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The influence of U.S.-China relations on the current geopolitical situation

Вплив Американо-Китайських Відносин на Розвиток Сучасної Геополітичної Ситуації

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Abstract


The complex interaction between the USA and China, which has developed into a real confrontation, greatly affects global politics and economics, significantly influencing the geopolitical situation. The political behaviour of most countries, delicate geopolitical balance, and the solution to global problems are now directly dependent on changes in U.S.-China relations. The study aims to determine the consequences of U.S.-China relations for global politics. The methodology of the study involved using a comparison method, graphical analysis of the characteristics of the role of the U.S. and China for the respective countries (adversary, rival, ally, partner), prognostic method and content analysis of German political declarative documents. Establishing optimal U.S.-China relations would help solve the problems of global recession, mass migration, environmental issues,

Анотація


Складні процеси взаємодії Сполучених Штатів Америки та Китаю, які переросли у справжнє протистояння країн, стрімко нарощують свою роль у порядку денному глобальної політики та економічній сфері, суттєво впливаючи на формування геополітичної ситуації. Політична поведінка більшості країн світу, хиткий геополітичний баланс, вирішення глобальних проблем тепер знаходяться в прямій залежності від змін у американо-китайських відносинах. Метою дослідження є визначення наслідків американо-китайських відносин для глобальної політики. Методологія дослідження передбачила використання: методу порівняння, графічного аналізу характеристик ролі США та Китаю для відповідних країн (противник, суперник, союзник, партнер), прогностичного методу та контент-аналізу декларативних документів політичних сил Німеччини. Встановлення оптимальних американо-китайських відносин

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Russian military aggression in Ukraine, and food security. The article reveals the pragmatic approaches of most countries to the competition between the U.S. and China. Identifying the critical goals of U.S. and China relations will help establish possible prospects for cooperation or increased conflict due to changes in the geopolitical situation. The study proves the need to develop and implement strategies to support stability, find standard solutions to global problems, and cooperate between the U.S. and China.

Keywords: media security, traditional media, new media, misinformation, fake content, media literacy.

Introduction

The critical actors in the international arena determine the modern geopolitical situation. In recent years, one of the most essential and dynamic relations is between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China. U.S.-China relations are of crucial importance for global geopolitics and economics. These countries occupy key positions in the world by economic power, military potential, technological development and influence on regional and global politics.

In the past century, the U.S. and China have gone through a challenging path – from rivalry and conflict to establishing diplomatic relations and cooperation. The current dynamics of interaction between these countries have the potential for both rapprochement and exacerbation of contradictions, which can significantly affect the global balance of power and geopolitical relations. The issues of trade, technology, cybersecurity, international sanctions, human rights and regional conflicts have become particularly important in U.S.-China relations. They can also affect other countries' and regions' socio-economic development and stability.

The world order has been undergoing significant changes, but the increasing globalisation of the world economy, the introduction of innovative technologies and economic integration have continued despite the existing crises. However, the growth of the economic power of Asian countries, particularly China, has contributed to strengthening political influence, namely of new integration initiatives and associations. The peculiarity of these processes is that the U.S. was

дозволило б посилити вирішення проблематики глобальної рецесії, масової міграції, екологічних питань, російської військової агресії в Україні, продовольчої безпеки. Виявлено прагматичні підходи більшості країн до конкуренції США та Китаю, що спостерігається у діяльності держав. Виокремлення ключових цілей кожної сторони американо-китайських відносин сприятиме встановленню можливих перспектив співробітництва або посилення конфлікту як наслідку зміни геополітичної ситуації. Дослідження доводить необхідність розробки та впровадження стратегій, спрямованих на підтримку стабільності, знаходження спільних рішень щодо глобальних проблем, співробітництва між США та Китаєм.

Ключові слова: геополітика, США, Китай, міжнародні відносини, конфлікти, протистояння, глобальні загрози.

not a co-founder of such associations and, accordingly, did not take an active part in their activities as it had used to be before (Csurgai, 2021).

