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Conflicts in contemporary Asia – theoretical approach

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ABSTRACT

The article attempts to theoretically systematize conflicts in contemporary Asia. At the beginning, attention was paid to the cultural and civilizational determinants of disputes and tensions in the region, which have a direct impact on the sphere of political activity of individual states. It has been found that ethnic and religious heterogeneity is the cause of tensions in Asia in most cases. The critical role of the United States in creating new security architecture across the Asian region has been determined. At the same time, it has been emphasized that multifaceted diversity is not always at odds with conflict-free development and stability. The exemplification of this hypothesis is Malaysia – a country of three cultures (Islamic, Chinese and Hindu). This country gives an example for the whole Asia that diversity does not mean the fatalism of internal conflicts. Malaysia can be an inspiration, especially for the Islamic civilizational circle.

1. Introduction

Contemporary Asia is the most conflictual field of international relations. In the vast geographical area from the Arabian Peninsula to China, India and Japan, countless conflicts of political, ethnic, cultural, religious and economic origin take place. Intra-state conflicts are dominant, although conflicts between states (inter-state conflicts) also occur. Following the thesis of prominent American political scientist Kenneth Waltz articulated in his work *Man, the State, and the War: A Theoretical Analysis*, conflicts in Asia should be studied in three dimensions: behavioral (Asian cultural conditions), political (particularism of Asian political regimes) and systemic. The greatest threats in Asia that can destabilize the entire continent and neighboring areas of international relations (Europe, Africa and Australia) are the Muslim fundamentalism and the danger of nuclear conflict (India, China, Pakistan and North Korea have nuclear arsenals). Contemporary Asia is also an arena for the rivalry of new superpowers. This applies espe-

cially to a potential Indian-Chinese confrontation for the *dominium Asiae*. The most powerful geopolitical entity in Asia – People's China can stand up to global competition with the United States, establishing the main axis of international relations in the 21st century. Mass migrations of peoples to Europe and Australia areas affected by endemic war are also a huge danger. Thus, a threat can come particularly from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia.

1.1. General characteristics of the region: history-geography-culture

The Asian continent can be divided into the following sub-regions [McColl 1975, pp. 301-310; Buzan 1998, pp. 68-87; Dent 2008; Frost 2008; Weightman 2011]:

- East Asia – it consists of land and sea territories of states such as: China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Taiwan and Russia. The Korean Peninsula has unique strategic value, as its location makes it one of the key regions allowing access to the heart of Asia.

- West Asia – this sub-region is primarily composed of Arab countries (Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman), Israel, Iran and Turkey.

- South Asia – this sub-region includes: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives.

- Central Asia – the sub-region creates five post-Soviet republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). Afghanistan can also be included in this sub-region.

- Southeast Asia – includes land states: Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand as well as land-archipelago countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Brunei. The nature of this area is characterized by a kind of particularism based on skillful building of its own political, economic and cultural position at the junction of two great powers – India and China. The domestic situation in these countries is a potential source of perturbation in the whole region, as countries such as Indonesia and Philippines are in danger of permanent conflict on religious grounds. There is a growing wave of Muslim fundamentalism, causing the emergence of local Islamic *guerilla* units. Southeast Asia is also critical in terms of the global economy. Transport arteries that are important for the global trade pass through this area and they provide access to ocean and sea trade corridors. This is especially true for the Strait of Malacca that connects the Indian Ocean with the Pacific Ocean through the Andaman Sea and the South China Sea. In this context, it seems reasonable to fear that the safety of these routes will be threatened in a situation when internal conflicts intensify, particularly in Indonesia [Halizak 1999, pp. 53-54].

When attempting to conduct an extended analysis of one of the aspects of international relations in Asia (internal conflicts and international disputes), it is important to be aware that even the best knowledge of history and contemporary problems of political-social nature will certainly be insufficient. It seems necessary to examine cultural-civilizational determinants without which understanding of Asia is impossible. The

behavior of states and Asian societies originates form a set of cultural paradigms, which are the most important causative factor of the Asians' conduct. The leading paradigms include:

- Strong authority as the foundation of all order and organization.
- The fundamental role of family both in the sphere of private life and in social and economic relations.
- The patriarchal society, supremacy of men, secondary role of women.
- The superiority of informal regulations and solutions over official solutions, resulting from existing legal regimes.
- Communalism – the superiority of the community over the individual [Halizak 1999, pp. 52; Diamond et al. 2013, pp. 6-8; Pye and Pye 1985, pp. 25-33].

