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## The Nonaligned Movement 60 years Later: Restless asia seeking its pan-continental integration

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**Abstract:** *The very creation of sub-regional international organizations is a proof that currently Asian countries are more willing to consult and cooperate with each other on the integration and creating of the zone of co-prosperity issues. Nevertheless, in Asia, there is hardly a single state which has no territorial dispute within its neighbourhood. From the Middle East, Caspian and Central Asia, Indian sub-continent, mainland Indo – China or Archipelago SEA, Tibet, South China Sea and the Far East, many countries are suffering numerous green and blue border disputes. The foundation on which Asia – Pacific countries now support regional cooperation initiatives, such as the various Indo – Pacific concepts proposed by Japan, the United States and others, as well as China’s “Belt and Road Initiative”, is built on a policy of peaceful coexistence and prevention of the emergence of a single prevailing power. This paper closer examines these trends and all-Asia future prospect.*

**Keywords:** *Asia, multilateralism, collective security, prof. Bajrektarevic, border disputes, confidence building*

**M**arking the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inaugural, Belgrade conference of the Non-aligned Movement (NaM) (Aug-Sep 1961), the International Institute for Middle East and Balkans Studies (IFIMES) conducts series of research papers and reports. Hence, the first of them:

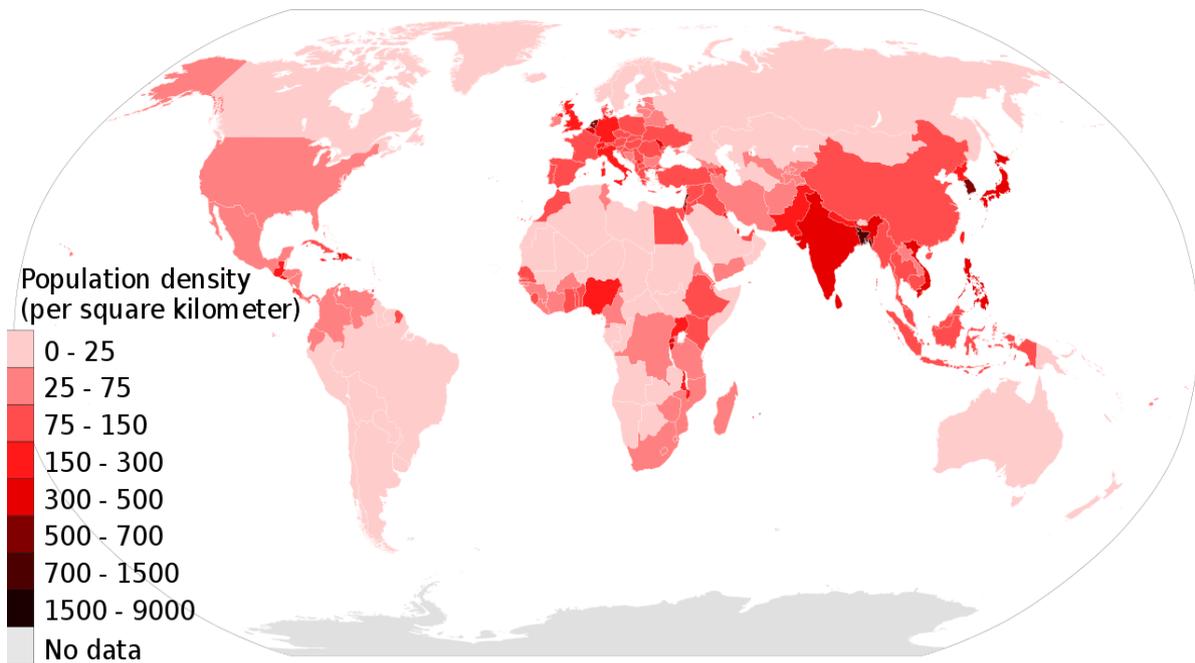
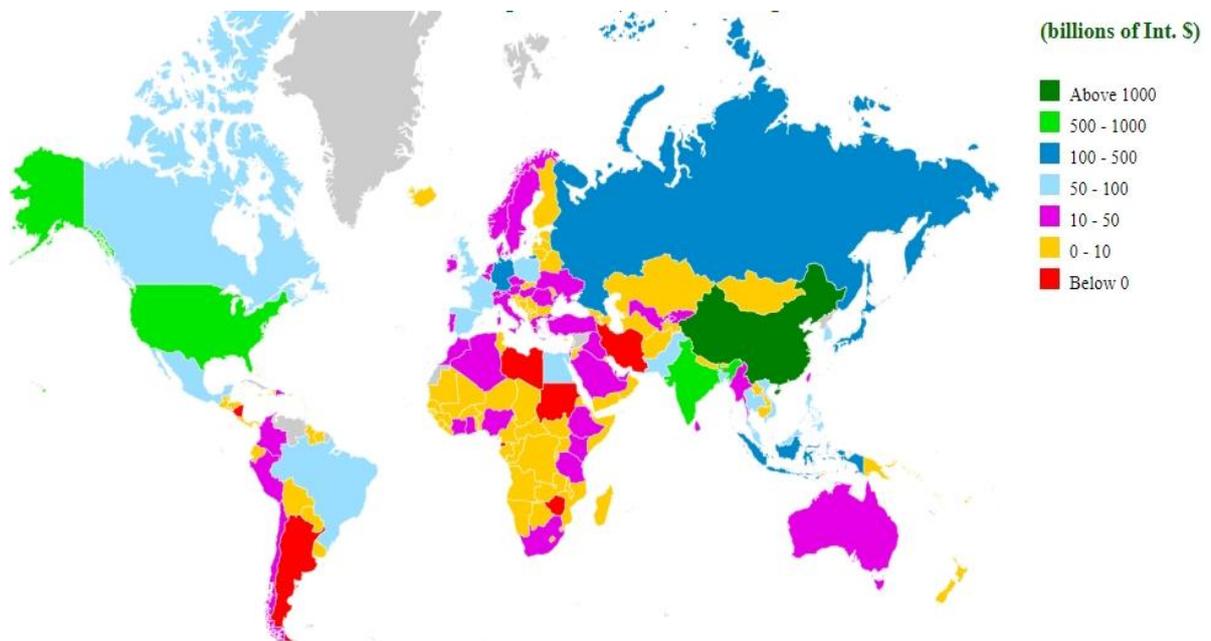
Following the famous argument of prof. Anis H. Bajrektarevic ‘No Asian century without pan-Asian multilateral settings’ which was prolifically published as policy paper and thoroughly debated among practitioners and academia in over 40 countries on all continents for the past 15 years, hereby the author is revisiting and rethinking this very argument, its validity and gravity.

Today Eurasia is the axial continent of mankind, which is home to about 75% of the world's population (**see Map 1**), produces 60% of world GDP (**see Map 2**) and stores three quarters of the world's energy resources (**see Map 3**) [Shepard, 2016]. In these open spaces, two giant poles of modern geoeconomics are being formed: European and East Asian, which are tearing the canvas of the familiar geographical concept of “Eurasia” and at the same time providing opportunities for new synthesis through the construction and connection of transcontinental transport arteries.

In the XX century, a united Europe was able to consolidate the power of its members and create the largest bloc that challenged the world hegemon – the United States, and the rapidly growing Asian giants – India and China. However, today the issue of the fact that the world economy is beginning to rely more and more on the East Asian pole of high technologies is being discussed more actively (**see Map 4**) [Tobny, 2019]. World geopolitics talk about the transformation of the Pacific Ocean into the same centre of business activity as the Mediterranean Sea in ancient times.

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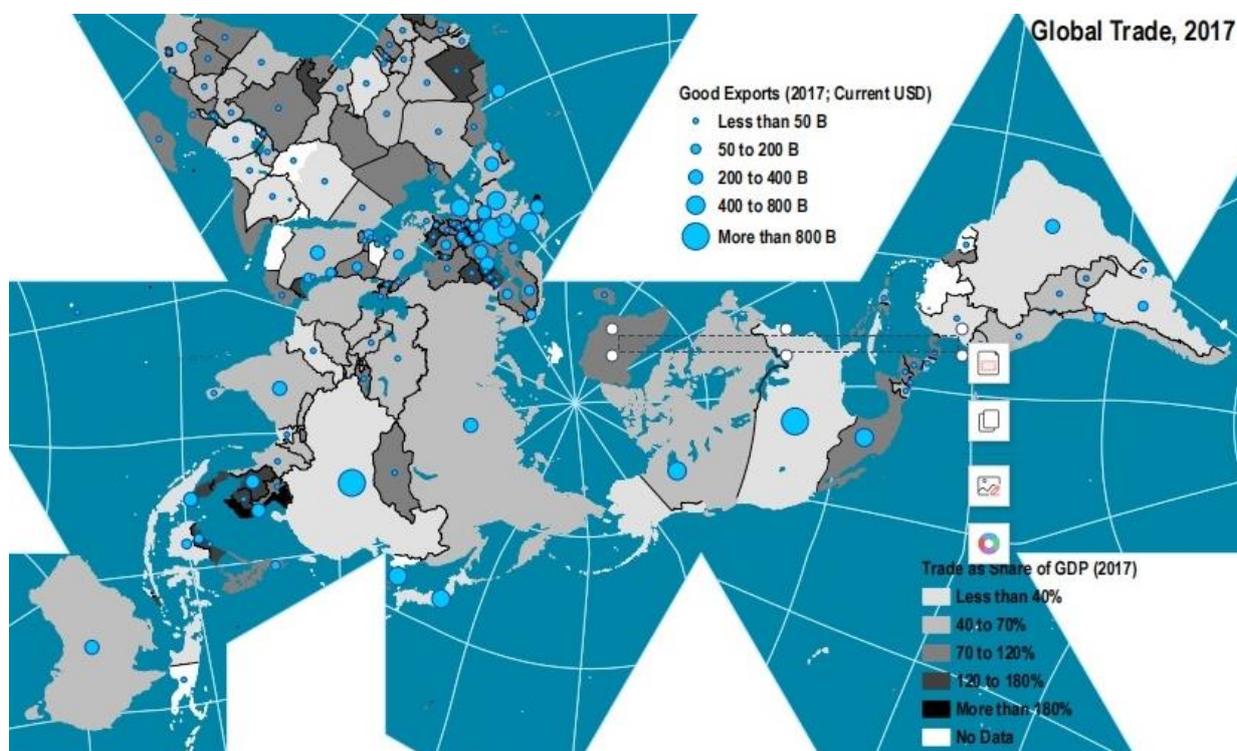
**Map 1.:** World's population density (per square kilometer)**Source:** WHO, 2019**Map 2.:** Global GDP Purchasing Power Parity**Source:** International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook, 2019

**Map 3.:** World's natural resources map



**Source:** BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2020

**Map 4.:** Global Trade, 2017



**Source:** The World Bank, 2017

At the end of the XIX century John Hay – US Secretary of State, stated: “The Mediterranean is the ocean of the past, the Atlantic is the ocean of the present, the Pacific is the ocean of the future” [Lehmann&Engammare, 2014]. Statistics show [Akhtar, 2018] that today the Asia – Pacific region (hereinafter APR) has become a powerful world theatre. Ascending Asia encompasses a vast triangle stretching from the Russian Far East and Korea in the northeast to Australia in the south and Pakistan in the west (see **Map 5**). This triangle contains many of the leading industrialized countries of the modern world – Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, which are characterized by the fastest rates of economic development [Reynolds, 2021]. In the water area of the region a new global reproduction complex is being formed, which today provides more than half of world production and world trade, almost half of the inflow of foreign direct investment (see **Map 4**).

In the XXI century, it was impossible not to notice the rapid economic growth of Asia, given that the growth rates of each of the national economies of the region exceed those of the Western countries. However, the assertion about the beginning of the Asian century is still vague.