Understanding the impact of U.S.-China relations on the geopolitical situation is critical to formulating effective strategies and policy decisions to ensure stability and development in the international arena. It is essential to consider various political, economic, socio-cultural and strategic aspects of U.S.-China relations, especially technological development and cybersecurity. Political decisions made by both countries can have significant implications for the geopolitical balance, affecting regional conflicts, economic stability and international order.

Contemporary U.S.-China relationships are complicated due to the struggle for resources, identity conflicts, geostrategic rivalry, and the contradictory effects of globalisation and power shifts. The geopolitical approach is multidimensional and based on systems analysis, seeking to identify the interactions at different levels of States in multiple dimensions, considering external and internal geopolitical factors (Csurgai, 2021).

The 2022 G-20 Bali summit facilitated an encouraging meeting between U.S. President J. Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping, which concerned the dangers of nuclear weapons. This is evidence of the geopolitical realities in which the U.S. is pursuing economic confrontation, emphasising specific economic claims against

China. In turn, fearing American military threats in the South China Sea, the Chinese side has taken aggressive political actions to convince the U.S. of its military capabilities. However, if aggressive enough, neither side wanted an actual military confrontation. China's behaviour is based on the situation with Russia's aggression in Ukraine, during which the United States and its allies supported Ukraine. At the same time, China opposed the U.S. by passively supporting the Russian side, which proved more dangerous for China than for the U.S. Another factor was the large-scale decline in the Chinese economy, which threatened social stability. China did not want a war that it could lose, and the U.S. was not interested in an economic crisis in China (Friedman, 2022).

Understanding the impact of U.S.-China relations on the current geopolitical situation requires a comprehensive approach that considers political, economic, military, technological and cultural aspects, historical context and the role of other political actors. The study aims to determine the impact of U.S.-China relations on global politics. Hence, the research objectives are as follows:

- 1) to prove the influence of U.S.-China relations on global politics;
- 2) to identify the main factors influencing the dynamics of geostrategic interests and diplomatic relations;
- 3) to analyse the consequences of the impact of U.S.-China relations on the geopolitical structure on the example of individual countries.

Literature Review

It took China only a few decades to transform from an ordinary member of the international community to become the most significant regional power aspiring to become a global player. Today, humanity is witnessing a new confrontation between the U.S. and China, characterized by mutual claims, trade restrictions, and a technological struggle.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of interests between the U.S. and China has become more acute in the economic and trade spheres, taking on a more ideological dimension. Trump administration officials have been critical of China, its government, and its violations of human rights and international agreements.

China's high hopes for improving relations with the U. S. in the event of J. Biden's election in the

fall of 2020 did not materialize. Although J. Biden mostly sought to avoid escalating ideological discussions with Chinese party leaders, relations remained tense, and competition intensified in various policy areas. From China's perspective, under J. Biden's leadership, the U.S. adopted a tougher policy, employing sanctions and restrictions on specific Chinese citizens based on their stance. In May 2022, Secretary of State A. Blinken emphasized the need to enhance the country's investment potential and collaborate with American partners to compete with China and shift its strategic position (Blinken, 2022).

However, the changes in the relations were not unilateral; they were primarily driven by China and can be partially explained by the emergence of alternative political approaches that have developed in recent years. The Jinping administration is spreading the idea that China has to act more assertively to play a much more significant role in the world. The official documents indicate a strengthening of approaches aimed at integrating China's key role in the global community. The internal policy of China is based on the thesis of achieving the status of a global political player by the country. The Chinese leadership considers these tasks quite realistic, which is being implemented as a strategy to weaken the West and strengthen the East (Buckley, 2021).

The military budget of China in 2022 amounted to approximately 292 billion US dollars, which is over 4% higher than the expenditures in 2021 (Tian et al., 2023).

China's position on its peripheral territories related to Taiwan is also quite principled. At the same time, China's ambitions beyond its traditional regional role are growing. Hence, the growing U.S. pressure leads to a specific reaction from China regarding its vision of the balance of power in the global public space and international order. For example, the large-scale One Belt, One Road project manifests China's vision of changes and challenges to the rules and institutions of the liberal democratic world (Yu, 2019; Glaser, 2022).

