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NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA FOREIGN POLICY

A. M. BAICHOROV^a

^a*Belarusian State University, 4 Niezaliezhnasci Avenue, Minsk 220030, Belarus*

The article provides an overview of the challenges the People's Republic of China faces and its responses to them. Main attention is drawn to the new challenges that mostly appeared at the end of the second decade of the 21st century. These challenges associated with the slowing down of the economic development of China, the Western policy of containment towards the country and the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is determined that the pace of the China's economic growth might never return to the double digits because of the combined effect of accumulated internal structural and financial problems and pressure from the West. The Western containment strategy includes not just direct tariffs and limitations against the Chinese goods, services and investments but such changes in the world economy that will make more difficult for China to compete in the world markets. The anti-Covid policy of the Chinese government delivered a striking blow to the country's export and contributed to the slowing down of the national economy. The article strives to prove a hypothesis that the PRC's government managed to modify its foreign policy strategy to meet the traditional and new challenges and provide the best possible external conditions for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Keywords: United Nations Security Council; Covid-19 pandemic; European Union; USA; China; Security Council resolutions; collective West; political confrontation; consensus; global challenge; global threat; national economy; world economy; economic growth; policy of containment; export; import; world markets; Taiwan issue; the Russian Federation; Ukraine; military operation; democracy; mega-regional economic partnership.

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Автор:

Александр Мухтарович Байчоров – доктор философских наук, профессор; профессор кафедры международных отношений факультета международных отношений.

Author:

Aleksandr M. Baichorov, doctor of science (philosophy), full professor; professor at the department of international relations, faculty of international relations.
albaichorov@mail.ru
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8625-5204>

НОВЫЕ ВЫЗОВЫ ДЛЯ ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКИ КНР

А. М. БАЙЧОРОВ¹⁾

¹⁾Белорусский государственный университет, пр. Независимости, 4, 220030, г. Минск, Беларусь

Рассматриваются вызовы, стоящие перед КНР, и ответы государства на них. Главное внимание уделено новым проблемам, которые проявились в основном в конце второго десятилетия XXI в. Они связаны со снижением темпов экономического развития Китая, западной политикой сдерживания в отношении КНР и последствиями пандемии Covid-19. Высказано предположение, что комбинированный эффект от накопившихся внутренних структурных и финансовых проблем, а также давление со стороны Запада не позволят показателям экономического роста Китая вернуться к двузначным числам. Западная стратегия сдерживания включает не только прямые тарифные и другие ограничения в отношении китайских товаров, услуг, инвестиций, но и изменения в мировой экономике, что затруднит для Китая конкуренцию на мировых рынках. Политика китайского правительства по предотвращению распространения Covid-19 нанесла тяжелый удар по экспорту страны и внесла вклад в сокращение темпов развития национальной экономики. Предпринята попытка доказать гипотезу, что правительству КНР удалось модифицировать свою внешнеполитическую стратегию, чтобы встретить уже существующие и новые вызовы и обеспечить наиболее благоприятные внешние условия для великого возрождения китайской нации.

Ключевые слова: Совет Безопасности ООН; пандемия Covid-19; Европейский союз; США; Китай; резолюции Совета Безопасности; коллективный Запад; политическая конфронтация; консенсус; глобальный вызов; глобальная угроза; национальная экономика; мировая экономика; экономический рост; политика сдерживания; экспорт; импорт; мировые рынки; тайваньский вопрос; Российская Федерация; Украина; военная операция; демократия; мегарегиональное экономическое партнерство.

Introduction

At the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century the PRC was confronted with a number of major challenges some of which were global in nature, some came from the policies of foreign governments and transnational corporations, and some were of its own making. By its sheer size China greatly reflects upon the world economy and world politics. The economic and political situation within the PRC has a big impact on world affairs. And comprehending the Beijing foreign policy becomes an indispensable prerequisite for the governments and other world politics actors to elaborate their own policies.

There are some global challenges that have already become “traditional” in the 21st century: ecological, climatic, challenges emanated from the vestures of international terrorism and the weapon of mass destruction proliferation. In 2020 a new global challenge joined the ranks: it was Covid-19 pandemic.