Asia’s economic resurgence and cumulative financial strengths over the last two decades have largely contributed to the global shift of power to Asia [Medcalf, 2018], nevertheless how politically and economically stable the “dominance” of Asia? To answer this question, one need to refer to history of the region and its current geopolitical status-quo.

**Map 5.:** Political map of Eurasia



**Source:** Dept. Of Global Studies and Geography, Hofstra University, 2018

At the end of the last century and the beginning of this century, Asia flourished because the Pax Americana period after the end of World War II provided a favourable strategic context. But now the twists and turns of US – China relations are raising questions about the future of Asia and the structure of the emerging international order.

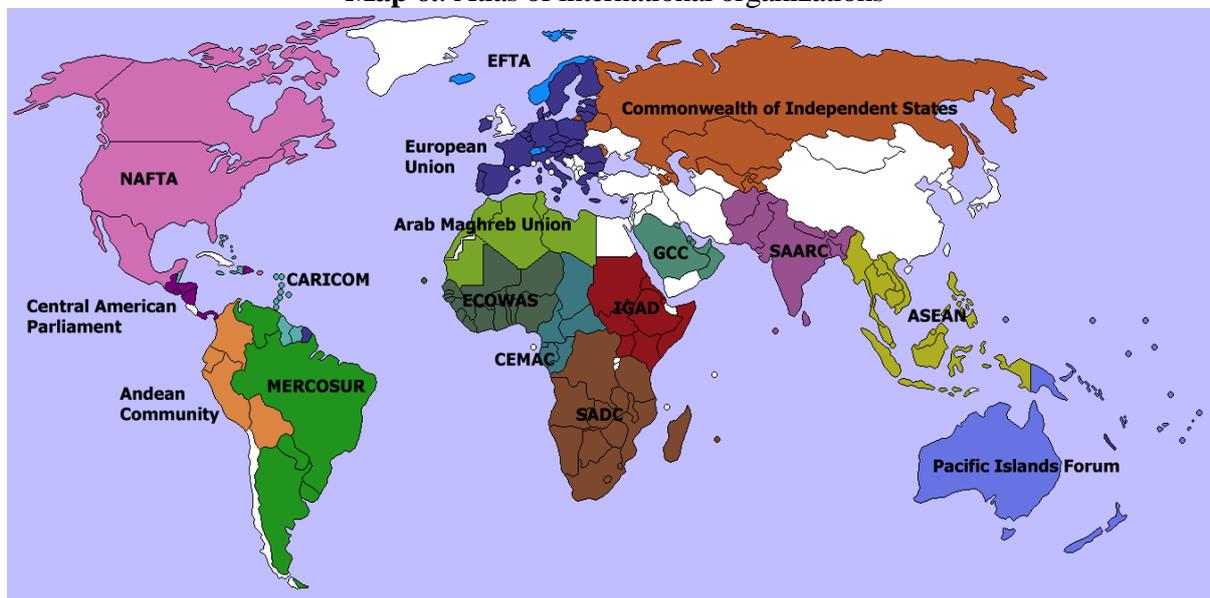
For a long time, Asian countries have taken the best of both worlds, building economic relations with China, and maintaining strong ties with the United States and other developed countries. Many Asian states for a long time have considered the United States and other developed countries as their main economic partners [Tran, 2019]. But now they are increasingly taking advantage of the opportunities created by China's rapid development [Harada, 2020].

Due to the new geopolitical situation, the countries of the East Asia region are concerned [Rsis, 2021] that, being at the intersection of the interests of major powers, they may find themselves between two fires and will be forced to make difficult choices. In this regard, countries understand that the status-quo in Asia must change. But whether the new configuration will further prosper or bring dangerous instability remains to be seen.

It is worth noting that Asian countries view the United States as a power present in the region and having vital interests there. At the same time, China and India are immediate and close reality. Asian countries don't want to choose between them. And if they face this challenge – Washington will try to contain the growth of China or Beijing will make efforts to create an exclusive sphere of influence in Asia – they will embark on the path of confrontation that will drag on for decades and jeopardize the highly-discussed Asian century.

An important element that can resolve the issue of the status-quo in the region is the fact, that the largest world's continent must consider creation of the comprehensive pan-Asian institution, as the other major theatres do have in place already for many decades [Kuo, 2018] (i.e., the Organization of American States – OAS (American continent), African Union – AU (Africa), Council of Europe and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – OSCE (Europe)) (see **Map 6**).

**Map 6.:** Atlas of international organizations



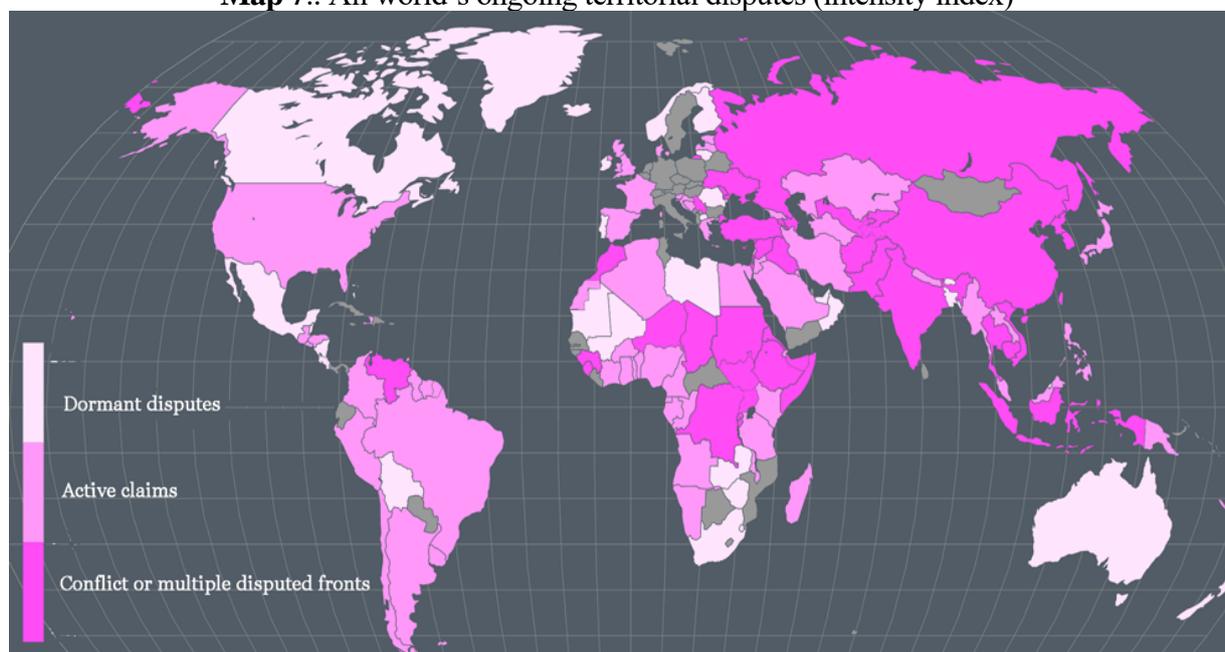
**Source:** Dept. Of Global Studies and Geography, Hofstra University, 2020

The steps taken by the countries of the leading regions of the world to create a single market and a zone of co-prosperity in recent years have given rise to a desire for consolidation among the leaders of Asian countries [Frost, 2008]. Thus, today Asia is a place of concentration of the largest integration groupings, including the Asia – Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), its' countries are members of large organizations: the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Eurasian

Economic Community (EurAsEC), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), BRICS, G-20, G-8, E-7. These integration groupings are closely interconnected, widely diversified (Commonwealth of Nations) or specialized (OPEC) (see **Map 6**). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in Asia there is still the absence of any pan-Asian security/ multilateral structure, which leaves many issues of cooperation between countries (especially in the field of security and interstate territorial disputes) unresolved [Kaisheng, 2015]. Thus, in Asia the presence of the multilateral regional settings is limited [Bajrektarevic, 2013] to a very few spots in the largest continent, and even then, they are rarely mandated with security issues in their declared scope of work (see **Map 6**).

Underlining the importance of the creation on multilateral mechanism in Asia, one need to analyse in details the conflicts' map of the region. The world's map, which is showing the world's countries involved in land or border disputes, categorizes the conflicts according to their gravity, from dormant disputes to active conflicts (countries marked in grey have none) (see **Map 7**), (see **Map 29**). Thus, Central and Western Africa, Asia and the Middle East emerge as the areas of the world with most active territorial conflicts [Conant, 2014].

**Map 7.:** All world's ongoing territorial disputes (intensity index)



**Source:** CIA World Factbook, 2020

The historical background of Asian region shows that Asia has witnessed more territorial disputes, and more armed conflicts over disputed territory, than any other region in the world (see **Map 8**) [Mancini, 2013]. In 2000, Asia also accounted for almost 40 % of all active territorial disputes worldwide [Fravel, 2014]. Thus, today territorial disputes in Asia remain a serious challenge to peace, stability, and prosperity of the countries. The geopolitical shifts, natural resources, and environmental degradation are a source of concern (see **Map 29**). The East and South China Seas are flashpoints that could lead to devastating confrontations for the region and beyond.

Dividing the region to subregional level Asia as a region includes Northern (Northeast) Asia, China & Far East (Eastern Asia), South – Eastern Asia, Western Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia (see **Map 9**). Among them Western Asia and Central Asia has higher conflict potential, which influence the interstate cooperation.

**Map 8.: Asia's Disputed Borders**



Source: Business Insider, 2020

**Map 9.: Subregions of Asia**



Source: National Geography, 2018

The subregion of **Central Asia** is west of China, south of Russia, and north of Afghanistan. The western border of this region runs along the Caspian Sea. It is politically divided into five countries: Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan (see **Map 10**).

Two post-Soviet Caspian Sea sub-regions – Central Asia and the South Caucasus – have experienced different conflict scenarios. The South Caucasus has been embroiled in protracted, large-scale armed conflicts, while Central Asians have managed to avert a serious armed conflict, remaining largely peaceful despite local, short-term, small-scale clashes, and the existence of factors that may have led – and still may potentially lead – to a serious military conflict (i.e., Armenia – Azerbaijan conflict (*The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict*<sup>2</sup> [Visual Explainer, 2021])). Conflict map of Central Asia (see **Map 11**) mainly describes the issue of border settlement is the problem of *ethnic enclaves* [Indeo, 2020], which is a constant factor of tension in relations between Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan (see **Map 29**).

**Map 10.: Central Asia Subregion**



Source: Cartarium/Shutterstock, 2019

<sup>2</sup>The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is an ethnic and territorial conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, inhabited mostly by ethnic Armenians, and seven surrounding districts, inhabited mostly by Azerbaijanis until their expulsion during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, which are *de facto* controlled by the self-declared Republic of Artsakh, but are internationally recognized as *de jure* part of Azerbaijan. The conflict has its origins in the early 20th century, though the present conflict began in 1988, when the Karabakh Armenians demanded that Karabakh be transferred from Soviet Azerbaijan to Soviet Armenia. The conflict escalated into a full-scale war in the early 1990s which later transformed into a low-intensity conflict following the end of the war, later escalating into another full-scale war in 2020.

