economic cooperation, investing billions of dollars in loans and infrastructure projects. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan remain key partners, although Chinese banks invest heavily also in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (A. Jarosiewicz, K. Strachota, 2013: 31).

Russia's position is making the collaboration between China and Central Asia countries difficult. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the region has been a "natural" area of Russia's influence, each, even the smallest, activity on the part of other states within its borders being interpreted by Kremlin as an outright provocation. Of significance in this respect are also social moods and attitudes, especially in Kazakhstan, where the common fright against Chinese influences is further fueled by the opposition media. Similar worries can also be observed in other republics facing constant warmings and coolings in relations with China and Russia. What people fear most, apart from excessive economic dependence, is migration from China (N.J. Steiner, 2013: 38)⁸.

Although conflicts are apparent, Chinese oil concerns are very successful in their exploration expansion in the central part of the continent. In the 1990s companies would acquire insignificant and, in great part, exploited oil fields. The state of affairs changed in 2005, when CNPC purchased in Canada shares in PetroKazakhstan, gaining access to the state deposits and establishing close collaboration with the KazMunaiGaz holding. As a result of the increased activity an oil pipeline leading from Kazakhstan to China was created. The route was constructed in stages to reach the culminating point in 2012, with the capacity of the interconnection power line having reached 12

⁷ One exception is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation within which China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan declare cooperation for the purpose of the region's safety. The potential transformation of the organisation into a properly military alliance has been an open issue for many years now and it seems that it will not change in the nearest future.

⁸ The fear of the Chinese people's migrations to Central Asia is being artificially fueled by the mass media. The available statistical data shows that the number of Chinese citizens coming to this region is actually low (except for the Siberian territory of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast). Of much greater importance in this context is the Chinese diaspora in the Southern and Southern-East Asia, where the Chinese minority dedicate themselves to trade and finances, often playing a crucial role as mediators in international business. Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand are just a few examples of countries where Chinese people, have built up a strong socio-economic position away from the homeland.

million tons of oil per year (according to the plan, it will eventually amount to 20 million tons). The construction of the pipeline has brought about significant consequences. It came as a signal sent by Kazakhstan to its neighbours that they should co-operate more closely with China, and to the Russian decision-makers – that their monopoly for raw materials in Central Asia is nothing sure anymore. At the moment, CNPC, Sinopec and a few smaller and less known Chinese energy companies (e.g. Guanghai Energy) possess a 22% share in the oil production in Kazakhstan and it is being estimated that it will increase by another 6% by 2020 (A. Jarosiewicz, K. Strachota, 2013:38). Other countries from the region are providing China predominantly with gas and fossil fuels, including uranium, zinc, lead, copper and gold.

While safeguarding their influence in the north, the Chinese authorities were simultaneously fulfilling the plan of protecting the energy interests in the southern part of the continent. The awareness of their dependence on the narrow passage caused that the search for an alternative solution, and the subsequent determination in bringing it into life, was an aggressive one, leading to a number of conflicting situations in the region. What came as an answer to the *China Malacca dilemma*⁹ was the idea of *the string of pearls* first formulated in 2005 the *Energy Futures In Asia* report was submitted to U.S. Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld (Ł. Gacek, 2012:297). As pointed out by the report's authors, China's authorities were surprisingly consistent in establishing closer contacts with the countries located along the coast of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. The Chinese, well aware of that their energy safety depends directly on sea transport, decided to prevent any supply disruption. A quick glance at the map of the Indian Ocean is enough to realise that the route which tankers and container ships have to travel to get to Chinese ports is an extremely dangerous one. An oil-filled vessel starting leaving a port in Northern Africa or Middle East has to find its way across one of two hazardous straits – Ormuz and Bab-al-Mandab – that are frequent aims of pirate attacks. Then, through the restless waters of the Arabian Sea, it gets to the Indian Ocean. Following that, it is at risk of an attack on the part of China's local rival, India. Each vessel travelling to the East has to cover the distance in the shortest possible way, without taking any roundabout routes, and, at the same time, avoiding the