The precedent axiological code in the case of the largest Asian country, i.e. China, is a set of Confucian norms and dispositions. Confucianism has great internal flexibility, which makes it possible to combine democratic and authoritarian systems using its mechanisms. The characteristics of Confucianism that are incompatible with parliamentarianism and democracy include:

- The individual lives only in the family and in the state; the concept of civil society is non-existent, there is a lack of intermediary institutions between the family and the state.
- Familism – hierarchical relations within the family, which is reflected in all social interactions. There is no concept of equal opportunities (e.g. in terms of professional career).
- A lack of human rights protection system. In light of the Confucian paradigms, the individual has no rights but must fulfill obligations towards the community and the state.

The Confucian values are ambivalent, as at the same time one can identify elements that, under appropriate conditions, can support the emergence and survival of democratic institutions:

- Religious tolerance – Confucianism is not present in the theological and metaphysical sphere. It does not address eschatological issues associated with the afterlife. It does not create the duality of divine order and earthly order. It is not an institutionalized religious system presenting itself as a depositary of truth. It perfectly and peacefully coexists in religiously diversified cultural space. In a diverse environment, Confucianism is a complementary, not a dominant element.
- The primacy of civilian over military rule – there is a proverb in the Chinese tradition saying that good iron should not be used to make nails and good men should not be used to make soldiers. The superiority of the pen and plow over the sword and rifle also means greater social trust in civilian structures than in military ones. According to another Confucian principle, every government has three types of power in disposal: trust, economic efficiency and armed forces,

which is the least effective mean [Halizak 1999, pp. 98-99; Tan 2004, pp. 1-16; Wei-ming 1996, pp. 75-82; Taylor 1990, pp. 9-17].

In the set of Asian values democracy is not the first commandment. In Asia, the one who is right is, first and foremost, effective. It is not necessarily the one whose mandate comes from democratic elections. A natural consequence of such axiological preferences is the tendency of political elites to despotism and authoritarianism. Over time, it accumulates the ferment in society, which demands the right to freedom and participation in a fair distribution of power. Dictatorial governments generate conflicts and democracy becomes a remedy for their suppression. The question, then, arises: is democracy in Asia possible? Is it needed there at all? Will democratic and parliamentary mechanisms eliminate sources of tensions and disputes? The antithesis is the assumption that only authoritarian regimes are able to maintain order, although "cold", but guaranteeing "cold" stabilization, not velvet destabilization. It could be argued that economic development is an overarching goal, and that only economic prosperity creates the prerequisites for democracy. By gaining material well-being, people then achieve political and social autonomy. Admittedly, authoritarianism is initially better at triggering the mechanisms needed to stimulate economic growth. In democratic systems, the parliament may decide that the current delivery of social obligations is more important than investment plans. In the long term, economic development creates the conditions for democratic institutions to take root. If we recognize that the ultimate horizon for Asia is permanent economic development (sustainable development), then it is not limited to economic indicators but also includes such values and norms as human rights, political pluralism and parliamentarianism, and this can be only achieved under democratic conditions. The Asian *mot d'ordre* is: through economic development towards democracy and human rights [Case 1996, pp. 437-464; Neher 1994, pp. 949-961].

The multifaceted heterogeneity of many states in the region as well as the coexistence of heterogeneous and homogenous areas (India and China) are exemplary sources of conflicts, wars, tensions and disputes in Asia. However, it would be simplistic to make a dichotomous division of Asia into diverse and homogenous countries. There are states that show homogeneity on one level and diversity on other levels. The factors that deepen the heterogeneity of the region include:

- Linguistic diversity – Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Farsi, Korean, Russian, Malay, Vietnamese, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Bahasa Indonesia and Tagalog. The English language plays a unique *lingua franca* role. It is a communication transmission belt through which Western values are passed to the Asian civilizational circle.