Map 11.: Conflicts of Central Asia region



Source: Jacques Leclerc Research Centre, 2020

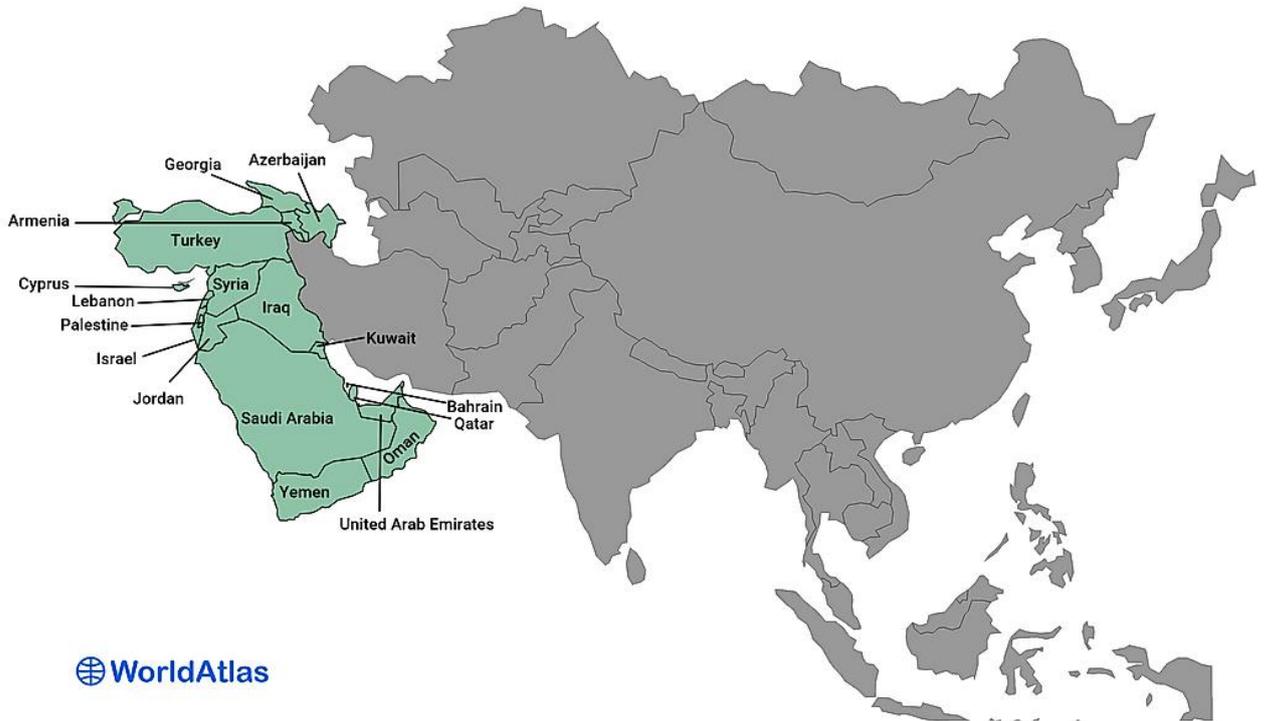
To date, of all the currently existing independent states in Central Asia, only Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have decided to delimit their land borders with neighbouring countries [Zhunisbek, 2021]. The largest number of territorial disputes leading to border armed conflicts arose between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, which share a common border in the Ferghana Valley, where there is a difficult socio-economic situation (high density and rapid population growth, lack of farmland, lack of water resources), as well as strong positions of supporters of Islamic radicalism.

The conflicts on the borders and border areas of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in recent years and months allow to characterize the current situation as unstable and tends to worsen (see Map 29).

**Western Asia** is in the area between Central Asia and Africa, south of Eastern Europe. Most of the region is often referred to as the Middle East, although it geographically excludes the mainland of Egypt (which is culturally considered a Middle Eastern country). West Asia is politically divided into 18 states: Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Yemen. Iran can also be considered as border state of the subregion. It also includes the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt (see Map 12).

The situation in (South-) Western Asia, which covers most of the Near and Middle East, has remained very complex and explosive for half a century. This is largely due to the *Palestine – Israeli confrontation* in Palestine [BBC, 2021], which escalated in the early twentieth century after the proclamation of the doctrine of creating a “people’s land” for the Jews. The *Arab – Israeli confrontation* [Boston, 2021], which began in 1948 (the state of Israel was proclaimed), remains unresolved to this day and is a hotbed of armed conflicts in the region (see Map 13).

Map 12: Western Asia Map



Source: WorldAtlas, 2019.

Map 13: Israel Palestine conflict: A map of the region



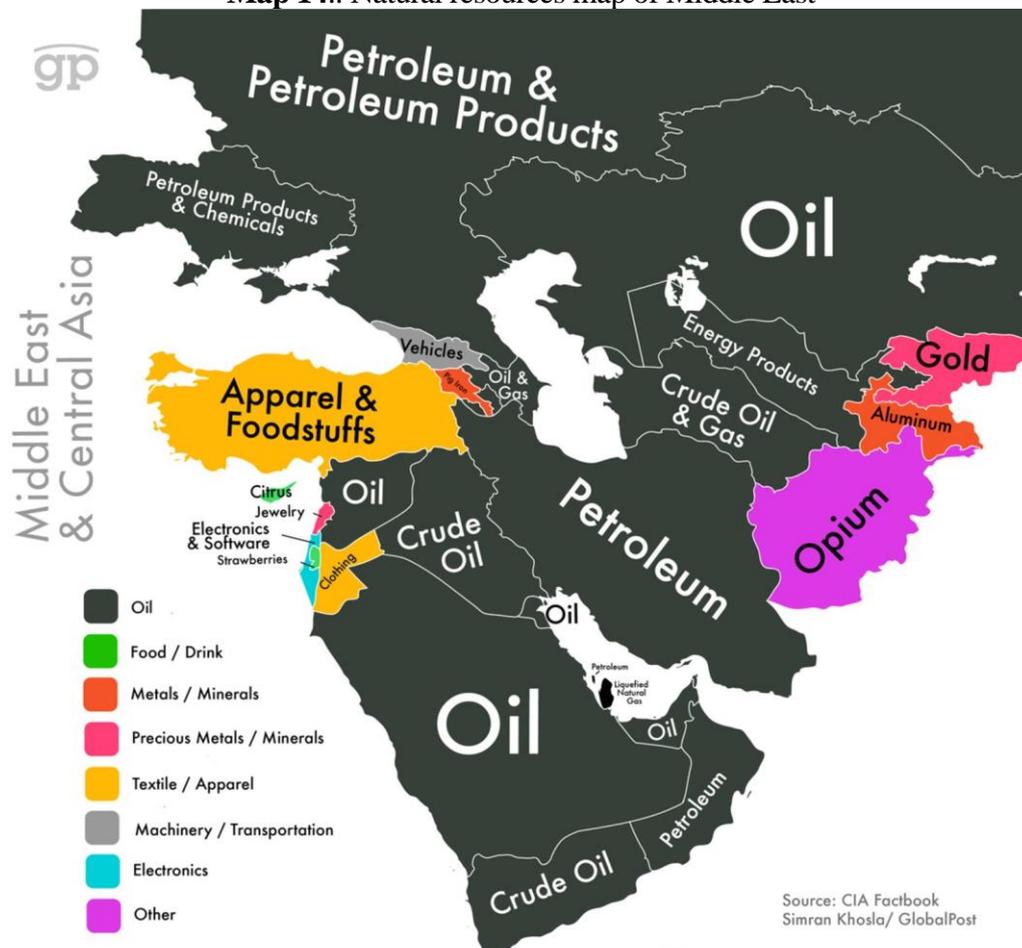
Source: Express Politics, 2020

The second hotbed of instability in Southwest Asia for almost a quarter of a century is the forcibly divided *Cyprus* [Anno, 2015]. The main reasons for the dispute in the region are the instability of the state system based on the principle of ethnic dualism and ethnic confrontation (Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots). Thus, the unresolved political and ethnic disputes not only maintain tensions between NATO members Greece and Turkey, but also complicates the implementation of Cyprus's initiative to join the European Union.

Unsettled border issues are the reason for the aggravation of the situation in the south of the *Arabian Peninsula* between Saudi Arabia and Yemen [Martin, 2021]. The border between these states was clearly established only in the southwestern sector (after the military conflict in 1943). In 1993, Saudi Arabia put forward claims for 12 of 20 oil fields located between 17 and 18 parallels, and the negotiations of the border commission have not yielded results so far.

The region's richness in oil and the lack of agreed borders are the cause of territorial disputes both on land and in the waters of the *Persian Gulf*: territorial disputes between Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman (see **Map 14**) [Henderson,2008].

**Map 14.:** Natural resources map of Middle East



Source: CIA Factbook, 2016

Islands Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunbs (Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz) – subject of dispute between Iran and the United Arab Emirates [Al-Mazrouei, 2015]. Due to the depth of sea, oil tankers and big ships must pass between Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser

Tunbs, which makes these islands some of the most strategic points in the Persian Gulf. The islands are now controlled by Iran, which took control of them in 1971. The conflict between Iran and the UAE periodically flares up and turns into a phase of exchange of harsh statements.

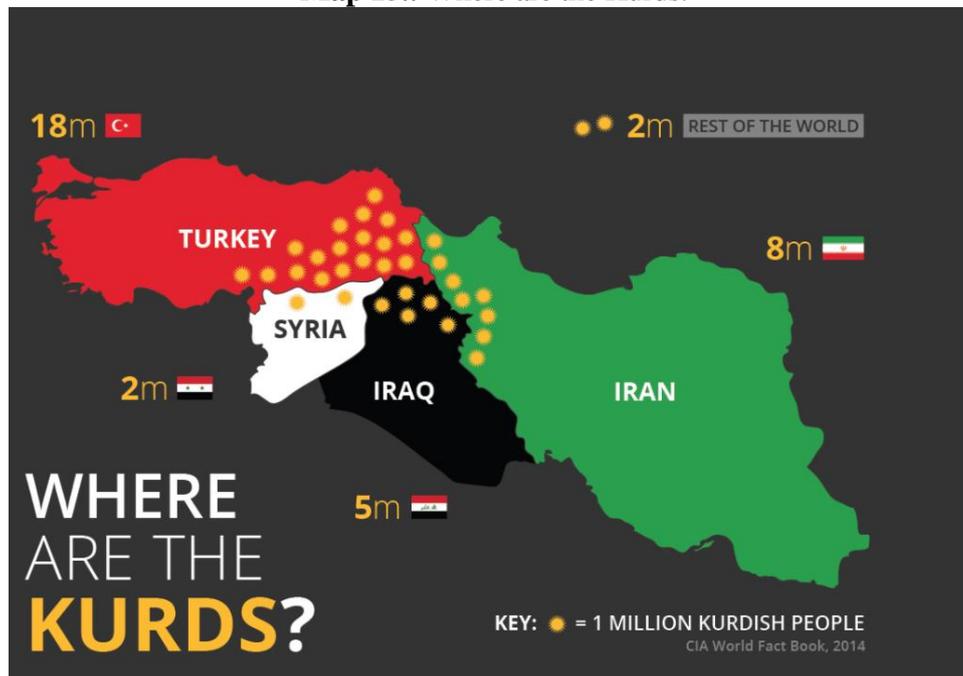
The already dangerous situation in the Persian Gulf region is fuelled by several other regional conflicts: important players in the regional political arena are concerned about the threat of Iranian expansion. The enmity between Iran and Saudi Arabia is based not only on interfaith conflict. Political leadership in the Middle East is at stake.

In addition to those listed above, the *Iraqi issue* remains a hot spot in the South – West Asia subregion [CRS, 2003]. The overthrown 2003 dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein and the creation of new government bodies did not save the country from acute internal political conflicts.

The instability of the *Caucasus* significantly exacerbated the conflict in the region at the beginning of the 21st century: in August 2008, the situation in the region worsened sharply, which was associated with an attempt by Georgia to regain South Ossetia by military means [Lehmkuhl, 2017]. Russia's intervention in this conflict led to the proclamation of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The conflict remains unresolved to this day.

Ethno-religious conflicts and the struggle of *the Kurds* for their statehood, which lasted throughout the entire twentieth century, are important centres of instability in the region [Khalifa&Bonsey, 2013]. The Kurds (according to estimates, at least 20 million people) are settled compactly in mountainous areas at the junction of state borders in the south-eastern part of Turkey (about 10 million people), north-western Iran (5.3 million), northern Iraq (3.0 million) and Syria (1.3 million), more than 0.5 million Kurds live in other countries, in Armenia (see **Map 15**).