For quite a number of years China has been considered as “a partner in development” by most of the countries. Washington that became accustomed to its world leader role treated the PRC as “a strategic partner”. Even after the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” caused by the concerns over the unprecedented PRC’s growth Beijing remained a useful force to modernise Asia, and Washington envisaged its participation in the US strategic endeavors such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). A new challenge came from the US Trump administration that included China in its short list of “revisionist states” (alongside with the Russian Federation) as one of the main security threats for the USA.

Since 2001 the PRC demonstrated an impressive economic growth. One by one it overtook the leading Western economies, in 2009 the country overtook the Japanese economy in GNP terms and became number two economy in the world. Even the 2008–2009 world economic crisis could not stop this impressive growth that just slowed down a bit (from 10 to 7 %). But by the end of the second decade something went wrong. The Chinese economic engine slowed down to 6 % annual rate, and even less¹. Therefore, the Beijing foreign policy had to reflect a new “internal challenge”: slowing down of the national economy.

Eminent British expert on China W. Hutton came to a conclusion that “so far China has defused tension and exploited the system of which, arguably, it is one of the biggest beneficiaries. China’s problem is that its objective interest is to buttress the international system from which it benefits; but this means associating itself with values, institutions and processes that directly challenge what it practices at home” [1, p. 225]. US expert on China K. Conkin warns that there could be a new policy twist in the PRC’s foreign policy after the 20th Communist party of China (CPC) congress (October 2022). “China long-term economic growth depends on scientific innovation, – he argues, – and Xi Jinping used the 20th party congress to prioritise science and technology as a cornerstone of China’s national economic and military “self-reliance strategy”. This newly defined policy of national “self-reliance” will further economic decoupling with the US and Europe. Western business and policy makers should view Xi Jin-

¹According to some Western experts the Chinese official statistics usually paints a brighter picture of the country’s economy.

ping's comments on "secure and reliable supply chains" as the opening salvo for further market restrictions and prepare accordingly"².

This article will try to test the hypothesis that the new challenges, namely, slowing down of the national economy, confrontation with the West and Covid-19

pandemic, greatly influenced the Beijing foreign policy forcing the Chinese leaders to reconsider traditional ways of international behaviour, to modify its foreign policy strategy to meet the traditional and new challenges and provide the best possible external conditions for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Challenges emanated from the internal political and economic problems

Famous dictum says: foreign policy is a continuation of domestic policy. And in most instances it's true. When Xi Jinping was elected CPC Secretary General in 2012 at the 18th CPC congress he proclaimed as a party goal the great rejuvenation of the great Chinese nation. His predecessor Hu Jintao was talking about building of a medium income society, stepping up the economic development of the poor Western provinces of China and conducting a good neighbour policy towards the PRC's adjacent countries. Xi Jinping understood that to restore the Chinese nation greatness would require much more than just increased income and managing the domestic imbalances. It would require a restoration of the great nation psychology, national pride, and ability of putting national interests before the individual ones. The last task proved to be the most difficult, especially for the ruling elites.

At the end of the 20th century the state and party bureaucrats earning state salaries looked like a middle class in comparison with the majority of poor peasants and factory workers. 30 years later their salaries looked very disrespectful in comparison with the high incomes of the Chinese nouveau riches. The state and party bureaucrats became interchangeable: one day the same person could lead a provincial party committee and the next day becomes a provincial governor (and vice versa).

The Chinese nationalism was greatly enhanced by the over 10 % economic growth during 20 years period and an impressive military build-up, resulting in total modernisation of the People's Liberation Army. Last doubts in their own agency were swept away in the Chinese national psychology by the victory at the XXIX Olympiad (2008), successful organisation of the Shanghai EXPO-2010, open confrontation with World War II adversary – Japan – over the Senkaku islands (2012) and with the South China Sea neighbouring states. The state mass media that dominates the country's information space also played a prominent role. Consequently, the Xi Jinping's appeal to rebuild China's greatness found a fertile social soil. The country elites as well as the majority of the ordinary Chinese were ready to support his appeal. The state propaganda machine started calling the years of the Xi Jinping's presidency

"a new epoch in the Chinese history". This growing mélange of nationalism and authoritarianism confirms the W. Hutton assessment that "Chinese communism and Chinese nationalism are an uneasy coalition; the more nationalism gains upper hand in an authoritarian state, the more China will want to behave according to its own criteria" [1, p. 226–227].