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⁹ More on that at: <http://www.chinesedefence.com/forums/strategic-geopolitical-issues/4564-china-malacca-dilemma.html> (As for: 26.08.2014).

shallows Maldives and passing close to Sri Lanka. The route's penultimate stage leads through the notorious Malacca Strait controlled by the navies of Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and... the USA. If, upon crossing the Strait, the tanker doesn't collide with other industrial ship¹⁰, it sails into the South China Sea, where relatively low levels of hostile activities shown by the naval forces of Vietnam and the Philippines don't pose any serious threat (ChineseDefence.org, 2012). The final stage of the troublesome route is marked by one of the ports of China's eastern coast. In an attempt to minimize the route-related risks, the so-called "pearls", safe harbours, were created for vessels sailing to China. The first of them is the port in the Pakistani city of Gwadar. As early as in 1990s the Chinese officials signed an agreement on the construction, financing and lease of the Gwadar port. Nearly 400 million dollars were spent till mid-2014 on completing the development of the investment and maintaining it. Thanks to that, some of cargo ships sail from the Persian Gulf to Gwadar, from where materials are transported by land, and in a cheaper way, through the Karakoram Highway (a branch of the CAREC 5 route) to China's western provinces. The second strategic port "of China" is the Bangladeshi Chittagong port (M. Devichand, 2010). As part of the China-Bangladesh agreement on defence cooperation, China provides Bangladesh with military technology, gaining, in return, an easy (virtually unlimited) access to the port (J.B. Miller, 2014). The cooperation is also accompanied by contracts concluded by Chinese corporations in the Bay of Bengal rich (by the standards of the Southern Asia) in oil and gas. Finally, the third and biggest "pearl" on the Indian Ocean is Sri Lanka's port of Hambantota. The port being fully under the Chinese control, an 85% of the entire sum necessary for the project's development will be provided by the Eximbank of China (Ł. Gacek 2012:261). On the one hand, the port was designed as a safe harbour for ships and on the other as a departure point for Chinese naval units patrolling the waters and protecting them from pirate attacks. These three points form a kind of "control triangle" enclosing the Indian coast and arousing anxiety in Delhi by increasing competition for the supremacy over the Indian Ocean (R.D. Kaplan, 2012:341). One should also bear in mind that the Chinese are closely collaborating with the government of Myanmar, which results in Chinese ships having easy access to the Burmese ports.

¹⁰ 85.000 transport units of mean and high draught cross the Malacca Strait every year.

Towards destabilization

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China's dominant position, along with its attempt to widen its sphere of influence (so that it includes many territories rich in raw materials) has made this country become involved in various conflicts with the neighbours. In the case of Vietnam, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia and Japan the bones of contention were, respectively, the following small archipelagos: the Spratly Islands, the Macclefield Banks and the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands¹¹. And when it comes to the archipelagos located within the South China Sea region, since the 1950s they have witnessed a great number of disputes characterized by different levels of severity. Initially, these were purely strategic conflicts aimed at both showing particular countries' urge to dominate the islands situated along important communication crossroads and the attempt to secure their international position in the neighbours' eyes. Yet the situation changed drastically when deposits of oil and gas were found at the bottom of the South China Sea. There are big discrepancies in figures relating to the Spratly and Paracel Islands. The Chinese called them a new Persian Gulf, estimating (rather exaggeratedly) that there might be up to 105–123 billion barrels there, but there is no solid evidence for that. In 1993–1994 the area was explored by the U.S. Geological Survey which found out that the resources actually amounted to around 30 billion barrels (A. Modzelewski, 2008:13). Apart from oil, deposits of natural gas are also located in the region. According to the available analyses, the Spratly Islands are home to nearly 70% of the South China Sea's energy resources. This is why the competition for the control over the predominantly inhabited terrains has become extremely intense. From the moment when the deposits were found none of the parties has been willing to renounce exploitation of the area. The fact that it is hard to use the international law to grant some of the conflicted parties exclusive or partial right to the islands further increases the tensions. This is particularly true of China, Vietnam and the Philippines which have been incessantly fighting in line with the principle of conquest, the presence of a given country's military forces being considered as the cornerstone of its control of the area in question. The competing par-