**Map 15.:** Where are the Kurds.



Source: The Kurdish Project, 2018

In 1992, the Kurds proclaimed their own state on part of the territory of Iraq, the government of which was not recognized by Iraq, which offered them the preservation of their autonomy status. The “temperature” of the centres of separatism of the Islamic regional type, the greatest contribution to the formation of which was made by ethno-confessional and geopolitical factors, as well as the factor of natural boundaries, today remains relatively high. One of the bloodiest separatist conflicts,

as noted above, is the Kurdish one. Since its inception, the number of its victims has exceeded 40 thousand people.

The conflict potential of the region is aggravated by the numerous emigrations of Kurds to Western Europe (Germany, France) and the United States, whose radical groups often resort to terrorist acts. Such approaches and fierce military operations complicate the overall political climate in such a volatile region (see Map 29).

**Northern and Eastern Asia** is one of the world's most dynamic areas in terms of economic growth and significance for global trade. While China attracts most attention, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan are all strong economies. Add Russia and the US in the mix and the importance of Northeast Asia cannot be overstated.

**Northern Asia** includes the bulk of Siberia and the North – Eastern edges of the continent and comprises Siberia and Russian Far East, which is in the Asian part of Russia and Mongolia (see Map 16).

Map 16: East Asia



Source: WorldAtlas, 2019

In the Far East and North Asia, destabilizing factors remain the Russian – Japanese territorial dispute over *the Kuril Islands* (Northern Territory) [Kaczynski, 2020], the Korean – Japanese territorial dispute over *the Dokdo Islands* (Takeshima) (Liancourt Rocks dispute) [Genova, 2018] and the territorial dispute over *the Senkaku Islands* (*Diaoyutai*) between Japan and China [SCMP, 2019].

Analysing Russia – Japanese territorial dispute over *Kuril Islands* [Gorenburg, 2012], it can be emphasized that the official position of Japan is that the Kuril Islands were never part of Russia and therefore these islands belong to Japan but are currently illegally occupied by Russia (see Map 17). A peace treaty has not yet been signed due to Japan's remaining claims to the islands of Kunashir and Iturup. Russia sees no guarantees of the end of the dispute, even after the “theoretically conceivable” transfer of the four disputed islands to the Japanese side.

Japan – South Korea territorial dispute over *Liancourt Rocks* remains unresolved [Jennings, 2017] (since 1965 – the parties concluded a Basic Agreement on Relations) and mainly stems from a controversial interpretation of the fact – whether Japan's renunciation of sovereignty

over its colonies also applies to the Liancourt Islands. Due to this fact Japan recalls its claims and makes attempts to exercise its jurisdiction in the area.

**Map 17.: The Kuril Islands**



**Source:** Deutsche Welle analytics, 2016

**East Asia (China & Far East)**, one of the subregions of Asia, is including the continental part of the Russian Far East region of Siberia, the East Asian islands, Korea, and eastern and north-eastern China. It is located east of Central Asia, with its eastern border running along the East China Sea. East Asia is politically divided into eight countries and regions: China, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau (see Map 16).

These two regions are characterised by “strategic diversity” where several unresolved territorial disputes threaten to undermine the very source of regional prosperity: maritime trade.

Of all the disputed territories in the APR, a striking example of the high potential of a formally latent territorial dispute in NEA is the *conflict over the Senkaku – Diaoyu Islands*<sup>3</sup> [European Parliament, 2021], in which Japan and China, the two largest economies and two leading foreign policy players in Northern and East Asia (NEA), are parties to the conflict (see Map 18). This conflict illustrates the essence of modern territorial disputes in the region and the essential information component of such processes.

Currently, territorial disputes over the right to own the above-mentioned region are not resolved. Both China and Japan periodically engage in military provocations.

The further development of the situation around the Senkaku – Diaoyu Islands is likely to take the form of an ongoing foreign policy conflict of moderate intensity, including the alleged periodic escalation-de-escalation. Thus, the consideration of the situation around the Senkaku-Diaoyu Islands makes it clear that this territorial conflict in modern conditions is supported mainly by information actions of its participants. A similar scenario development is typical for many other territorial contradictions in the APR today.

<sup>3</sup> Senkaku-Diaoyu Islands: the archipelago is de facto controlled by Japan and owned by private individuals (however, these islands may soon be nationalized by Japan). The Senkaku ownership dispute is seen as a potential casus belli

**Map 18.: Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands Dispute**

Source: Chinese Defense Ministry, EIA, Yonhap, 2015

However, other, equally intractable, disputes cannot be neglected. Among these cases are disputes between Japan and Korea over *Dokdo/Takeshima Island*<sup>4</sup> and *the Kuril Islands*<sup>5</sup> that are held by Russia but claimed by Japan (See Map 17). Further regional conflicts involve *Korean Peninsula*<sup>6</sup> disputes [Visual Explainer,2013], disputed fishing areas that frequently witness clashes between fishing boats and respective law enforcement agencies. No less important conflict areas of the region are Korean Peninsula and Chinese territories [Krishnankutty,2020] (namely *China – Taiwan*<sup>7</sup> [Maizland,2021], the *issue of Inner Mongolia*<sup>8</sup> [Roney,2013] the *issue of Tibet* (Tibet

<sup>4</sup> Liancourt Rocks : in 1952, South Korea declared its sovereignty over Liancourt. In 1954 and 2012, Japan offered to refer the dispute to the UN, to which South Korea refused. In 1965, the parties concluded a Basic Agreement on Relations, in which they recognized the existence of a dispute over the islands. Currently, the conflict mainly stems from a controversial interpretation of the fact — whether Japan's renunciation of sovereignty over its colonies also applies to the Liancourt Islands. From time to time, Japan recalls its claims and makes attempts to exercise its jurisdiction in the area.

<sup>5</sup> Kuril Islands: currently, the official position of Japan is that the South Kuril Islands were never part of Russia, the decisions of the Yalta Conference were not a treaty, and Japan was not a participant in this conference, and therefore these islands belong to Japan, but are currently illegally occupied by Russia. A peace treaty has not yet been signed due to Japan's remaining claims to the islands of Kunashir and Iturup. Russia sees no guarantees of the end of the dispute, even after the "theoretically conceivable" transfer of the four disputed islands to the Japanese side.

<sup>6</sup> Dispute between South and North Korea: earlier agreements were disavowed by Lee Myung-Bak in 2010 (after the incident with the sinking of the corvette "Cheonan"), and the April 2013 crisis led to the fact that the DPRK ceased to consider itself bound by the terms of not only the 1953 Agreement, but also the 1991 document. On March 8, 2013, the DPRK government annulled the peace treaty with South Korea on non-aggression. The dispute is not resolved.

<sup>7</sup> China – Taiwan: mainland China considers the island to be part of the People's Republic of China. However, the Communist Party of the People's Republic of China does not actually govern the island, Taiwan has its own government, parliament, and ruling party. Moreover, on the Chinese mainland, there is a special law that prescribes the armed seizure of Taiwan in certain cases, for example, when certain amendments to the Constitution of the island state are adopted. Therefore, the inhabitants of the island live in constant anticipation of possible military aggression from the mainland. The territory of Macclesfield Bank is located below sea level, so it cannot be a disputed territory under international law. Contested by the Republic of China.

<sup>8</sup> China – Inner Mongolia: Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia is now one of the largest national entities in China. Now the activity of the independence movement has decreased: there are only about 18 Mongols in Inner Mongolia %

Autonomous Region)<sup>9</sup> [Shetty, 2017] and *the issue of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region*) [Fuller&Starr,2003] (see Map 19).

None of the above-mentioned disputes are likely to be resolved in the foreseeable future. The worst-case scenario is that they continue to plague Japan's bilateral relations with China, South Korea, and Russia, isolating Japan in the region, and perhaps even resulting in militarized conflict. Though such conflict is unlikely in the disputes with Russia and South Korea, it remains a possibility in the dispute with China.

The recent flare-ups in all three disputes have served to harden domestic opinion on all sides, preventing the states from explicit compromises (see Map 29). But the Northern and Eastern Asia territorial disputes underline an important fact: as the disputes faded from view, public opinion softened slightly, and bilateral trade and other exchanges developed. If the states involved can recognise and pursue their long-term interests, the disputes could be shelved. Over time, if shelving agreements pertained and future flare-ups were avoided, an environment may even develop whereby both sides could reach a compromise agreement. This is perhaps the most optimistic scenario, and it requires a suppression of nationalism and revisionism that may well be impossible. Still, the alternative is a bleak future for not only the disputes, but also for Northeast Asia as a whole.

**Map 19.:** the PRC: Administrative Divisions & Territorial Disputes

People's Republic of China (PRC):  
Administrative Divisions & Territorial Disputes



**Source:** South China Morning Post, Infographics, 2019

<sup>9</sup> China – Tibet: Currently, no State recognizes the independence of Tibet, considering it part of the PRC. Fleeing from the repression, many Tibetans, led by the Dalai Lama XIV, went into exile, mainly to India. Under the leadership of the Dalai Lama, a Tibetan government-in-exile was established, the legitimate successor to the Tibetan Government that had previously operated in Lhasa.

**Southeast Asian** subregion is located north of Australia, south of East Asia, west of the Pacific Ocean, and east of the Bay of Bengal. It encompasses several island and archipelago nations that stretch between the northern and southern hemispheres, making it the only Asian region located on both sides of the equator. Southeast Asia is politically divided into 12 countries and territories: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, East Timor, Papua New Guinea, and Vietnam (see **Map 20**).

In Southeast Asia (hereinafter SEA), compared to other regions, the numbers of unresolved territorial disputes are still considered small [Jenne, 2017], and SEA is considered a relatively safe region with no violence going on due to the unresolved territorial disputes as compared to the Africa region (where the conflicts has involved 9 million people causing them to be refugees and internally displaced people (hereinafter IDP) where hundreds and thousands of people were slaughtered).

**Map 20:** Southeast Asia



**Source:** WorldAtlas, 2019

The territorial disputes in SEA consist of the following disputes: *the Philippines' Sabah Claim (The North Borneo)*<sup>10</sup>, *the Ligitan and Sipidan dispute*<sup>11</sup> [Victoria, 2019], *the Pedra Branca dispute*<sup>12</sup>

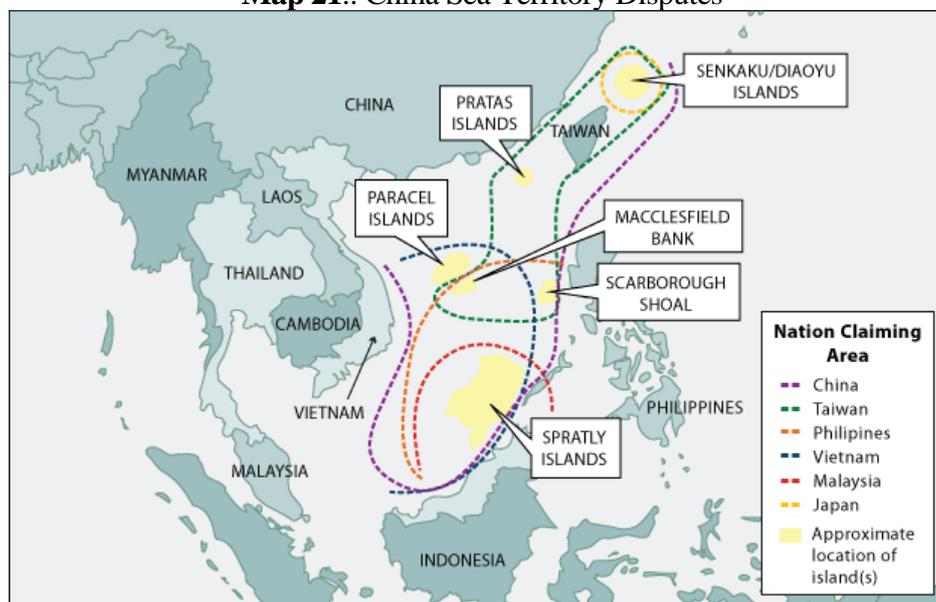
<sup>10</sup> The North Borneo (Sabah) dispute: to date, Malaysia maintains that the Sabah claim is a non-issue and non-negotiable, thereby rejecting any calls from the Philippines to resolve the matter in ICJ. Sabah authorities stated in 2009 that they see the claim made by the Philippines' Moro leader Nur Misuari to take Sabah to International Court of Justice (ICJ) as a non-issue and that they dismiss the claim

<sup>11</sup> the Ligitan and Sipidan dispute: none of Indonesia's actions are of a legislative or administrative nature; it did not follow from the fact of patrolling that Indonesia considered the islands as its own; the activities of fishermen cannot be considered as originating from the State. Malaysia's actions, on the contrary, can be regarded as suggesting a claim to sovereignty. The number of these actions is small, but they are diverse in content and cover a significant period of time. Neither Indonesia nor the Netherlands protested them during their implementation. Thus, the islands belong to Malaysia.