The exceptional status of Xi Jinping in the new epoch was confirmed by the resolution of the 6th Plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the CPC in November 2021. At the Plenary meeting a special resolution on "historic matters" was adopted and it stated that the most important task for the Chinese communists in the coming years will be "to firmly stand up to protect comrade Xi Jinping status as a leading nucleus of the Central committee and the entire CPC, to unswervingly defend the CPC Central committee's authority and support its united centralised leadership"³ [cit.: 2, p. 103].

The aim of the PRC foreign policy in the new epoch was formulated by Xi Jinping in his speech before the students and professors of the MGIMO University in 2013. He stated that main objective of the PRC's foreign policy should be the creation of the favourable external conditions for "the realisations of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation – the main dream of the Chinese people since the opium wars" [3, p. 371–372]. At the Central meeting on foreign affairs at the beginning of his second term as Chinese President Xi Jinping made a fine-tuning of this objective: "We have to fully and persistently turn into practice the diplomatic ideas of socialism with Chinese specificity, constantly create favourable external conditions for the realisation of the Chinese dream about the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, facilitating the building of the common mankind destiny" [4, p. 663]. This fine-tuning meant that Beijing foreign policy takes upon itself a responsibility not just for the development of the PRC but for the mankind development, as well. The world order should be altered to accommodate the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

The strong economic growth was thought to be the main pillar of the whole construction of the building of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. When it slowed down by the end of the second decade of the 21st century

²Experts react: Xi solidifies his power at China's Communist party congress. What should the world take away? [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react-what-the-world-needs-to-know-from-chinas-communist-party-congress/> (date of access: 22.01.2023).

³Hereinafter translated by us. – A. B.

ry (up to 2.3 % in 2020)⁴ the entire construction process of the great Chinese nation was put in question.

By the end of the second decade of the 21st century three big problems materialised in the economic development of the PRC: a real estate bubble; a high level of debts of the local and provincial administrations; tremendous debts of the state owned corporations (SOEs) and some big private ones, as well. M. Pettis noted that “...the surge in China’s debt burden in the past decade, among the fastest in history...” [5]. It became obvious for the Chinese leadership that without facing up to these three problems the strong economic growth will not return.

At first, Beijing tried to use the traditional method of state planning and mandatory directives to rectify the situation. The Chinese banks were instructed not to provide credits to the construction companies that had build shantytowns, endless roads and airports that no one used. As M. Pettis assessed, “much of China’s investment in property and infrastructure in recent years cannot be justified” [5]. About 60 % of homes sold between 2013 and 2020 are thought not have been delivered to buyers, many of whom have nevertheless started to make payments. About 70 % of homes, sold since 2018, have been bought by people, who already own at least one property⁵. The local and provincial administrations were prohibited from issuing bonds and other financial instruments to cover their debts. The SOEs were ordered to clean up their financial mess. These mandatory measures might have worked better but their application coincided with the establishment of the numerous quarantine zones due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The economic situation had not ameliorated and a high degree of social frustration and tension was registered caused by general slowing down of business and freezing of the personal assets of hundreds of millions of the ordinary

Chinese in the unfinished real estate projects. As a result, the government had to change its policy. By the end of 2022 the banks have been ordered to extend the credits to the construction companies to allow them to finish the projects they had started. On 13 January 2023, Beijing introduced a draft 21-point plan, which stated that the aim was to provide liquidity to “high-quality developers”. The local governments and the SOEs were allowed to issue new stocks and bonds to refinance their previous debts. Therefore, the main problems for the Chinese economic development were not solved; they were partly mitigated in order to allow the economic growth resume its pace, albeit at a much lower rate.

Under these circumstances, Xi Jinping, re-elected for the third term as the CPC Secretary General at the 20th CPC congress in October 2022, had to find some innovative strategy to revive the economic growth and somehow modernise the foreign policy to provide more favourable conditions for the struggling national economy. The economic considerations that were by sided during the first two terms of the Xi Jinping presidency (greater political, social and international ambitions took the precedence) became once again at a forefront of the Chinese foreign policy. In his main report to the 20th CPC congress Xi Jinping articulated a new twist, he emphasised the need for pursuing China’s national economic and military “self-reliance” strategy. Most likely, during forthcoming years Beijing would put less emphasis on grand designs (like the Belt and Road initiative, harmonised world, mankind of a common destiny) and would try to pursue more immediate economic results while determining its participation in the international alliances. First step in this direction was taken at the end of 2021 when Beijing announced his desire to sign up to the TPP agreement.