- Religious diversity – considering the criterion of confession, the Buddhist cultural circle (Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia); the Confucian cultural circle (China, Taiwan, Korea and Singapore); the Muslim cultural circle (partly India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, partly Malaysia, partly the Philippines, Brunei, Iran, Turkey, Arab states, and South Asian states); the Hindu cultural circle (India and partly Sri Lanka); the Christian cultural circle (partly

the Philippines, partly Indonesia, partly India and Russian minorities in South Asian states) and the Shino cultural circle (Japan) can be distinguished in Asia.

- Ethnic diversity – Asia is characterized by the coexistence of homogenous and heterogeneous areas in terms of ethnicity. The homogenous countries include: Japan, China, North Korea, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam and a part of Arab states. The heterogeneous countries include: India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. In Central Asian states, Russian population centers constitute an important ethnic component. Japan and two Korean states are characterized by unique homogeneity. Since the groundbreaking reforms of the *Meiji* period, the Japanese have been able to internalize Western civilizational patterns without the inflow of foreigners. Simultaneously, Japan is characterized by universalist aspirations. The Empire repeatedly sought to impose its own civilizational patterns on all of Asia (*pax nipponica*). South Korea is also an ethnically homogenous country. The factor that establishes the identity of Koreans is a historical experience related to the expansionism of Japan and China. The Koreans consider themselves a nation living in the shadow of these two powers. China is also ethnically homogenous (the only significant minority are the Muslim Uighurs the Xinijang province and the Tibetan people). In this case, we are dealing with a political and ideological conflict within the same nation: the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China (Taiwan).

2. A list of political, religious and social conflicts, disputes and tensions in Asia

The most important conflicts in contemporary Asia include [Halizak 1999, pp. 336-337; Ball 1993-1994, pp. 78-112; Sisodia and Kalyanaraman 2010; Searle 2002, pp. 1-11; Dahal et al. 2003, pp. 1-56]:

- The Japanese-Russian dispute over the South Kuril Islands (in Japanese terminology this area functions under the name of the Northern Territories): Kunashir, Etorofu, Shikotan and Habomai.
- The Japanese-South Korean dispute over the Liancourt Rocks. The geographic Japanese nomenclature uses the name Takeshima, while the South Korean terminology uses the name Dokdo. The islands are located in the southern part of the Sea of Japan.
- The North Korean issue – a real possibility of an outbreak of a conflict of conventional or nuclear nature between North Korea and South Korea or between North Korea and Japan. In both cases, the United States would be the third party actively involved in the conflict.
- The Taiwan issue – a possibility of an outbreak of a conventional or nuclear conflict between the People's China and Taiwan supported by the United States.
- Multisided conflict (People's China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines) over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.
- The Chinese-Vietnamese dispute over the Paracel Islands in the South Chiba Sea.

- The Chinese-Japanese dispute over the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu in Chinese) in the East China Sea.
- The increased activity of extremist Muslim organizations on the Philippine island Mindanao.
- The threat of the activity of extremist Muslim organizations in Indonesia.
- The Christian-Muslim conflict on the Maluku Islands.
- The Philippine-Malaysian dispute over the Malaysian part of the Borneo Island (Sabah).
- The border dispute between Indonesia and Vietnam over the course of the demarcation line of the continental shelf near the Natuna Islands.
- The Vietnamese-Chinese disputes.
- The Vietnamese-Cambodian disputes.
- The Chinese-Indian territorial disputes.
- The conflicts on religious grounds in the Indian state Gujarat.
- The Tamil separatism in India.
- The Sikh separatism in India.
- The separatism in the Indian state Assam.
- The conflicts on social grounds in India (the Naxalite movement).
- The Tamil-Sinhalese conflict in Sri Lanka.
- The ethnic conflicts in Bangladesh (the separatist aspirations of people professing Buddhism or Hinduism: the Jummas, the Chakmas and the Marmas in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region).
- The separatist movement on the Bougainville Island in Papua New Guinea.
- The separatist movement in Western Irian/Western Papua New Guinea (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka*) in Indonesia.
- The internal conflicts and their international dimension in Afghanistan.
- The Indian-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir.
- The separatist movement in Pakistani Balochistan.
- The Sunni-Shia conflict in the Pakistani province of Sindh.
- The political conflicts of anti-regime nature in South Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan).
- The Iran issue – a possibility of using nuclear weapons by Iran in a conflict with Israel.
- The anti-regime tensions in Iran.
- The separatism of the province inhabited by the Azeri people in Iran.
- The separatist movement in the Indonesian province of Aceh (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka; Aceh Sumatra National Liberation Front*).
- The Indonesian-Malaysian dispute over the Sipadan, Sebatik and Ligitan islands located in the Celebes Sea.
- The political tensions in Laos.