As we can see, the complexity of relations between China and the U.S. has its historical preconditions, which began to intensify in 2008 and created a certain unpredictability for the further implementation of the U.S. global policy. The strengthening of China's potential is gradually evolving into its aspiration to transform the existing international environment

to achieve significant outcomes, namely creating a favorable political climate conducive to China (Doshi, 2021). China's neutral position after Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 was also contrary to U.S. policy. Analysing Joe Biden's approach to the FOIP, it is clear why China is considered the most significant potential threat to the security of the U.S. (Lieberherr & Maduz, 2022).

In turn, the Chinese strategy is based on the desire to become the most considerable economic and military power, shifting the hegemony of the U.S. Based on the geopolitical competition between the two countries for political values and institutions that establish the post-Cold War world order, China has seen American institutions and values as an obstacle to itself and a deterrent to growth (Doshi, 2021). Therefore, to politically and economically counter U.S. global influence, China has actively begun to join regional and international institutions.

The economic convergence of countries characterizes the current situation, and questions of technological security are becoming increasingly critical. In the United States, the CHIPS and Science Act was passed at the end of 2022 (Peters, 2022), which was supposed to accelerate the "internalisation" of semiconductor production. The concentration of production in China required the reorganisation and restructuring of the global economy and trade. At the same time, exports of U.S. goods to China in 2020 reached \$124 billion, while imports reached \$434 billion. Hence, the U.S. trade deficit with China was \$310 billion (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022). China has become the largest supplier of goods to the U.S. and the third largest consumer of its exports after Canada and Mexico (Chotiner, 2021).

The competition between the United States and China is rising. In the future, rising tensions may lead to a widening of ideological and economic indicators, which could distinguish a bloc with the U.S. and its allies on the one hand and the Russian-Chinese alliance on the other, which will strengthen resistance on various fronts in the further global development after Russia's invaded of Ukraine (Carlson, 2022).

The future U.S.-Chinese interaction and their struggle will depend on the directions of China's domestic policy and its development. There are enough complex problems that put pressure on the Chinese Communist Party. China's past socio-economic policies led to a long-term

decline in economic growth. The current assessment of the situation shows that China's growth could reach 2-3%, creating a completely different future (Rajah & Leng, 2022; Grano, 2023).

The competitive confrontation between China and the U.S. has affected small countries' political options, and many chose between the U.S. and China (Kuik, 2020; Tritto et al., 2022). At the discourse level, the U.S. and China address their supporters by characterising their actions as a competition between effective and lousy governance (on the part of China) and authoritarianism and democracy (on the part of the U.S.). Despite some economic separation, China remains dependent on the international trade network. The confrontation has intensified due to the financial factor and accelerated due to digital transformations. The extent to which this state of affairs can shake the international community in matters where broad cooperation is needed also depends on other factors that may emerge in the near future.

Methods

The study's analytical structure is based on identifying key actions and geopolitical orientations of the U.S. and China, which involve defending their political, economic and military interests. Contextual and comparative analysis of opinion polls, reports, surveys and other sources were used to analyse the data. The research procedure is based on obtaining the necessary data analysing the state of U.S.-China relations and the attitudes of different countries to them, the results of data analysis, and the formulation of conclusions. The research methodology involved the use of a comparison method, graphical analysis of the characteristics of the role of the U.S. and China for the respective countries (adversary, rival, ally, partner), prognostic method and content analysis of German political declarative documents. The dataset used was the results of a 2021 survey on the perception of China's role and place in relation to their own countries and the results of a 2023 survey on the role and place of the U.S. regarding their own countries. Forecasting the geopolitical situation in ten years was based on the survey of respondents in 2023. These surveys were conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) in 2021 and 2023 (Krstev & Leonard, 2023; Oertel, 2021; Moldicz, 2021).

The final stage involved determining the role and place of China in Germany's foreign policy based

on the content analysis of its declaration documents. In this case, Germany is the largest economy in the European Union and a significant geopolitical player (Reimers, 2021; Damm, 2020).