Challenges emanated from the Western policy of containment

The Western policy of containment of the economic and political ambitions of China is multifaceted and covers economic, political and technological matters. The collective West had to apply some protectionist measures to contain the futuristic economic growth of China. The most innovative approach was found at the beginning of 2013 when the Western countries started negotiations on creation of mega-regional economic partnerships, excluding the PRC. Such partnerships – Transatlantic trade and investment partnership (TTIP), TPP, EU – Japan free economic zone, EU – Canada free economic zone – were aimed at limiting Chinese access to the biggest international markets. On 23 March 2018, President D. Trump imposed tariffs on still and aluminium coming from the PRC, starting trade war in response to “China’s economic aggression”. Russian researchers

(A. Vinogradov, A. Salitsky, N. Semenova) conducted a thorough research of the US – China economic confrontation [6]. The collective West later added to the mega-regional economic partnerships the technological and military alliances in Asia, like Quard and AUKUS. On the G7 initiative the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence was created in June 2020 to restrict the PRC and the Russian Federation access to modern AI technologies. In June 2022 USA launched the Minerals Security Partnership whose 13 members include G7 and EU countries.

Beijing had to find some counter strategy and it succeeded in doing so by creating a rather attractive alternative to the mega-regional economic partnerships in the form of the BRI. For more than 15 years the BRI, advocating free trade at free markets, providing for the

⁴World economic outlook update: fault lines widen in the global recovery [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2021/07/27/world-economic-outlook-update-july-2021> (date of access: 13.01.2022).

⁵Can China fix its property crisis? [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2023/01/23/can-china-fix-its-property-crisis?utm_content=conversion.direct-response.non-subscriber.article_top&utm_campaign=a.23recessionwatch_content_v1_prospect_test.2 (date of access: 02.02.2023).

interconnectivity of the national economies, received mostly a warm welcome among the developing countries and even some Western powers. United Kingdom, Australia and other countries of the collective West became founding members of the Asian Bank of Infrastructure Investments – financial institution created by China that provided funding for the BRI projects.

In order to meet the challenges emanated from the collective West policy of containment Beijing used three main approaches.

The first approach, associated with the promotion of the BRI, was envisaged to counter the protectionist tendencies that manifested themselves in the creation of the mega-regional economic partnerships and unilateral anti-Chinese policies exercised by the Trump administration.

The second approach was associated with the establishment of closer ties of the PRC with the existing integration institutions and the creation of the new ones that would include China. Exercising this approach, Beijing put a lot of efforts in promoting ASEAN plus China format, summits of China – Africa, China – Latin America, etc. In case when the PRC could not forge closer ties with a certain integration institution, Beijing did not hesitate to undermine it by creating divisive formats with its member states (format of 16+1 with the Eastern and Central European EU member states, for example). In 2021 Beijing expressed its desire to sign the TPP agreement and join this megaregional partnership. The Chinese diplomacy portrayed as its great success the creation on 15 November 2020 of a new regional economic partnership – the Association of the South-Eastern Asian States that included the ten ASEAN countries, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

The third approach was associated with the developing of the privileged cooperation with certain countries on the bilateral basis. During the second decade of the 21st century Beijing was trying to build such privileged ties with the Russian Federation, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Georgia, Italy, Greece, Montenegro, etc. In the framework of such privileged cooperation China financed building of the gaz pipeline “Sila Sibiri” in Russia, rented for 49 years Batumi port in Georgia, constructed port facilities in Italy and Greece, built an economic corridor in Pakistan and a national highway in Montenegro. One of the first foreign visits after his re-election for the third term as the CPC General Secretary Xi Jinping conducted to Saudi Arabia (December 2022). The Chinese President and King Salman signed an agreement on comprehensive strategic partnership, and agreed on coordination of the BRI and Saudi development programme “Vision-2030”. During the visit 34 investment protocols were signed worth 29.2 bln of US dollars⁶.