- The activity of the communist guerilla warfare at the border of Thailand and Laos.
- The border disputes between Thailand and Laos.
- The military operations of separatist groups of the Karens, the Shans and the Arakans in Myanmar.
- The anti-regime tensions in Myanmar.
- The anti-regime guerilla warfare in Nepal.
- The ethno-religious conflict in the Chinese province of Xinijang.
- The Palestinian issue in the Middle East.
- The internal conflicts and their internationalization (especially the activity of the Shia group Hezbollah) in Lebanon.
- The civil war in Syria; the internationalization of the terrorist activity of the Islamic State.
- The Syrian-Turkish tensions.
- The Israeli-Arab conflicts (tensions in the relations between Israel and Egypt as well as Syria and Lebanon).
- The Kurdish issue in the Near and Middle East.
- The civil war in Iraq.
- The civil war in Yemen.
- The anti-regime tensions in Bahrain.
- The Shia separatism in Saudi Arabia (Al-Ahsa province).

Taking into account the above-mentioned disputes and wars, they can be systematized and five most conflictual areas in Asia can be identified:

- The Afghanistan – Pakistan – India triangle (the civil war in Afghanistan, the conflict over Kashmir and the increased activity of Muslim fundamentalists in Pakistan).
- The Persian Gulf region (the civil war in Iraq; the nuclearization of Iran).
- The South Asian region (the intensification of the activity of extremist Muslim groups, especially in Uzbekistan).
- East Asia – the increase of tensions in the Chinese-Taiwanese relations and the nuclear threat from North Korea.
- The Southeast Asian region: the increase of the influence of Muslim fundamentalists in Indonesia (the danger of disintegration of Indonesia as a result of the separatist aspirations of the Sumatra and Western New Guinean separatists); the civil war in the Philippines caused by the activity of Muslim extremists on the Mindanao island.

In most cases, the following causes of conflict in Asia should be distinguished:

- Ethnic heterogeneity.
- Religious heterogeneity.
- Separatist movements posing a threat to territorial integrity of states.

- Fundamentalist Muslim organizations' activity
- Regional competition for the status of the Asian superpower (China – India).
- Ongoing unsettled border issues (most borders, especially in South Asia, is a potential source of conflict (the Afghan-Pakistani border; the Pakistani-Indian border; the Indian-Chinese border; the Indian-Burmese border; the Bengali-Burmese border). The leakiness of borders creates conditions for the emergence of cross-border crime. An example is the Indian-Bengali border where thousands of people are recruited on a mass scale to work illegally in the Persian Gulf states [Mato 2009]. A similar phenomenon is observed at the Afghan-Pakistani border.

In order to generally systematize conflicts in Asia, the following division can be made [Croissant and Trinn 2009, pp. 13-43]:

1. Based on the involvement of a party in the conflict:
   - Civil wars (the warring parties belong to one country; *domestic conflicts*; *intra-state conflict*).
   - Inter-state conflicts.
   - Transnational conflicts (e.g. between non-state actors fighting on the territory of many states whose members also originate from many countries).

2. From the point of view of causes, conflicts can be divided into:
   • Conflicts about political power.
   • Socio-economic conflicts.
   • Cultural conflicts.

3. The competition between superpowers in Asia – the key role of the United States

The United States will play a crucial role in international relations in Asia [Steeds 1997, pp. 255-268; Brzezinski 2013]. The complementary scenario assumes strategic cooperation between Washington and Beijing, cementing the East Asian-Pacific axis, the political-economic backbone of the world. The confrontational scenario is the prospect of the formation of an American-Indian-Japanese alliance against China, which could lead to direct conflict, "cold war", in the Pacific or the formation of an anti-American Sino-Russian symmachia.