<sup>12</sup> The Pedra Branca dispute: on 23 May 2008, the ICJ ruled that Pedra Branca is under Singapore's sovereignty, while Middle Rocks belongs to Malaysia. As regards South Ledge, the Court noted that it falls within the apparently overlapping

[Jumrah, 2021] and the South China Sea Conflict Zone also known as *the Spratly Islands disputes*<sup>13</sup> [Moss,2016] (see Map 21), (see Map 29).

**Map 21.: China Sea Territory Disputes**



**Source:** Money Morning staff research, NPR, 2021

The country of *East Timor*, also known as Timor-Leste, which gained independence from Indonesia in 2002, only in 2018 has signed (with Australia) a historic treaty on a permanent maritime border in the Timor Sea – settling the dispute over Timor Gap. The deal ended a decade-long dispute between the neighbours over rights to the sea's rich oil and gas reserves.

The international border between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, which divides the *island of New Guinea* in half, represents another hot spot in the region [Cooke,1984]. Tensions between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea grew, as the ongoing *West Papuan conflict*<sup>14</sup> destabilised the border region, causing flows of refugees and cross-border incursions by Indonesia's military. Ongoing Papua conflict up to date preserves dangers and high level of violence in the region. Land dispute in which 21 people died (last update as for April 2021 [Fardah,2021]) is the latest brutal conflict exacerbated by high-powered weapons, weak governance, and erosion of traditional mores.

The territorial and maritime *disputes in the South China Sea* are considered some of the most complex conflicts in the region if not worldwide [Sakomoto,2021]. The disputed areas are abundant

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territorial waters generated by mainland Malaysia, Pedra Branca and Middle Rocks. As it is a maritime feature visible only at low tide, it belongs to the state in the territorial waters of which it is located. Malaysia and Singapore have established what they have named the Joint Technical Committee to delimit the maritime boundary in the area around Pedra Branca and Middle Rocks, and to determine the ownership of South Ledge.

<sup>13</sup> the South China Sea Conflict Zone: the situation today is as follows: The PRC controls eight or nine coral reefs and rocks in the Spratly archipelago, Vietnam controls from 21 to 29 islets, the Philippines – from 8 to 10, Malaysia-5, Brunei-2. The Republic of China (Taiwan) controls one, but the largest island in the Spratly group, Taipingdao, on which the runway is built. Each of the parties concerned states that they are trying to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in the South China Sea. The incredible interweaving of geopolitical, military-strategic, economic factors, as well as national-state interests and ambitions of the parties to the dispute turn the issue of the ownership of the islands of the South China Sea into one of the most dangerous conflict situations in Southeast Asia, characterized by a very high degree of military-political tension.

<sup>14</sup> The Papua conflict (1962 – ongoing) is an ongoing conflict in Western New Guinea between Indonesia and the Free Papua Movement.

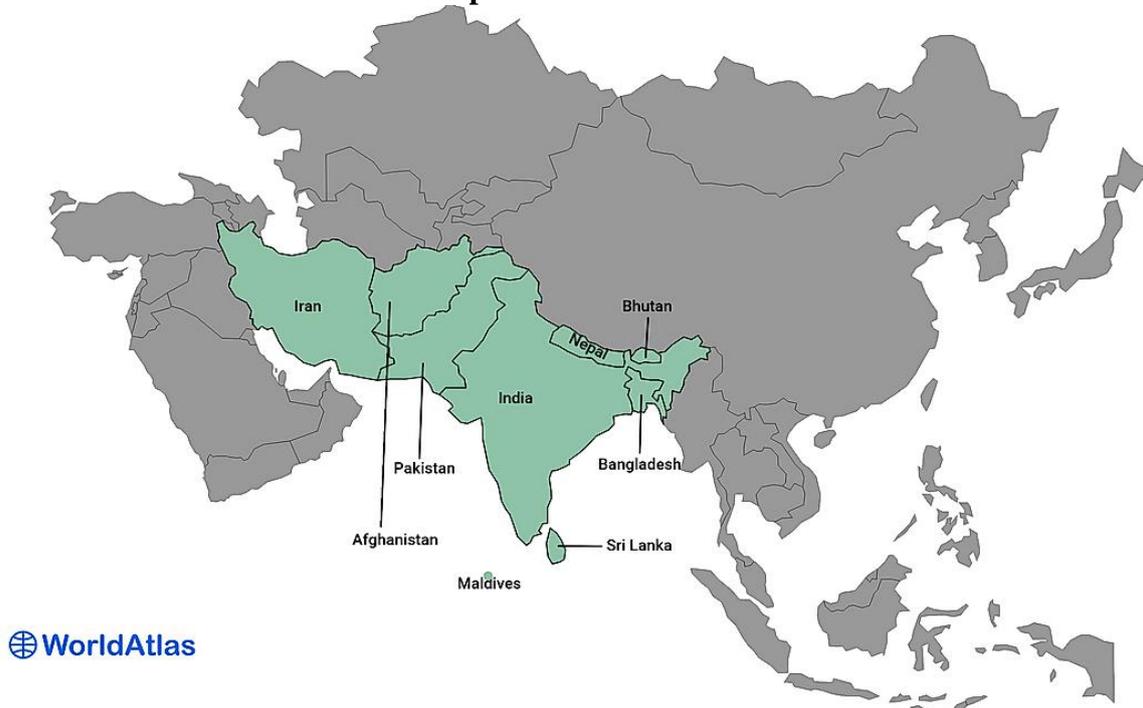
in natural resources such as gas and oil and carry strategic importance, as roughly half of the world's commercial shipping passes through them. These disputes played an important role not only in the relations among the claimants but also in the foreign policies of countries such as Japan and the United States. The disputes involve overlapping maritime, territorial, and fishing rights and claims by China, Taiwan, Brunei, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia (see Map 21).

However, despite the fact, that territorial disputes in SEA are related to the vagueness of colonial titles and are usually of an acute political (geopolitical) nature, they affect the interests of third States, including superpowers (namely the USA, China, India); involve the analysis of not only territorial titles, but also claims to self-determination; provoke constant tension and are fraught with armed conflicts. Their judicial resolution is usually unlikely, and the use of conciliation mechanisms is preferable.

Despite this, there is little doubt [Avis, 2020] that the conflicts in the South China Sea will dominate the region's security agenda for years, if not decades, to come. In this case, the ASEAN claimant states have decidedly stuck to their unwritten agreement that some form of settlement needs to be reached with China before any attempt is made to resolve overlapping claims amongst themselves. Thus, the intra-ASEAN disputes in the South China Sea will most likely remain dormant for a considerable time to come [Tønnesson, 2002].

**South Asia** is Asia's largest sub-region. It comprises the sub-Himalayan SAARC countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (see Map 22). The area is often referred to geologically, as the Indian Subcontinent and appears to be the area with the highest conflict intensity index in the region (see Map 23), (see Map 29).

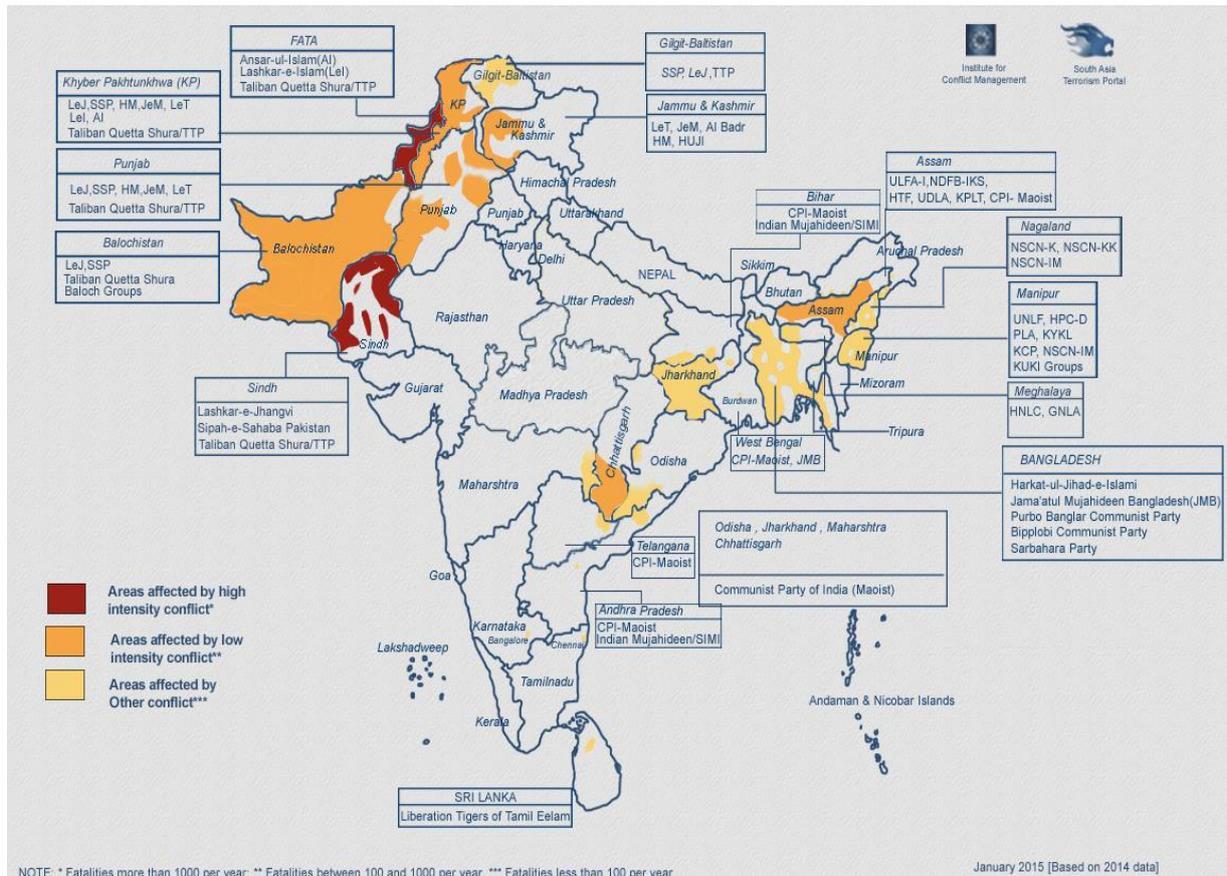
**Map 22: Southern Asia**



**Source:** WorldAtlas, 2019

The biggest country of the region – India – faces territorial issues with many of its neighbours. Over the past 70 years, it has succeeded to resolve its boundary issues only with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The undemarcated boundaries with Myanmar, Bhutan and lately with China, Pakistan and Nepal have often flared up into tensions [Kapoor,2020] (see Map 24).