Another thorny point in the Chinese relations with the USA (and collective West) is the Taiwan issue. It has a long history and generally it is portrayed in the

West as a confrontation point between the authoritarian Goliath and democratic David. Officially and semi-officially Taiwan is recognised as an integral part of the PRC but in practice Taipei preserves its sovereignty over the Taiwanese territory and population. Traditionally, Washington helps Taiwan by delivering arms and providing political support.

The Taiwan issue is a traditional challenge to the PRC’s foreign policy but with the introduction by Beijing the law of the PRC on safeguarding national security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (passed on 30 June 2020) and crushing pro-democratic demonstrations of the Hongkongneers opposing this law, there was a new twist in that traditional challenge. Looking at the Hong Kong destiny, the Taiwanese citizens trust less and less the Beijing promises of living in one country under two different political and socio-economic systems. The young Taiwanese openly expressed their solidarity with the Hong Kong pro-democracy demonstrators.

The first Beijing response to this attitude and the speaker of the US House of Representatives N. Pelosi visit to Taipei (August 2022) was to exercise its “hard power”: put more missiles and air force plains on alert and to conduct military manoeuvres imitating a Taiwan landing. Unified and decisive response of the collective West to the Russian Federation military operation in Ukraine also contributed to Beijing taking a more cautious stance towards Taiwan. It looks that the Chinese government has to balance the “hard power” methods with “soft power” ones, to invent some new incentives for the Taiwanese to join mother-China voluntarily or at least semi-voluntarily.

The confrontation with the West somewhat eased after the start of the Russian Federation military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. Beijing demonstrated its political support of Moscow by not voting in favour of certain UN resolutions condemning the Russian aggression (PRC mostly abstained), but at the same time it proclaimed its unequivocal support of the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Beijing did not officially sided with the anti-Russian economic sanctions of the West but in practice the Chinese banks stopped accepting the Russian Federation banks’ credit cards, the Chinese corporations refrained from new investments and technological transfers to Russia.

Some political experts think that a three-hour meeting of Xi Jinping and J. Biden in Indonesia in October 2022 (on the sidelines of the G20 meeting) laid a fresh start to rebuilding of the US – China bilateral ties and moving a step further to the creation of the G2 format in the world politics. During their first face-to-face meeting as leaders Xi Jinping and J. Biden discussed key issues concerning to the bilateral relations, Taiwan, regional and international security. According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs meeting readout, Beijing took seriously president J. Biden’s “five noes”:

⁶What Xi Jinping’s Saudi Arabia visit means for the Middle East [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/news-atlanticist/what-xi-jinpings-saudi-arabia-visit-means-for-the-middle-east/> (date of access: 23.01.2023).

“...does not seek to change China’s political system; does not seek to start a cold war with China; does not seek to strengthen alliances against China; does not support “Taiwan independence”...; does not intend to break off ties with China, impede Chinese economic develop-

ment, or contain China”⁷. A promotion of Chinese ambassador to Washington Qin Gang to foreign minister position (30 December 2022) was considered by the Chinese business circles as a new attempt by Beijing to improve the Sino-US relations⁸.

Challenges emanated from the Covid-19 pandemic

Beijing faced two types of the new challenges emanated from the Covid-19 pandemic: political and economic. The political challenges were mostly associated with the accusations of the PRC being a source of Covid-19. The economic challenges were mostly associated with the negative consequences for the economic development caused by the strict quarantine policies adopted by Beijing.

Politically the coronavirus pandemic played in the hands of unilateralism and isolationism of the Trump administration. It happened that Chinese city Wuhan became the place of origin of Covid-19. The Chinese authorities completely isolated Wuhan and every family in the city was placed under strict quarantine. Subsequently, all country was placed under quarantine measures, curfews, and so on. In the Chinese authoritarian political system, it was possible to do this in a fast and effective manner. The world media that has previously unseen powers and enjoys enormous political influence presented the Wuhan experience as the only effective way to deal with Covid-19 pandemic. The media ostracised the governments that did not follow the Chinese example (Belarus, Sweden). Political leaders of the Western countries facing regular reelections in 4–5 year term, were utterly afraid of being accused of not fighting the pandemic aggressively enough. Under the media pressure, they mostly opted for the Wuhan practices.

The political confrontations between Russia and the West, China and the USA prevented the United Nations and its Security Council to play a meaningful role in fighting the pandemic. In the author’s opinion, the United Nations Security Council (SC) should be heavily involved in doing so.