In characterising the influence of the U.S. on the overall geopolitical situation, the authors use data from surveys of respondents in 10 European countries with different levels of economic development – Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom (Krastev & Leonard, 2023). To characterise China's influence on the overall geopolitical situation, the study used data from surveys of respondents in 12 European countries (Hungary, Poland, Estonia, Bulgaria, Italy, Denmark, Portugal, Austria, Sweden, France, the Netherlands, and Germany) (Oertel, 2021; Moldicz, 2021). Data from surveys of respondents in 10 countries (Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy,

Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom) were used to determine the overall geopolitical situation in the world based on the analysis of policies regarding the perception of other countries as threats or allies for the next ten years (Krastev & Leonard, 2023).

Results

The confrontation between the U.S. and China has led to different approaches to defining each country's role in selected European countries. A survey of respondents on the perception of the role of the U.S. for their own countries was conducted in 2023. Most respondents in eight countries consider the United States a “necessary partner”. However, Denmark and the United Kingdom consider the United States an ally, while Germany and Poland have fairly evenly split the two options (Figure 1). Based on a similar study in 2021, fewer Europeans saw the U.S. as an ally, and this response was not prevalent among the citizens of the countries surveyed (Krastev & Leonard, 2023).

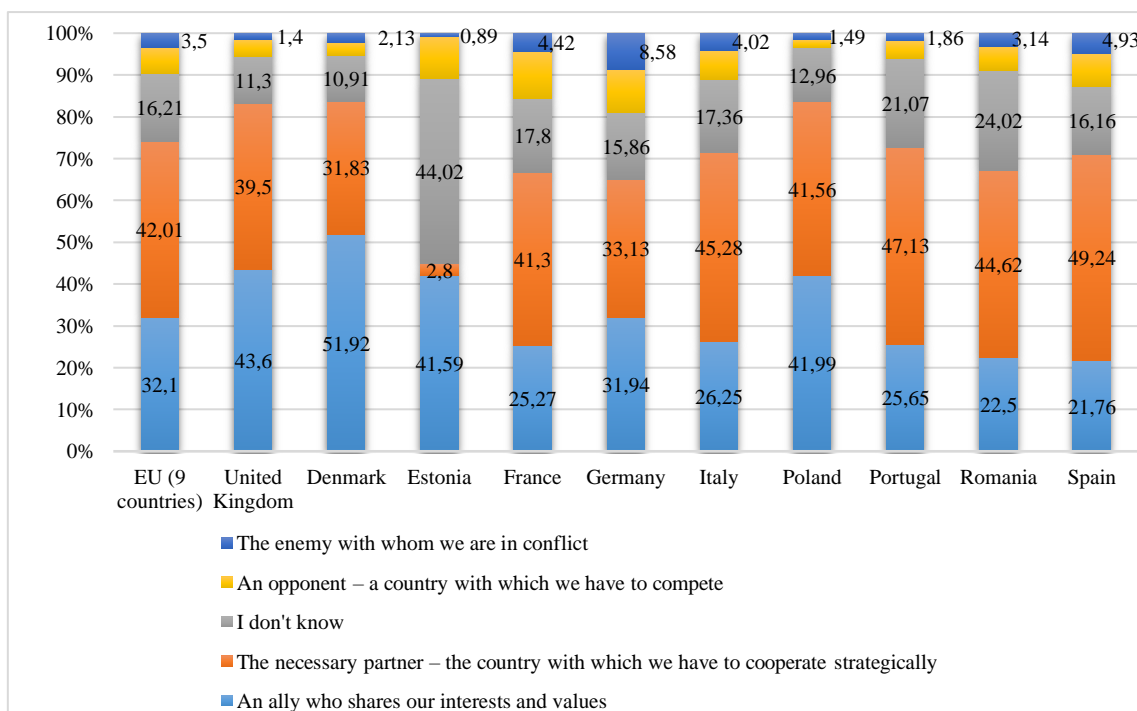


Figure 1. Respondents' views on the role of the U.S. for their country in 2023, %
Source: (Krastev & Leonard, 2023)