Map 23.: South Asia Conflict Map



Source: Institute for Conflict Management, 2016

When analysing the stages of settlement of the minor conflicts of the region (namely *disputes over Bay of Bengal*<sup>15</sup>[Hague...,2014], *India – Myanmar dispute*<sup>16</sup>[Gilani,2020], *India – Bangladesh*<sup>17</sup>[Banerji,2021], *India – Bhutan border dispute*<sup>18</sup> [Ramachandran,2021]), it is worth noting that two disputes concerning the delimitation of the Bay of Bengal were resolved by judicial means. These disputes were of exclusively economic importance. Three disputes from the second group were resolved based on international law; in two cases, the parties used judicial mechanisms, in one – conciliation.

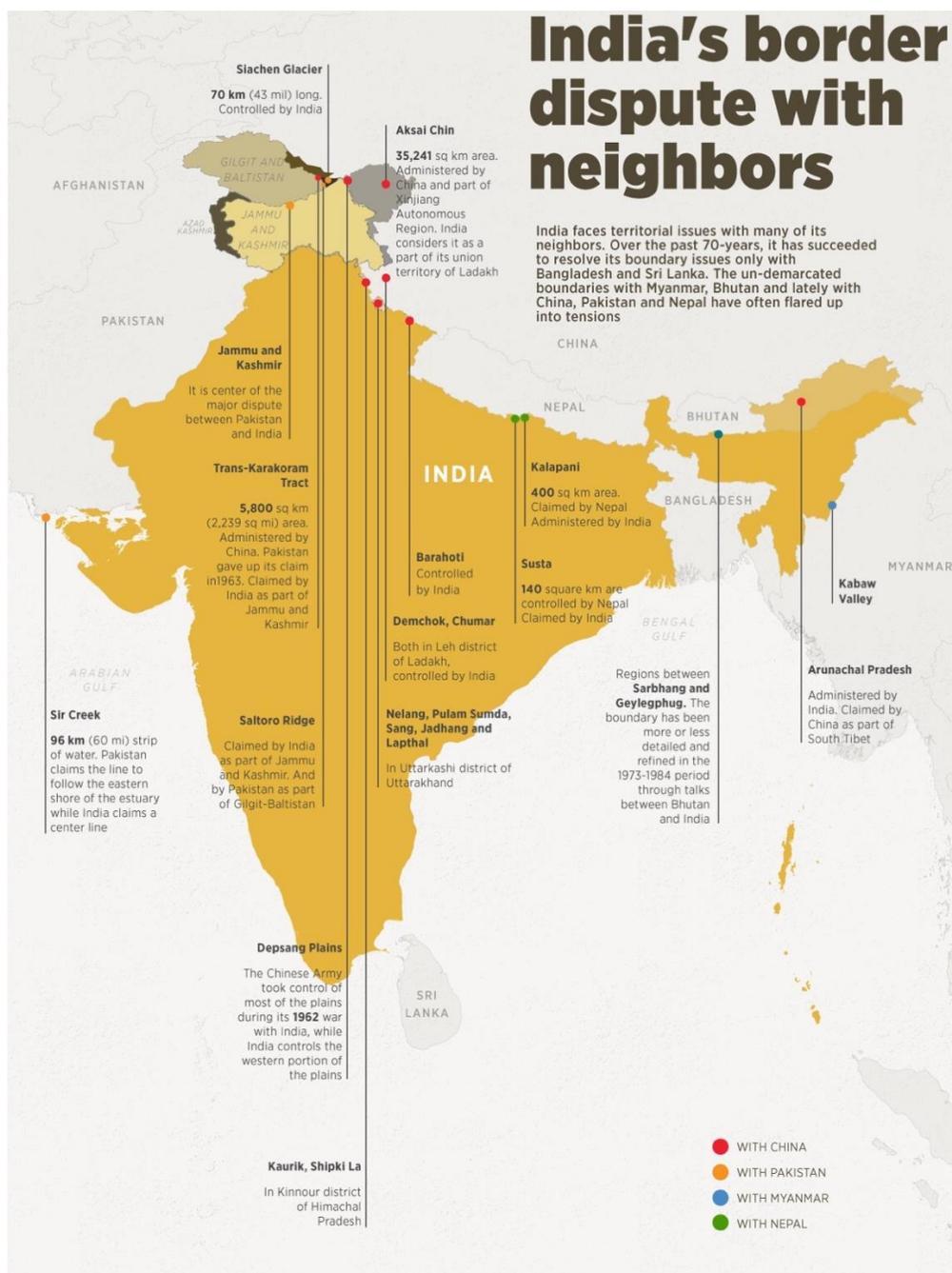
<sup>15</sup> The Bay of Bengal Dispute: The cause of the dispute is South Talpatti (as it was known internationally) or Sheikh Mujib Island (as it was called by supporters of the Bangladesh Awami League). India and Bangladesh participated in eight rounds of bilateral negotiations starting in 1974, but they remained inconclusive until 2009. In October 2009, Bangladesh notified India of the arbitration proceedings under UNCLOS.

<sup>16</sup> Dispute between the land in Kabaw Valley near Hollenphai village, Moreh of Manipur state, India and Namphalong village, Tamu of Sagaing Region, Myanmar.

<sup>17</sup> India settled its land and maritime boundaries with Bangladesh, by resolving the issue of South Talpatti Island or Bangabandhu Island -- a small uninhabited offshore sandbar landform in the Bay of Bengal, off the coast of the Ganga-Brahmaputra Delta region. After decades of strenuous negotiations, both countries also exchanged enclaves five years ago, which were in adverse possession. Inside the main part of Bangladesh, there were 111 Indian enclaves (17,160 acres), while inside the main part of India, there were 51 Bangladeshi enclaves (7,110 acres)

<sup>18</sup> The boundary has been detailed and refined in the 1973–1984 period through talks between Bhutan and India. Regions between Sarbhong and Geylegphug remain undefined. They border the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

Map 24.: India's borders disputes with neighbours



Source: Anadolu Agency Research, 2020

The most problematic disputes of the region are between India and China (namely *disputes over Aksai Chin*<sup>19</sup>[Ayes,2020], *Depsang Plains*<sup>20</sup>, *Demchok, Chumar*<sup>21</sup> [Long,2020], *Kaurik*,

<sup>19</sup> Aksai Chin is in the northwestern part of the Tibetan Plateau, it is approximately 35,241 sq km in size, administered by China and part of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. India considers it a part of its union territory of Ladakh.

<sup>20</sup> The Depsang Plains are located on the border of the union territory of Ladakh and disputed zone of Aksai Chin. The Chinese Army controlled most of the plains during its 1962 war with India, while India controls the western portion of the plains

<sup>21</sup> Demchok, Chumar: Both in the Leh district of Ladakh, controlled by India

*Shipki La*<sup>22</sup> [Bhonsale,2018], *Barahoti*<sup>23</sup>[PTI,2017], *Nelang, Pulam Sumda, Sang, Jadhag and Lapthal*<sup>24</sup>[Modi,2020], *Trans – Karakoram Tract*<sup>25</sup>, *Arunachal Pradesh*<sup>26</sup>[D'Ambrogio,2018]), which have been worsening in recent years. The two world powers are facing off against each other along their disputed border in the Himalayan region. Thus, the most recent skirmish – on 20 January 2020 – left troops on both sides injured. It took place along the border in India's Sikkim state, which is sandwiched between Bhutan and Nepal. The June 2020 clash in the Galwan Valley – fought with sticks and clubs, not guns – was the first fatal confrontation between the two sides since 1975.

India – Pakistan borders disputes (namely *disputes over Jammu and Kashmir*<sup>27</sup>[Jilani,2019], *Siachen Glacier*<sup>28</sup>, *Saltoro Ridge*<sup>29</sup>[Nair,2009], *Sir Creek*<sup>30</sup> [Dabas,2016]) are the second largest in the region. With continued violence in Kashmir and a heightened threat of terrorist activity by Pakistan-based militant groups, tensions, and concerns over a serious military confrontation between nuclear-armed neighbours India and Pakistan remain high. Thus, while analysing India – Pakistan relations, it can be concluded that, since 1947, Pakistan and India have been fighting and disagreeing, and are still set on claiming Kashmir (see **Map 25**). But until the political fate of Kashmir is fully developed, a war is always a constant threat between these two countries.

Third group of disputes, which is rising of the region's conflict potential, are India – Nepal border's disputes (namely *disputes over: Kalapani*<sup>31</sup>, *Susta*<sup>32</sup>[Drishti,2019], *Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh of Uttarakhand* [IST, (2020)] . It is worth noting that the redrawing of the map covers a relatively small region high in the Himalayas, but it has stirred simmering tensions between two of the world's biggest powers, India, and China (see **Map 26**).

<sup>22</sup> Kaurik, Shipki La: In the Kinnour district of Himachal Pradesh.

<sup>23</sup> Barahoti: In the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand whose grazing fields are disputed by China, which is also in the state of Uttarakhand and is controlled by India.

<sup>24</sup> Nelang, Pulam Sumda, Sang, Jadhag and Lapthal: In the Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand.

<sup>25</sup> Trans-Karakoram Tract: An area of nearly 5,800 square kilometers (2,239 sq mi) along both sides of the Shaksgam River, is entirely administered by China as a part of Kargilik County in the Kashgar Prefecture of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. It was claimed by Pakistan until 1963, and still claimed by India as part of the Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan gave up its claim to the tract under a border agreement with China in 1963 with the proviso that the settlement was subject to the final solution of the Kashmir dispute.

<sup>26</sup> Arunachal Pradesh: Arunachal Pradesh is a state of India created on Jan. 20, 1972, and located in the far northeast. Most of the territory is claimed by China as part of South Tibet.

<sup>27</sup> Jammu and Kashmir: It is the center of the major dispute between Pakistan and India. Three wars have been fought between the two countries over Jammu and Kashmir.

<sup>28</sup> Siachen Glacier: The Siachen Glacier is located in the eastern Karakoram in the Himalayas just east of the Actual Ground Position Line between India-Pakistan. India controls all of the Siachen Glacier itself, including all tributary glaciers. At 70 km (43 mi) long, it is the longest glacier in the Karakoram and second-longest in the world's non-polar areas.

<sup>29</sup> Saltoro Ridge: The Saltoro Mountains is a subrange of the Karakoram Heights or of Saltoro Ridge. They are located in the heart of the Karakoram, on the southwest side of the Siachen Glacier. They are claimed as part of Ladakh union territory by India and as part of Gilgit-Baltistan by Pakistan. In 1984, India assumed military control of the main peaks and passes of the range, with Pakistani forces into the glacial valleys just to the west.

<sup>30</sup> Sir Creek: The Sir Creek is a 96 km (60 mi) strip of water disputed between India and Pakistan in the Rann of Kutch marshlands. Pakistan claims the line to follow the eastern shore of the estuary while India claims a center line

<sup>31</sup> Kalapani: Kalapani is an area under territorial dispute in Darchula District of Sudurpashchim Pradesh, Nepal and Pithoragarh District of Uttarakhand, India, area 400 square km. Although claimed by Nepal, Kalapani has been administered by India's Indo-Tibetan Border Police since the 1962 border war with China. This discrepancy in locating the source of the river led to boundary disputes between India and Nepal, with each country producing maps supporting their own claims. India has now released its new political map which includes all of Kalapani in India without any consent of Nepal. Nepal in turn has issued a new national map incorporating 300 square kilometers (115 square miles) of mountainous land incorporating Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura and Kalapani, currently with India.