One should rather agree with analysts according to whom the US will play the role of a moderator on the Asian chessboard regional superpowers, strengthening existing alliances with Israel, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam and Australia. One of the instruments of institutional-legal action aimed at "velvet" limiting China's drive for hegemony in Asia is the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The protagonist of the partnership is the United States. So far, the following countries have entered: Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. On the analyzed subject, it is worth to mention the surprising but penetrating assessment expressed in the *Politique Étrangère*, according to which the ambitions of the People's Republic of China are in reality a blessing for the United States. Without China, America would not have a wor-

thy rival and as a consequence the United States would become a "sluggish superpower". In the face of the Chinese threat, the United States must develop at the "highest rate" [Buzan 2012; Beeson and Li 2012, pp. 35-51; Brewster 2010, pp. 95-120].

Joseph Nye, a well-known American political scientist, wrote in the 1995 report *United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region* – "The interests of the United States in particular areas in the region complement and reinforce each other. Security is a prerequisite for economic development; security combined with growth make it more likely that human rights will be respected, and the democratic order will be strengthened, democratization will in turn limit international conflicts as democracies do not fight each other." [Halizak 1999, p. 145]. Among the most important strategic goals of the US in Asia, J. Nye included:

- Bilateral alliances with Japan, the Republic of Korea and Australia.
- Engagement in the development of relations with China and bringing China closer to the political and economic structures of the West.
- Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.
- Cooperation with Russia for regional stabilization.
- Maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait.
- Intensification of cooperation with ASEAN states [Halizak 1999, p. 145; Goh 2007, pp. 809-832].

Maintaining United States' strategic presence in Asia primarily as a guarantor of security will have a positive impact on international relations in the region. There is no reason to argue that this will lead to an armed confrontation with China, but it will certainly protect Asia from the total hegemony of Beijing [Baker 1991, pp. 1-18]. The emerging US-China bipolarity will not be built on an ideological foundation that characterized international relations during the Cold War, but it will be shaped civilizational and cultural values. Its characteristic will not be an arms race and conflictual rivalry, but rather economic competition and cooperation.

Conclusions

In the first decades after the Second World War, East, West, South and Southeast Asia were the area where the greatest domestic and international conflicts in the world at that time took place: the Chinese Civil War 1946-1950; the First Indochina War 1943-1954; the Korean War 1950-1953 and the Vietnam War 1964-1975. Eighty percent of the fatalities in conflicts after the Second World War, between 1946 and 1979, were related to East Asia and Southeast Asia [Hurtig 1991, pp. 113-129]. In this period, the biggest humanitarian catastrophes, massacres and crimes against humanity occurred in this area of international relations: the Cultural Revolution in China 1966-1976; the brutal suppression of communist rebellions in Indonesia in the years 1965-1966; the Cambodian genocide 1975-1979 and the massacres carried out by Indonesian forces after the incorporation of East Timor in 1975. Since the 1980s, the involvement of East and Southeast Asia in global conflicts has fallen significantly. In the years 1990-2011, out of 760 thousand fatalities in local and international conflicts, 27 thousand were

from East and Southeast Asia. In recent years, this sub-region of Asia can be considered more stable than West and South Asia [Pareja Alcaraz 2008, pp. 1-54; Friedberg 1993-1994, pp. 5-33; Ross 1999, pp. 81-118; Simon 1994, pp. 1047-1063; Ayoob 1999, pp. 247-260].

When analyzing the Asian continent from the point of view of domestic and international conflicts it seems reasonable to present the following conclusions [SIPRI Yearbook 2013, pp. 28-40; Searle 2002, pp. 1-11]:

- The most conflictual sub-regions are West and South Asia. The source of instability and threat is primarily the growing number of Islamic fundamentalists (Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and India); separatist and independence movements (India, Indonesia, the Philippines, China and the Palestinian Authority); the rivalry between regional superpowers with nuclear weapons in their disposal (Iran, India and Pakistan) and anti-regime revolutions that destabilize other states in the region (the Civil War in Syria).

- East Asia – is a definitely more stable region. The existing threats are potentially extremely dangerous (the prospect of war in the Korean Peninsula, the Korean-Japanese wars, the Indian-Chinese wars, the Chinese-Japanese wars and the People's China invasions of Taiwan). However, these have only been hypothetical scenarios so far. Despite the tensions, there has been no inter-state war in the region [Kivimäki 2010, pp. 503-526; Vatikiotis 2006, pp. 27-47].