The same approach can be used to assess China's role in individual European countries. 47% of respondents in Germany identified China as the opposing party with conflictual relations with European countries (according to a survey conducted in 2021) (Figure 2). A similar assessment was given by the Netherlands, France, Portugal and other countries that took part in the survey. Indeed, the public perception

of China as a partner in EU Member States is relatively high, demonstrating that there are specific common interests with Europe. Still, this state of affairs is somewhat conditional. Despite the perception of partnership with China as necessary in certain areas, countries that can be called leaders in Europe (Germany, France) have different positions (Oertel, 2021).

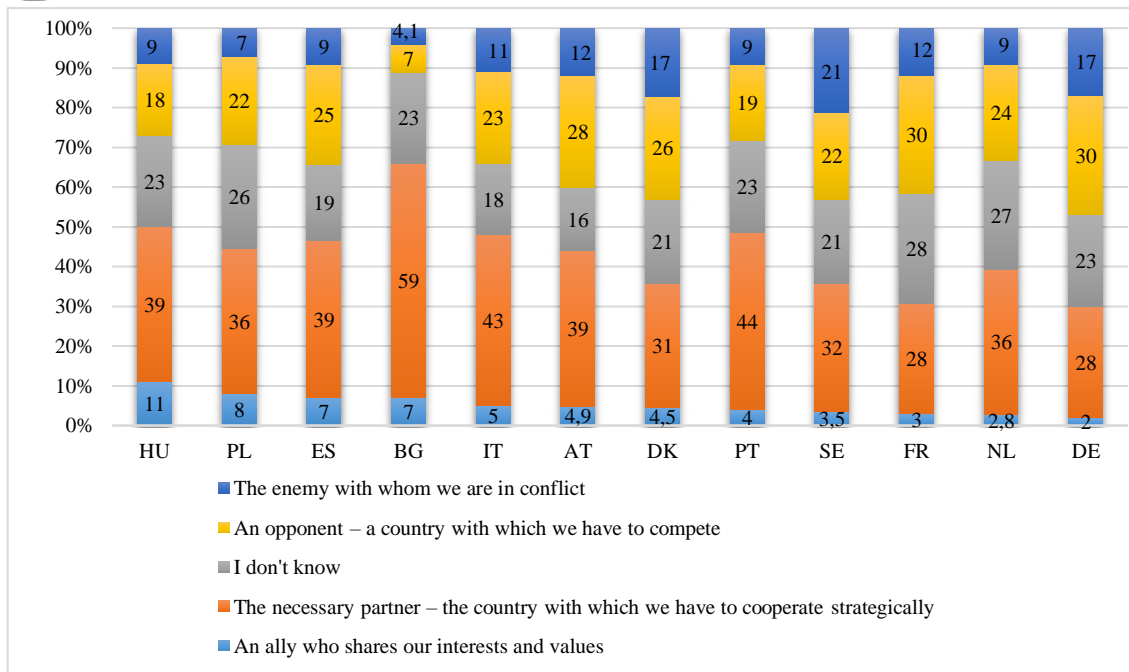


Figure 2. Respondents' views on China's role in their country in 2021, %
Source: (Oertel, 2021; Moldicz, 2021)

It is essential to understand specific trends that shape U.S.-China relations to determine the likely development of the geopolitical situation in ten years (Table 1). The respondents in the nine EU countries suggest that specific associations led by the U.S. and China will continue to compete in future. However, the respondents from 10 European countries showed different views on the development of the geopolitical situation. Almost every country demonstrates confidence in dividing the world

into two spheres of influence (the average in the EU is 28%, Spain and Italy – 32%, and Romania – 24%). Another opinion – that the world will be multipolar – is widespread (average – 19%). At the same time, many respondents could not decide on their position (the average in 9 EU countries is 25%, with the highest result in France, Romania, the UK, Poland, and Denmark). This indicates uncertainty or a lack of relevant information among the surveyed Europeans (Krastev & Leonard, 2023).