¹¹ Conflicts over the archipelagos of the South China Sea are today believed to constitute one of four biggest threats to the safety of the South-East and Eastern Asia. The other ones are: the tensions on the Korean Peninsula, the relations between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan, the dispute over the Kuril Islands between Russia and Japan, and the competition between China and the United States observed in particular regions.

ties sometimes resort to the 19th-century methods such as ramming ships (including civilian ones), constructing naval blockades or navy's maneuvers in the vicinity of the enemy's vessel. In June earlier this year China's Minister for Foreign Affairs presented the public opinion with a report informing that over the last months Vietnamese ships have undertaken 1416 attempts to destroy Chinese vessels within the region of the disputable islands (Xu, 2014). The current state of affairs has recently been aptly described by the head of the United States Pacific Fleet Admiral Samuel Locklear: "Eastern Asia is becoming the most militarised region in the world" (TVN24.pl). For several years now various attempts have been made by members of ASEAN (Association of South-East Nations) to develop a common alliance against the Chinese actions sea water bodies. The organisation took an adequate decision to consider the dispute between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China for the Pratas and the Macclesfield Bank archipelagos as China's internal issue (A. Modzelewski, 27). With regard to the Spratly Islands, on the other hand, a kind of internal alliance against China within ASEAN was created (Economist.com, 2014). However, the shy attempts to form an anti-China alliance will most probably fail. And the only reason for that, though somewhat paradoxical, is actually fundamental: China's economic influences in each of the states are so big that none of them will ever dare to openly and categorically break off the collaboration with this global power.

A dispute that appears to be even more complex is that between China and Japan for the small Senkaku Island (though it would be more precise to describe it as seven square kilometers of bare rocks). In this case, the clue of the conflict also lies in natural resources located in the island's coastal waters. From the moment of this territory's annexation by Japan, China has repeatedly questioned the resulting state of affairs, emphasizing on the international forum its right to the territory. The conflict has been marked by the use of force by both parties, causing temporary crises in mutual relations. Cold, if not hostile relation between Japan and China are already described by some as the beginning of a new "cold war" (S. Tiezzi, 2014). What makes the issue even more problematic is that both parties are actually striving to gain control of the natural resources located within the area in question. Besides, both the Chinese and Japanese authorities take ostentatious actions directed against the opposing party. After seventy years of the country being ruled in accordance with a pacific constitution, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is now trying to win public support for a project implying far-reaching changes in the basic law that would allow for developing and modernising the country's armed

forces (D. McNeill, 2014). It needs to be remembered that the lack of army, in the Western meaning of the word, was a result of the post-war restrictions imposed on Japan. With time the idea of pacifism became part of the country's collective consciousness and thus, the plan to change the constitution is being strongly criticised by some of the citizens. Yet the actions undertaken by the government in Tokyo actually stem from the decrease in the region's safety which, in turn, results directly from the conflicts with China.

Tragic consequences for diaspora

Those who always suffer most during any international conflict are civilians. The increasing competition between the South-East and Eastern Asia is no exception. The rapid escalation of the disputes within the region enhances the sense of danger in China's neighbours, causing outbursts of social dissatisfaction.¹² In the middle of May a series of riots erupted in Vietnam that cost the lives of twenty one Chinese workers employed in local enterprises in Hanoi (BBC.com, 2014). Only a few days later the Vietnamese expressed their frustration by attacking the Chinese minority (especially those inhabiting cities), setting on fire their shops, workshops, manufactories and Chinese temples. In view of the deteriorating situation the Beijing authorities sent two cargo ships to the Vung Ang port to evacuate nearly 3.000 Chinese citizens. And what really caused the riots was... CNOOC that launched a new phase of drilling for oil on the Parcel Islands.