- The most dangerous potential conflicts in Asia (a nuclear strike by North Korea and an Indian-Pakistani war for Kashmir) have their origins in the colonial period (the division of India) and the Cold War era (the Korean issue).

- Today, low-intensity conflicts dominate in this research area. They are most commonly related to the activity of separatist movements, fundamentalist organizations and leftist *guerillas* (the Naxalites in India). Over the last dozen or so years, the only case of inter-state conflict was the incident in relations between South Korea and the DPRK. In 2010, the North Korean navy bombarded a South Korean ship. This incident, however, did not lead to an outbreak of war between the two states. Another conflict of inter-state nature occurred in 2011 between Cambodia and Thailand in the disputed area near the Preah Vihear temple.

- The new axis of conflicts in Asia runs from Pakistan do Kyrgyzstan, with particular consideration of southern Kyrgyz provinces and eastern districts of Tajikistan. We observe that Central Asia is becoming one of neuralgic sub-regions in contemporary Asia, but it is an area with a high conflictual potential. Religious, ethnic and ideological conflicts as well as the rivalry between superpowers join there (the United States, Russia and China) [Cagnat 2010].

- Australia can play a constructive role in international relations in Southeast Asia. Canberra is particularly interested in the unstable situation in Indonesia and in the Philippines. The involvement of Australians in this area can be an alternative to the interventionism of the United States or China. Australia's activity in international relations in Asia is also desirable for another reason. The

state recognizes the diversification of power in the region as one of the axioms of its democracy, which actually means limiting the influence of the People's China. For this reason, Australia is extending bilateral relations with India, considering this state as the main entity that can limit the supremacy of the Middle Kingdom on the Asian continent [Guillard 2012].

- A factor that partially extinguishes domestic and inter-state conflicts in Asia is the increasing interdependence and economic complementarity of the states in the region. Economic development usually leads to the freezing of conflicts. In this way, the extremely desirable process of gradual transformation of Asian *homo bellicus* into *homo oeconomicus* will accelerate [Leverchy 1993, pp. 24-39; López Vidal 2013]. The increasing interdependence of Asian economies may turn out to be a factor that extinguishes many potential sources of conflict.

- The tragedy of Asia lies in the fact that the accumulation of pathologies of economic, political and demographic nature has occurred in this area. Ethnoreligious diversity also comes into play. In the event of economic collapse in China and India, mass migrations of many millions of people seeking a better place to live in neighboring countries, in Russia and Europe, could be the potential results. Such mass migrations could constitute the same source of destabilization at a regional and supra-regional level as classical conflicts.

Conflicts in Asia can be classified into the following according to the causes of their emergence [Principales conflictos… 2010, pp. 185-219]:

- Conflicts causes by the activity of Muslim fundamentalists (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Indonesia and India).

- Conflicts on ideological grounds (North Korea; the practices of Falun Gong in China; the Naxalite movement in India; the activity of communist organizations in Nepal; the New People's Army in the Philippines).

- Conflicts caused by the struggle for power (Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Kyrgyzstan).

- Conflicts caused by sovereignty aspirations (Chittagong in Bangladesh; independence aspirations of the Mindanao island in the Philippines; separatist aspirations in Indian provinces of Assam, Manipur and Tripura); separatism of Indonesian provinces: Sumatra, Maluku, Sulawesi and Papua; independence aspirations of Kurds in Iran, Iraq and Turkey.

- Conflicts on religious and ideological grounds (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand).

- Conflicts based on the rivalry of superpowers (the Chinese-Indian; Chinese-Japanese; Russian-Chinese; Pakistani-Indian; Iranian-Saudi; Iranian-Pakistani rivalries).

- Socio-economic conflicts caused by the increase of anti-Chinese positions in Southeast Asian states. This often leads to intensification of nationalistic and xenophobic ideologies, particularly in Indonesia. Chinese diasporas are treated as a foreign ethnic and cultural element. The economic activity of the Chinese is perceived by local communities as a part of "Chinese colonialism". There are

analyses that compare the stand of the Chinese in Southeast Asia to the situation of Jews in prewar Europe [Anwar et al. 2005, pp. 43-44].