Table 1.
Probable scenarios of the geopolitical situation in ten years, %

	EU (9 countries)	Spain	Romania	Portugal	Italy	Germany	France	Poland	Estonia	Denmark	United Kingdom
The division of global power between two rival blocs with the United States and China at the head	28	32	24	27	32	30	28	26	25	30	29
US global dominance	7	5	9	4	10	6	4	9	4	6	4
China's global dominance	9	9	8	8	15	10	7	9	5	9	11
More even distribution of global power between several countries	19	18	19	24	9	17	17	17	30	17	16
The global dominance of another country (not the U.S. or China)	4	4	5	3	6	4	3	3	2	3	2
I can't answer	25	22	25	23	23	22	33	29	20	31	30
Another option	8	9	10	9	4	10	8	7		4	9

Source: developed by authors based on Krastev and Leonard (2023)



The final analysis is to determine the attitude of German political forces towards China. The researchers have identified a critical position towards China based on violations of civil rights, existing geopolitical conflicts, and market competition (Reimers, 2021). The CDU/CSU calls for cooperation in the economic sphere, highlighting the external and security challenges posed by China. The political force of the Greens focuses on upholding human rights and addressing environmental protection through collective problem-solving. FDP criticises China for human rights violations and relations with

Taiwan. The Left Party is trying to maintain equal relations with both U.S. and China. The AFD party supports Germany's partnership in economic projects, while being critical of China's external interference (Damm, 2020). All centrist parties (SPD, CDU/CSU, Alliance 90/The Greens FDP) support the EU's 2019 formulation of China as a partner, competitor and rival and promote a level playing field (Table 2) and support the growth of Europe's competitiveness, primarily in the technological sector and digitalization.

Table 2.
Positions of different political forces in Germany on China policy

	AFD	Left	FDP	Green	SPD	CDU/CSU
Enhancement of European Competitiveness, with a Focus on Technological and Digital Sectors	–	–	+	+	+	+
The continuation of the EU-China interaction	–	–	+	+	+	+
The defense against China in terms of communication means, innovative technologies, and data	–	–	–	+	–	+
Faire economic relations	+	–	+	+	+	+
Creating European alternatives to the BRI	x	–	+	+	–	
Strengthening transatlantic cooperation (a), explicit vis-à-vis China (b).	–	x	+	++	+	++
China's Involvement in Disarmament Processes	–	+	+	+	+	–
Cooperation with China in the Climate Sphere	–	–	–	+	+	–
Enhancing Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region	–	–	+	+	–	+
Intolerance towards human rights violations	–	–	+	+	+	–
Support for Hong Kong's Right to Autonomy	–	–	+	+	+	–
Support for Taiwan's independence	–	–	+	–	–	–
Support for the Independence of Confucius Institutes	+	–	+	–	–	–

Note: + the issue was paid attention to; – was not mentioned; x – takes the opposite position.

Source: developed by authors based on Reimers (2021) and Damm, (2020)

These political forces are critical of China and its geostrategic challenges, market interaction, and human rights violations. The Social Democratic Party of Germany considers dialogue with China appropriate but cannot ignore the issue of Hong Kong's autonomy or the Xinjiang Problem. The FDP has clearly expressed its position on the unacceptability of human rights violations and the need for cooperation with Taiwan. Most political forces consider it appropriate to cooperate with China at various levels. The Green Party does not object to the U.S. proposal to confront China and its democratic allies jointly. This is the position of the CDU/CSU and

the Greens within the framework of transatlantic cooperation. Future approaches to Germany's economic cooperation with China may move towards a reduction, given the growing need for security, the use of technology, and the need for active support from Western partners in countering the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Discussion

The study of the importance of U.S.-China relations for global politics, the identification of the main factors influencing their dynamics, and the analysis of the consequences of this influence

on the geopolitical structure of the world have certain limitations and caveats. The respondents' perceptions of the countries used in the study are based on their own understanding, which may not be related to political, economic or military analysis. Thus, a certain percentage of subjective results may be expected. In addition, the available data contains only a limited number of countries (12 in one case and 9 in the other), which does not reveal the complete picture of different regional groups and individual countries. The analysis of responses related to China was based on the public position in 2021. At the same time, German political forces' assessment of China shows a much more robust level of professionalism in declaring the consequences of the geopolitical situation.