Firstly there have already been precedents when the SC adopted resolutions on the situations caused by the infectious diseases (HIV/AIDS, Ebola), and infectious disease had been already mentioned by UN Secretary General A. Guterres as a global security threat. Therefore, a SC resolution on Covid-19 would have been not an exception but a logical continuation of this UN tradition.

Secondly, the very magnitude of the pandemic with over 30 mln effected and 1 mln innocent men, women, and children dead in about 200 countries and territories

all over the world is a sufficient enough reason for the SC to be involved.

Thirdly, the pandemic demonstrated itself as a truly trans border global issue that can not be dealt with only by nation-states’ own efforts, but only through an international coordinating mechanism.

Fourthly, the pandemic breeds social discontent, racial and civil unrest that in its part may lead to local and trans border conflicts, including the armed ones.

Fifthly, the pandemic had a really devastating impact on the national economies of different states, some of which do not have enough resources to remedy the situation and destined for years and years of economic stagnation with all its social and political consequences (poverty, social tension, the rise of populism and authoritarian tendencies, and so on) [7].

The inability of the SC to play even a symbolic role in the consolidation of the world’s efforts against Covid-19 pandemic badly damaged the United Nations’ image. Some experts from Asia and Africa underlined that this SC’s “inaction” was not at all accidental, that Chinese diplomats (PRC’s ambassador Zhang Jun chaired SC in the crucial days of March 2020) did not want to allow their country to be accused by the SC of giving birth to a pandemic that had become the threat to international peace and security⁹.

In fact, the nation states relied mostly on their own recourses. The reciprocal accusations of Beijing and Washington in spreading coronavirus underlined very vividly the new axis of confrontation in modern world politics – between the PRC and the USA. This new confrontation had been added up to an “old” one: between the Russian Federation and the West (since 2014). These two confrontations paralysed the work of the SC. At the SC meeting on 28 May 2020, J. Borrell, EU high representative for foreign and security policy, stated: “At a time of global crisis, we need a Security Council able to take the necessary decisions – and not one that is paralysed by vetoes and political infighting”¹⁰.

On 22 September 2020, UN Secretary General A. Guterres delivered his annual report on the work of the organisation to the 75th session of the UN General Assembly. Once more he asked for a global ceasefire at the face of Covid-19 and underlined the necessity of the SC leading

⁷US – China relations in the Biden era: a timeline: China briefing [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/us-china-relations-in-the-biden-era-a-timeline> (date of access: 04.02.2023).

⁸China appoints new foreign minister [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-appoints-new-foreign-minister/> (date of access: 04.02.2023).

⁹Mukherjee T. The United Nations Security Council and securitisation of Covid-19 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.online.org/expert-speak/the-united-nations-security-council-and-securitization-of-covid-19-64079/> (date of access: 23.01.2023).

¹⁰Amid Covid-19, strong multinational system key to delivering for world’s most vulnerable, European Union foreign policy chief tells Security Council [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14197.doc.htm> (date of access: 16.06.2020).

role in consolidating the world efforts to fight the pandemic. "I appeal, – he said, – for a stepped-up international effort – led by the Security Council – to achieve a global ceasefire by the end of this year"¹¹. Unfortunately, even this passionate appeal, did not make the SC permanent members to put aside their differences and let the Council find a consensus and start playing an active role in mobilising the world resources in fighting the common challenge.

By the end of 2022 the Covid-19 pandemic was mostly over worldwide. But this was not the case for China. In autumn of 2022 millions of new coronavirus infections hit the country whose citizens were dead tired of sitting at home doing mostly nothing. The national economy was badly damaged by the work stoppages due to quarantine measures. The law abiding Chinese went out on the streets en masse defying the quarantine limitations maintained by the Governments at different levels. Not accustomed to dealing with mass protests in major and small cities the central Government sud-

denly decided to recall all limitations in the whole country at once. The ordinary Chinese hardly believed that their factual three-year imprisonment was at last over. In December 2022 millions and millions of the Chinese citizens bought millions and millions of air tickets to travel all over the world. Under these circumstances many countries introduced ten days quarantines against the travellers coming from the coronavirus infected PRC. Beijing tried to interfere on the side of its citizens accusing the relevant countries of discriminating against the Chinese and threatening to introduce the reciprocal measures. All these events sparked tensions in the international relations and contributed to the growth of anti-Chinese sentiments existing in many countries.