The worst scenario for Asia in the 21st century would be a nuclear war caused by the unpredictable position of North Korea, escalation of the Indian-Pakistani conflict, sudden deterioration of Chinese-Indian relations, the Chinese-American conflict about the Taiwan issue and the Israeli-Iranian war. All these scenarios are hypotheses, but they are not political phantasmagoria that can be completely ignored in analyzing international relations in Asia. In this context, the United States, China, Russia and India play a huge role. The future of the continent depends on the cooperation of these entities, regardless of ideological differences. The aforementioned superpowers have a significant influence on the behavior of states such as North Korea, Pakistan and Iran. The bilateral and multilateral initiatives undertaken to minimize the nuclear threat in Asia should aim not only at stopping or punishing threat-posing states (*threat-driven alliance*), but also at profiting from peaceful solving of disputes (*profit generating alliance*). The future of Asia will depend to a large extent on the conduct of two entities: the United States and China (*the distribution of military and economic power*). The problems and challenges in contemporary Asia exceed the capabilities of any superpower acting independently [Kapur 2003, p. 45].

Low-intensity conflicts resulting from ethno-religious diversity, activities of separatist movements and Muslim fundamentalist organizations will persist and it is currently difficult to predict the time of their extinction. The national and religious structure of Asian states will not change. However, the political and social systems of heterogeneous countries states need to be changed in a way allowing all groups to have the opportunity to pursue general state goals, the achievement of which will bring social and economic benefits to all, while maintaining and respecting all religious and national particularities.

Malaysia and Singapore are great examples of implementing such a policy. These two countries are characterized by domestic stability and high economic development despite ethno-religious diversity [Arif 1995, pp. 123-138; Haneef 2001, pp. 269-290; Wade 1992, pp. 270-320].

Malaysia is particularly an example worthy of imitations for Asia and the whole world. Despite the ethno-religious diversity, in the last decades this country has avoided domestic shakes and conflicts on confessionalist grounds. What is important, the heterogeneity of Malaysia turned out to be a factor mobilizing the ruling elites to implement many effective and ambitious strategies.

In terms of ethnic structure, in Malaysia we can distinguish: the Malays, the Indians and the Chinese. The religious mosaic mainly consists of Muslims and Hindus. Yet it is precisely this country that has managed to overcome the prospect of conflicts that have affected many other states in this region (Indonesia, the Philippines, Myanmar and Thailand). In Malaysia, the concept of supremacy of multiplicity has been created. The Malays have a dominant position. The Chinese and Indians enjoy full political and economic rights, but recognize the dominant position of the Malays (*the concept of*

bumiputera; communal compartmentalization). Thanks to this policy, Malaysia has avoided an outbreak of civil war [Huq Pramanik 2002; Gawlikowski 2003; Noor 2001, pp. 103-118]. The *bumiputera* system creates a specific social stratification in which full identity of the Chinese and the Indians is preserved while simultaneously adopting the paradigm that Malaysia is primarily a Malay and Muslim country [Croissant and Trinn 2009, p. 34]. The heterogeneous society has set itself a common goal – sustainable economic development, which is a mechanism for reducing economic disparities between individual communities. In the country dominated by Muslims, other groups do not feel impoverished because the basis for equality is egalitarianism of economic development. The Malaysian *homo oeconomicus*, despite ethno-religious particularisms, can perfectly and constructively cooperate with the other communities in the economic space. Malaysia is also an example of a successful convergence of economic development and a moderate version of Islam, devoid of fundamentalist tendencies. The creator of this success was the leader of the state Mahathir Mohamad. Similar processes can be observed in Singapore, where a strategy of supporting secularism and promoting the English language as the only *lingua franca* was pursued. This has led to state homogenization of diverse ethno-religious elements.

Malaysia has managed to avoid domestic conflicts by developing a *differentiated citizenship* accepted by all [Yong 2008, pp. 93-99, Hefner 2001, pp. 28-34, Christou and Mavroudi 2015, pp. 136-137]. Singapore maintains its stability due to the policy of strengthening and promoting national identity that limits particular identity aspirations. These countries have been characterized by high economic development indicators and internal political stability until this day.

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Author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. Author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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