Some researchers suggest that continued U.S. cooperation with China is unlikely to soften the latter's position on specific global issues, and individual countries will face the problem of choosing allies. These results are confirmed, for example, by a study of South Korea's foreign relations, where a complex process of choosing individual strategic actions towards the U.S. and China is underway. This requires a complex foreign policy programme, considering polarised opinions on relations with the U.S. and China (Heiduk, 2022).

The competition for power between the U.S. and China in Southeast Asia and the South China Sea also considers developing countries (Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia). Specific diplomatic isolation should localise China's actions to minimise its recent military actions (Vo et al., 2023). This may indicate that the U.S.-China rivalry intensifies regional conflicts, stimulating ties between other countries and their attempts to gain support from global rivals, thus changing the nature of regional problems (Schindler & DiCarlo, 2022).

China has to confront the growing military, diplomatic and technological coordination between democratic countries in the Eastern part of the world that are allies of the U.S. (Japan, India, Australia, and South Korea). In case of increased mutual confrontation, this will force both the U.S. and China to seek approaches to these countries to continue influencing players in the region (Wyne, 2022).

We have different situational solutions based on the analysed impact of U.S.-China relations on the geopolitical situation and, consequently, the movement of certain countries in support of each party's position. For example, one of China's

partners, Serbia, has stated that the Russian-occupied Crimea and Donbas belong to Ukrainian territories. For the U.S., it is critical that China and Russia strengthen their cooperation, which would harm both its economic interests and the war's end in Ukraine. Another area is the U.S. effort to preserve the status quo in Taiwan, which China seeks to take control of even by military means. Although China does not intend to launch a forceful scenario, considering the excessive economic risks. On the other hand, the possibility of ending the war in Ukraine, if Ukraine achieves its goals, will help improve relations between the U.S. and China. In the absence of Ukraine's military success, U.S.-China relations may further deteriorate, manifesting as a strengthening of the anti-Western coalition (Zhang, 2023).

The U.S. should demonstrate readiness to change relations depending on the actions of the Chinese side and recognise China's contribution to the agenda in case of its positive steps. Establishing optimal U.S.-China relations will help to strengthen the resolution of the global recession, mass migration, environmental issues, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, food security, and nuclear threats posed by North Korea. In the short term, the U.S. and China will be political and economic rivals, while the priority should be to solve global and domestic problems rather than a global confrontation between the two countries.

Conclusions

The study emphasizes the significant role of the U.S.-China rivalry in shaping the global geopolitical situation, which requires developing and implementing strategies to maintain stability, finding standard solutions to global problems, cooperation and peaceful coexistence between the U.S. and China. Such strategies should consider political, economic, climate, security, socio-cultural and technological dimensions of relations between the two countries.

At the same time, the study identified potential risks and challenges associated with U.S.-China relations. Disagreements in trade, cybersecurity, human rights, and other areas could lead to increased tension and uncertainty in the international arena, as evidenced by the role and place of the two global players for individual countries (adversary, rival, partner, ally). To ensure stability and peace, it is essential that the U.S. and China focus on maintaining an open and constructive dialogue, using the mechanisms of

international organisations to address problems jointly.

Understanding each party's main motivations and goals for U.S.-China relations will help determine possible prospects for cooperation or conflict. Consideration of the impact of their relationship on regional stability, the balance of power and interaction with other states in Asia and the Pacific will provide a complete picture of its geostrategic significance. Taking into account trade ties, investment flows, and competition in the economic sphere will improve the understanding of the impact of these relations on the global economy and the formation of new economic blocs. Analysing the two countries' participation in international conflicts and security will help identify possible ways to manage threats and ensure stability jointly.

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