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Power of raw materials – summary

Asia is currently an arena of growing tensions resulting predominantly from the local players' attempts to ensure their spheres of influences and gain a secure and unrestricted access to energy resources. China's rapid economic growth and the related demand for energy have resulted in ever more serious conflicts with its neighbours. Neither the ASEAN states, Japan nor South Korea will probably manage to establish a common alliance against China. But there is no doubt that

¹² What best illustrates the extent of China's economic influences, going beyond any "European" standards, is the fact that it is virtually impossible to buy in Myanmar any product not manufactured in China (based on the author's personal experience).

with China's growing world-power ambitions, the existing conflicts will enter a new, more dangerous phase. Importantly, at stake is not only economy, but also the "fuel" for particular state-nationalisms. The question, then, remains: How will the race for the "black gold" end? As long as China's biggest global rival doesn't get involved, the situation seems to be stable. Yet for how long will the United States remain passive?

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tożsamości grup plemiennych świata, stosunki kolonialne i postkolonialne w Azji, reportaż wojenny. Podróżnik, dziennikarz, fotograf.

Abstrakt

Stosunki energetyczne w Azji Południowo-Wschodniej i na Dalekim Wschodzie zależą od kierunku rozwoju chińskiej ambicji mocarstwowych. Chińska Republika Ludowa – w ogólnym mniemaniu – poszerza swoje strefy wpływów i zapewnia strategiczne bezpieczeństwo energetyczne uzależniając mniejszych i „słabszych” sąsiadów. Śmiało można stwierdzić, że polityka energetyczna Chin określać będzie w sposób bezpośredni przyszłość stosunków międzynarodowych w Azji, a pośrednio przyczyni się do kształtowania nowego globalnego ładu.

Kluczem do zrozumienia prowadzonej przez Chiny polityki energetycznej jest region położony kilkaset kilometrów na południe od granic państwa. Cieśnina Malakka – najkrótsza, prowadząca z zachodu droga morska do Chin i najważniejsza „arteria” transportowa w tej części świata. Przez cieśninę łączącą Ocean Indyjski z Pacyfikiem przebiega 80% importu ropy naftowej z Afryki i Bliskiego Wschodu do Państwa Środka. W przypadku zablokowania tego nerwalgicznego punktu na mapie morskiej Azji, doszłoby do przerwania ciągłości dostaw węglowodorów, a w państwo uderzyłoby daleko idące konsekwencje. Co równie istotne, rolę policjanta wód morskich w tym regionie pełnią jednostki amerykańskiej marynarki wojennej, wzmagając rozdrażnienie władz w Pekinie, motywując je do zaopatrywania w surowce alternatywnymi kanałami. Rozwiązaniem istniejącej sytuacji stały się dwa, konsekwentnie realizowane projekty. Pierwszy z nich zakłada intensyfikację współpracy z bogatymi w ropę naftową i gaz ziemny republikami byłego ZSRR. Drugi natomiast związany jest z ideą „sznura pereł” – budowy infrastruktury morskiej, tj. portów i terminali przeładunkowych oraz sieci rurociągów lądowych mających zastąpić transport „trasą malakkańską”.

Szybki wzrost gospodarczy Chin i wynikające z tego rosnące potrzeby energetyczne wywołują coraz bardziej jawne konflikty z sąsiadami. Najpewniej ani państwom ASEAN, ani Japonii, ani Korei Południowej nie uda się w najbliższym czasie zawiązać wspólnego frontu przeciwko Chinom. Pewne natomiast jest, iż rosnące ambicje chińskie wprowadzą istniejące nieporozumienia na nowy etap, kierując strony na kurs kolizyjny. I w tym przypadku nie chodzi o ekonomię, a raczej o „paliwo” dla narodowych gospodarek. Pytanie tylko jak zakończy się w przyszłości rywalizacja o „czarne złoto”? Dopóki największy, globalny rywal Chin przygląda się z boku, dopóty sytuacja wydaje się stabilna. Zastanawiające tylko jak długo Stany Zjednoczone Ameryki pozostaną bierne?

Słowa kluczowe

przemysł energetyczny, ChRL, polityka energetyczna, Azja Południowo-Wschodnia