<sup>32</sup> Susta: Susta is an area under territorial dispute currently in Tribenisusta, Lumbini Zone, Nepal and near Nichlaul, Uttar Pradesh, India. The area under dispute totals over 14,000 hectares (140 square km) and is controlled by Nepal.

**Map 25.: Disputes on China – India borders**

Source: BBC, 2020

**Map 26.: India – Nepal border disputes**

Source: BBC, 2020

Even during this period of social distancing and public lockdown, claims and counterclaims over territories in and around the Kalapani region (located at the trijunction between northern India, western Nepal, and southern China/Tibet) have resurfaced to become an issue that has embroiled

India and Nepal in a political debate; it is now gravitating towards a confrontational trend of popular politics.

Involving of the third party (China) into the conflicts of India – Pakistan and India – Nepal is making the tension in the region even higher. China's rising presence across the Himalayas, particularly after the BRI, has forced India to readjust its policy toward Nepal and Pakistan. Delhi has started to shift the focus away from geostrategic denial and isolation toward greater economic delivery and connectivity. The situation acquires another obstacle against the backdrop of a simmering border conflict between India and China along with their de facto frontier – the Line of Actual Control (hereinafter LAC) – a frontier that remains unmarked. Besides, Nepal's ruling Communist Party administration and political circles of Pakistan have in recent years reached out to China for investment and improved connectivity, which has worried India.

The problem of *Afghanistan* is also one of the most explosive in the region [Larson,2018]. The war has been going on here for the third decade, it has claimed millions of lives and has long ceased to be an internal affair of this state. Despite the change of power in the country after the events of 2001, it was not possible to overcome the severe economic crisis, and stabilization did not come. Till August 2021 the troops of 14 NATO countries were in Afghanistan fighting the “Taliban” [USIP,2021]. Moreover, several million Afghan refugees settled in Pakistan, Iran and other countries of Asia and Europe, in the United States.

The Western world has identified South Asia as an epicentre of terrorism and religious extremism and therefore has an interest in ensuring regional stability, preventing nuclear weapons proliferation, and minimizing the potential of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan [Rosand et al.,2009].

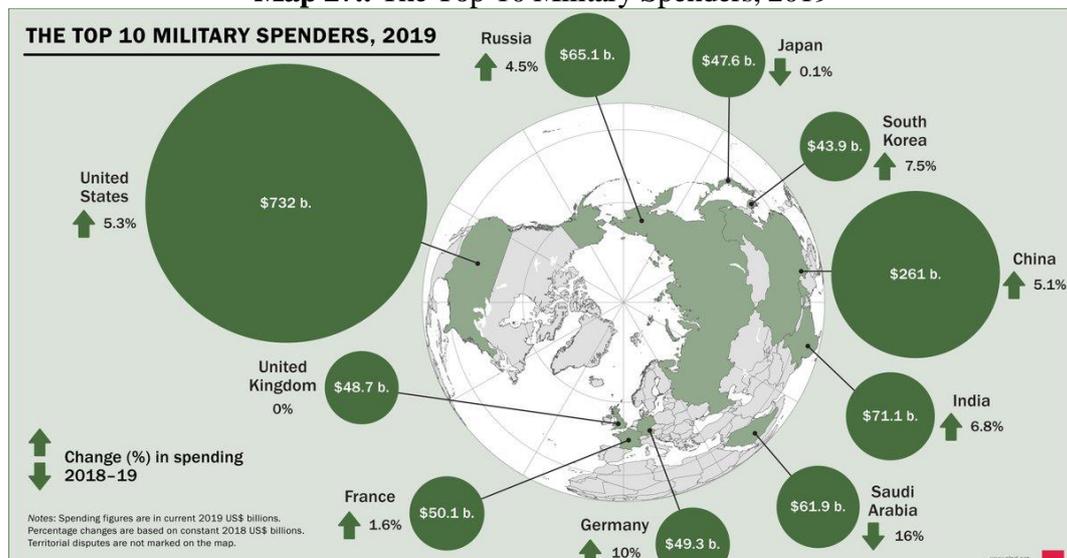
Based on the analysis of the conflict map of the region, the most significant territorial conflicts in the APR today include the situation on the Korean Peninsula, as well as such hotbeds of tension as the conflict over the Senkaku-Diaoyu Islands, the conflict between China and Vietnam over several island territories in the South China Sea (the Paracel Islands and the Spratly Islands), between Japan and South Korea over the Liancourt Islands. Russia has territorial problems in relations with Japan over the Southern Kuril Islands, as well as with the United States (on the division of shelf zones in the Bering Sea). At the same time, it is characteristic that the United States traditionally supports Japan in its territorial disputes with Russia [McDevitt&Lea,2013].

It is also important to consider that the main trend in the region is the growth of military spending (see **Map 27**). For example, according to the calculations of experts from the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies [Tian et al.,2020] from 2001 to 2013, nominal defence spending in Asian countries increased by 23%. According to the Stockholm Peace Research Institute [SIPRI, 2021], the APR has become the region of the world with the fastest growth in military spending-both in absolute terms and as a share of GDP. The second place after the United States is occupied by China, which accounts for 12.4% of spending in the Asia – Pacific region (\$112.2 billion), and Japan closes the top three with 5.6% (\$51 billion).

Given the growing number of military expenditures of the countries of the region and the presence of many hotbeds of tension, territorial disputes of the whole Asian region is turning into one of the most complex problems and potentially explosive challenges, indirectly affecting the interests of most of the states of the Eurasia (see **Map 28**).

Up to day countries of the region did not create a stable multilateral mechanism which can help them to work out a compromise solution on the issue of legal registration of state borders and territorial claims. This issue is one of the most important, since it can guarantee the territorial integrity of states and ensure non-interference in their internal affairs, as well as represent one of the barriers to external threats to their national security, such as smuggling, international crime, extremist and terrorist movements, illegal migration.

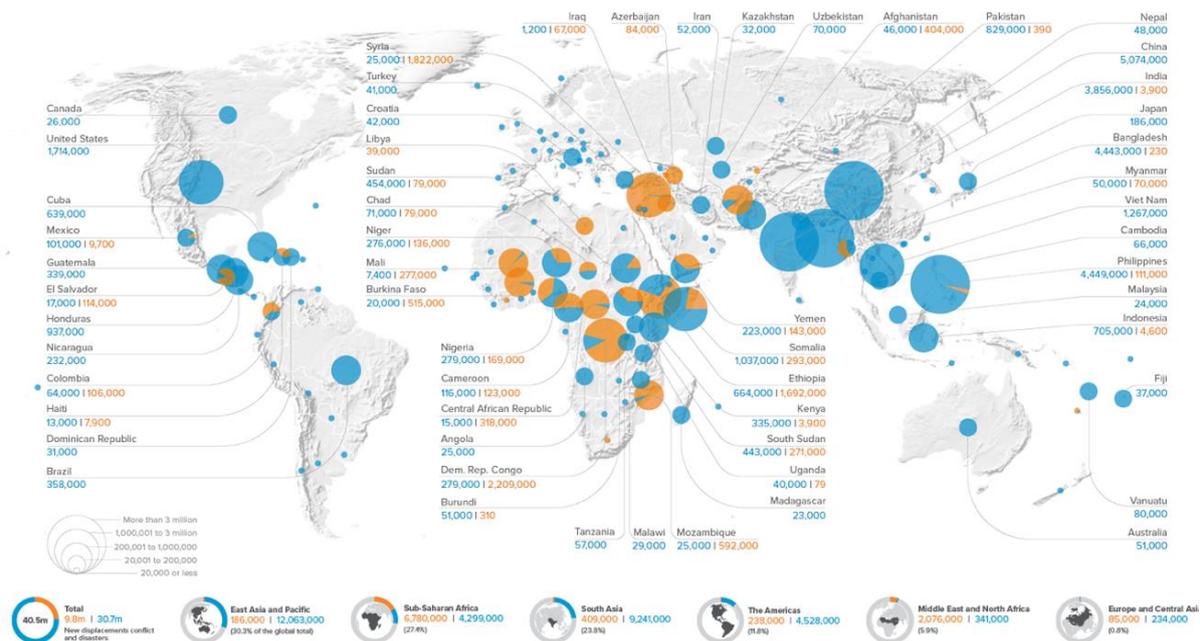
Map 27.: The Top-10 Military Spenders, 2019



Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, 2020

Today, the diversity of the Asia – Pacific region, the differences in the political and economic systems of the states, determine the specifics of the formation of integration structures in the region [Ayson, 2009].

Map 28.: New displacement by conflict and disasters in 2020



The country and territory names and figures are shown only when the total new displacements value exceeds 20,000. Due to rounding, some totals may not correspond with the sum of the separate figures. The boundaries and the names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IDMC.



Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2021

Thus, it is necessary to note a characteristic feature of integration structures in the APR – in most cases, they are created to jointly solve economic problems, achieve economic integration in the region or sub-regions, but not to solve security issues.

Despite this, it is important to mention that the steps aimed at creating a multipolar security structure in the APR were taken even before the collapse of the bipolar system of international relations. In the mid-1980s Mikhail Gorbachev offered the first proposal when he advanced the idea of organizing an “All – Asia security Forum” in May 1985 [Anwar, 1988]. This proposal was not a isolated diplomatic show, since he further elaborated on the idea in his Vladivostok address of July 1986 and his Krasnoyarsk speech of September 1988 [Ministry Of ..,1989]. The security arrangement that he proposed was, in effect, a multilateral security system modelled on the CSCE in Europe. However, it failed to elicit positive responses from countries in the region. Most importantly, the West regarded Gorbachev’s offers chiefly as deliberate attempts to weaker its influence in Asia – Pacific security matters [Meyer,1992].

In August 1987 the Australian government came up with a similar suggestion. Foreign Minister Bill Hayden emphasized that Asia – Pacific countries should begin dialogues both bilaterally and multilaterally on major regional security issues [ANU,1987]. He especially stressed the urgent need to devise measures for improving military transparency and thereby to avert an arms race in the region. His successor, Gareth Evans [Evans,1995], was more concrete in suggesting that an Asian version of the CSCE be formed, namely the CSCA (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Asia Pacific Region) [Evans & Dibb, 1994]. This multilateral forum was intended to complement the U.S.' bilateral security relations with its Asian allies. However, this proposal did not find a positive response, as it did not specify the range of potential participants and specific areas of possible cooperation.

The Canadian Prime Minister, Joe Clark, in the early 1990s, echoed [Majumdar, 2000] his support for such a proposal, indicating that it was time for Asia – Pacific countries to embark on creating a multilateral security institution for the region.

Nevertheless, the West continued to view negatively proposals made by allies [Kraft, 1993]. Basically, the Western superpower (US) saw no reason to revise the status-quo and security order in the APR, an order founded on bilateral security ties with regional allies. From its standpoint the collapse of the USSR removed the major security threat in the region, and thus only improved the security and stability of the APR. [Solomon & Drennan,2001].

At the same time Asian countries itself were more eager to dynamize economic cooperation than to concentrate their efforts on solving certain strategic tasks.

That is why the well-known regional security structures of the APR – the Asia – Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC – established in 1989) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN – established in 1967) – set their priority task for economic cooperation aimed at trade and technological integration within the APR.

To understand the integration processes in Asia, it is necessary to consider in detail the existing integration organizations of the region:

#### **APEC**

Being an organization with the largest Asian participation, the Asia – Pacific Economic Cooperation engulfing both sides of the Pacific. While created, this forum was planned to become a mechanism for developing global rules for economic and military-political interaction between countries of the APR, but eventually organization turned into a regional integration setting of the Asia – Pacific countries, mainly involved just in economically-related issues [APEC,2021]. Even considering the shifts of the APEC towards resolving political issues (response to security threats), so far this is a forum for member economies not of sovereign nations, a sort of a prep-com for the World Trade Organization – WTO, which is not involved into the solving of security issues of the region.