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic came to its end but the political and economic challenges to the Chinese government associated with it remain. Beijing will have to deal with the pandemic consequences in international relations, as well as in internal affairs.

Conclusions

By playing by the rules, albeit not always of her own making, the PRC achieved great results in economic growth and modernisation. Its foreign policy, subsequently, withstood the challenges associated with the current technological revolution and the Trump unilateralism. In a sense, Beijing has become one of the disciples of globalisation fighting protectionism in all its economic manifestations and being protectionist in preserving its authoritarian political system.

Beijing portrayed the PRC as a responsible world power that not just fights protectionism, but supports the development of an open world economy. At the 20th CPC congress Xi Jinping reiterated the China's foreign policy principles: respecting sovereignty of all nations, opposing hegemonism and power politics, the Cold War mentality and double standards.

Hu Jintao tried to remedy the deficiencies of the otherwise mostly harmonious international universe. Xi Jinping sees more conflicting world where one has to secure China's right standing and influence. He is sure that the CPC should instill in the people's minds a sense of "purpose, fortitude and self-belief... so that we cannot be swayed by fallacies, deterred by intimidation or cowed by pressure"¹².

Dealing with new challenges Beijing tries to hedge the risks associated with them. This foreign policy hedging approach includes the strategy of bandwagoning and the strategy of balancing. Usually these strategies are used by medium-size or small size countries that try to find a more effective way of protecting their interests in the relations with two or more hegemonic powers of

the region. In the case of the PRC we might say that we witness bandwagoning and balancing with the Chinese specificity. First of all, Beijing have never recognised its hegemonic policy in the region and portrays the PRC as a "third world" country. Secondly, Beijing uses these strategies in the concept of hedging against the USA, Japan or the Russian Federation depending on the development of the situation in the Asia – Pacific region.

Strategy of bandwagoning means trying to strengthen China's position by using the opportunities provided by globalisation, getting most advanced modern technologies from the USA, increasing economic ties with collective West. In order to avoid an open confrontation with the Western states Beijing makes some adjustments in its laws and industrial practices. Under pressure from the Trump administration the PRC adopted the law on intellectual property rights protection, Beijing issued an order prohibiting any involuntarily sharing of technologies by the Western investors with their Chinese partners. The US Public Company Accounting Oversight Board announced on 15 December 2022, that it had successfully gained uncensored access to investigate audit firms in mainland China and Hong Kong for the first time in history, potentially saving thousands of Chinese companies from forced delisting from US stock exchanges¹³.

Strategy of balancing in the PRC's foreign policy hedging concept implies internal and external balancing. The former means strengthening China's technological and military capabilities in order to somehow

¹¹UN chief appeals for global solidarity at General Assembly, warns Covid is "dress rehearsal" for challenges ahead [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1072972> (date of access: 24.09.2020).

¹²Cit.: *Ruwitch J.* These are 4 key points from Xi's speech at the Chinese Communist party congress [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.npr.org/2022/10/16/1129277377/china-xi-jinping-communist-party-congress-speech-takeaways> (date of access: 04.02.2023).

¹³PCAOB secures complete access to inspect, investigate Chinese firms for the first time in history [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://pcaobus.org/news-events/news-releases/news-release-detail/pcaob-secures-complete-access-to-inspect-investigate-chinese-firms-for-first-time-in-history> (date of access: 03.02.2023).

balance the relevant superiority of the USA. The latter means joining international alliances that could contain the Washington's hegemonic intentions. The latest indications of this external balancing one can find in the creation of the new regional economic partnership – the Association of the South-Eastern Asian States that included the ten ASEAN countries, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand and in Beijing desire to sign the TPP agreement and join this megaregional partnership (after Washington abandoned it).

The overall aim of this hedging approach is to make sure that the risks associated with the new challenges will not grow out of control and the challenges will not transform into the threats to the Chinese political and economic system. The manner, in which Beijing confronts the traditional and new challenges, confirms an ambivalence of the China's foreign policy in pursuing of its national interests: it preaches multilateral openness in trade and finance and claims to have a right to act unilaterally in security and military matters.

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