### **SCO**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, created in 2001, was formed based on the previously existing political association of the “Shanghai Five”: Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan (**See Map 30**).

While it was mentioned that the main goals were strengthening trust between its participants in the military field, ensuring peace, security and stability in the region, criticism of the SCO [Weitz, 2014] largely concerns the failure of its activities, in the fight against terrorism and the protection of regional security. Some foreign analysts (i.e., Matthew Oresman of the American Centre for Strategic and International Studies) [Oresman, 2005] suggest that the SCO is nothing more than a discussion club, claiming something more. The same opinion is shared by the head of the Institute of Military History of the Russian Ministry of Defence A. A. Koltyukov, who claims that “the analysis of the results achieved by the SCO allows us to characterize it as a political club in which bilateral cooperation still prevails over the solution of regional and world problems. ... there is no real cooperation in these areas in countering the threats of terrorism, separatism and the fight against drug trafficking at the regional level” [Kol'tyukov, 2008].

### **SAARC**

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, SAARC – economic and political organization of eight countries in South Asia is the Indian sub-continent’s grouping, created in 1985 (**See Map 30**).

The main goal of the SAARC is to develop interaction between the participating countries in the economic, socio-cultural, and scientific-technical fields, however, with the accession of Afghanistan (in 2007), the Association began to discuss issues of combating terrorism [Rosand et al., 2009].

Being an organization, which helps the integrate the region and intensify mutual collaboration between countries-participants, the SAARC is practically a hostage of mega confrontation of its two largest members, both confirmed nuclear powers: India and Pakistan. Additionally, the SAARC although internally induced is an asymmetric organization, considering the size and position of India: centrality of that country makes SAARC practically impossible to operate in any field without the direct consent of India, which is not helping the organization to resolve important security-related issues of the region.

### **OIC and NAM**

Another crosscutting integration settings of the region are the Organization of Islamic Cooperation – OIC and Non-Aligned Movement – NAM.

The development of NAM as a new trend in the system of international relations was laid by the Bandung Conference of 1955, which served as the beginning of the creation of an international organization uniting countries that proclaimed non-participation in military-political blocs and groupings as the basis of their foreign policy. The creation of the OIC in 1969 was facilitated by a series of events that shook the Islamic world, the main ones of which were the defeat in the Arab – Israeli war in 1967 and the burning of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem by Israeli extremists. Thus, initially the creation of these two settings had a security root.

However, as professor Anis H. Bajrektarevic elaborated in his work on “No Asian Century” [2015], they are inadequate forums as neither of the two is strictly mandated with security issues. Although both trans-continental entities do have large memberships being the 2nd and 3rd largest multilateral systems, right after the UN, neither covers the entire Asian political landscape – having important Asian countries outside the system or opposing it.

### **KEDO and the Iran-related Contact (P5 + 1, E3 + 3)**

The Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), which existed in 1995 – 2006, which main goal was to implement the 1994 Framework Agreement between the United States

and North Korea and freeze the development of a local nuclear power plant in North Korea, as well as Group 5 + 1 (P5 + 1, E3 + 3) – a forum of six great powers that have united their efforts to prevent the use of the Iranian nuclear program for military purposes, were both dealing with indeed security related issues in Asia. Nevertheless, both settings were created to deter and contain a single country by the larger front of peripheral states that are opposing a particular security policy, in this case, of North Korea and of Iran.

### **BRICS and G-20**

The formation of global governance institutions began with the creation of the G7 in 1975. In 2008, the first G20 summit took place, and in 2009 – BRIC (BRICS since 2011). These informal forums, focused primarily on economic cooperation, do not fully fulfil their obligations to counter protectionism, environmental growth, food security and fairness in the labour market.

These problems exist due to the inability of both institutions to create a full-fledged accountability mechanism to ensure transparency of the processes of implementation of the decisions of the summits.

Also, the BRICS and G-20 are not providing the Asian participating states either with the more leverage in the Bretton Woods institutions or helping to tackle the indigenous Asian security problems.

### **ASEAN**

Finally, there is an ASEAN – the Association of Southeast Asian Nations – a sub-regional political and economic organization created in 1967, which includes Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, and Brunei. The main goals of this organization are the development of economic, social, cultural, and other types of cooperation between the member countries of the Association, the establishment of peace and stability in Southeast Asia (**See Map 30**).

This organization played an important role in the social and economic development of the Southeast Asian countries, contributed to the growth of their political influence in the region, however, regional cooperation in the field of defence and security within the framework of ASEAN has not yet been activated. Today, it can be assumed that ASEAN can evolve into a “security community” in the sense that none of its members seriously consider using force against another member to resolve contentious issues [Friedrichs, 2012]. But it will not become a “defensive community” because there is no common cultural, ideological, and historical experience. More importantly, there is no threat common to all members. The successes achieved by ASEAN – relative peace, stability, and security – still do not form the basis for broader military cooperation, but rather allow each state to develop on its own way.

### **Conclusions**

Today Asian countries are more willing to consult and cooperate with each other on the integration and creating of the zone of co-prosperity issues, nevertheless in Asia, there is hardly a single state which has no territorial dispute within its neighbourhood. From the Middle East, Caspian and Central Asia, Indian sub-continent, mainland Indo – China or Archipelago SEA, Tibet, South China Sea and the Far East, many countries are suffering numerous green and blue border disputes [Mapbox, 2021], (**See Map 29**).

An equally important factor is the presence in Asia of strong global geopolitical players vying for spheres of influence in the region. Thus, China is fully involved in the integration processes in Asia [Cheng, 2014]. Every year, the Chinese Premier visits one of the ASEAN member-states to meet with the leaders of the ASEAN countries, proposing steps to strengthen Chinese cooperation with the member countries [Bisley, 2015]. As China's interest rate rises in the region, Beijing has launched its own initiatives, including the “Belt and Road” and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank [Smotrytska, 2021]. This helped to deepen China's interaction with its neighbours and, of course, increased its influence.

Map 29.: Green and Blue border disputes in Asia



Source: Created by Author (IFIMES, ms), 2021.

But since the regional architecture of Southeast Asia is open, Chinese influence is not the only one. The United States remains [Goh, 2008] an important player in supporting regional security and stability while strengthening its economic engagement through proposals such as the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act [CRS, 2019] and the BUILD Act [Runde, 2018].

As noted by politicians in Asia (the PRC, Xi Jinping): “The Pacific Ocean is large enough to accommodate both the United States and China” [Ministry of ...,2013]. However, this raises the question: Is the Pacific Ocean large enough for the United States and China to coexist peacefully with overlapping circles of friends and partners, or is it large enough to be divided into rival spheres of influence between the two powers?

Answering this question one should consider, that both countries cannot fully replace each other in the region: The US Seventh Fleet has maintained regional security in Southeast Asia since World War II, ensuring the security and openness of maritime communications that fuelled trade and spurred economic growth across the region. [Acharya et al., 2016]. Despite its growing military power, the PRC will not be able to assume the United States' security role. Unlike the Americans, Beijing has maritime and territorial disputes in the South China Sea with several countries in the region, which will always view China's naval presence as an attempt to enforce territorial claims.

Another obstacle that would prevent China from assuming a US security role is the fact that many Southeast Asian countries have Chinese minorities, whose relations with the non-Chinese majority are often delicate [Department of ...,2015]. These countries are extremely sensitive to any

hint that China is unduly influencing their ethnic Chinese populations, especially when one considers the history of China's support for communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia up until the early 1980s. And this circumstance will also restrain China's role here in the foreseeable future.

At the same time, it is very difficult, almost impossible for the United States to replace China as the world's main supplier – just as it is unthinkable to do without the Chinese market [Ramirez, 2020], which is the third largest importer of American goods after Canada and Mexico. But the PRC cannot oust the US economy in Asia either. The global financial system is heavily dependent on American financial institutions, and the yuan will not replace the dollar as the world's reserve currency anytime soon. Although other Asian countries export more to China than to the United States, US transnational corporations continue to be the most important source of foreign investment in many countries in the Asia – Pacific region. Major Chinese companies are already beginning to invest overseas, but it will take many years before they have the same scale and complexity as those based in America that will connect global value chains, connect Asia to the global economy, and create millions of jobs.

For the same reasons, the APR countries today do not want to choose between centres of power, willing to develop good relations with all partners and at the same time ensure their security. In this regard, the question of the creation of its own comprehensive pan-Asian multilateral mechanism, with the help of which countries will be able to take an active part in the formation of a new world order and take a worthy place in it, is becoming more and more urgent (**See Map 30**).

**Map 30:** International organization in Asia



Source: Created by Author (IFIMES, ms), 2021.

The foundation on which Asia – Pacific countries now support regional cooperation initiatives, such as the various Indo – Pacific concepts proposed by Japan [Ministry of .., 2021], the United States and others [Haruko, 2020], as well as China's "Belt and Road Initiative" [Smotrytska,2021], is built on a policy of peaceful coexistence and containment of the emergence of one strongest leader in the region (many Asian countries believe that promoting the "Belt and Road" is a constructive way to control China's growing influence in the region [Smotrytska,2020]). Thus, today the behaviour of the countries of the APR region shows that the development of new regional mechanisms does not mean abandoning the existing multilateral structures. These hard-won agreements and institutions continue to provide all countries, especially small ones, a framework to work together and advance collective interests.

Nevertheless, today even ASEAN Asians (as the most multilateralized Asians) have no suitable standing organization to tackle and solve their security issues. This makes one wonder whether it is possible that the Western century will be replaced by an Asian or Asia – Pacific century? The question also remains, will one of the Asian countries lead the new "Asian century"?

It should be noted that this is not the first time in history that we see emerging markets doing well for a good number of years before a crisis stops their development. Is this time different, or will their growth suddenly stop because of an economic crisis? More importantly, the growth model that takes an economy from low income to middle-income status is different from the one that is required to take it to the next level.

It is important to understand that early growth comes from basic economic reforms, as in China after Deng Xiaoping [Kobayashi et al, 1999]. But to go beyond that, to reach levels of development of the richest economies, a major institutional change is required. This change involves a substantial integration of the Asian region or a transformation of the political and societal institutions of its' countries. This second step is harder, and we have seen economies in the past stagnating when they reach this level (i.e., the former Soviet Union, which managed to perform well until it reached a level of development that required that second step of institutional change).

Besides the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), there have been other emerging features of security cooperation in Asia that are not necessarily based on geographical groupings but on security concerns and capability [Pejsova, 2014]. These multidimensional developments indicate that security cooperation in Asia is far more complex today than a traditional bi-multi nexus model. The "double-track" approach is now entering into the new phase especially in the wake of various forms of multilateral security mechanisms that have been revealing in recent years in Asia – Pacific.

An analysis of the emerging alignment of forces within the international community allows us to conclude that the very formulation of the question of the Asian century suffers from unacceptable simplification and schematization that does not consider new world realities and the geopolitical structure of the region, that cannot be explained in traditional concepts and categories. And the reality is that the East has already become the supporting structure of the world community, equal in size to the West, and its' role in the coming century will increase. Moreover, in the East itself, several centres are ripening (China, Japan, India, and a numerically growing group of smaller, but very dynamic new industrial countries), capable of competing on an equal footing both with each other and with the West, if not as a whole, then with its leading powers. But to consolidate the total power of Asian countries the largest continent must consider the creation of its own comprehensive pan-Asian multilateral mechanism. Economic and demographic parts of Asia must be accorded by the new pan-continental setting. On the very institution setup, Asia can closely revisit the well-envisioned SAARC and ambitiously empowered ASEAN fora. By examining these two regional bodies, Asia will be able to find and calibrate the appropriate balance between widening and deepening of the security mandate of such future multilateral organization.

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