

The decline of the United States in Asia will deepen with Trump

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During his presidential campaign, Trump accused China of 'raping America' and 'stealing' US jobs. That is the reason why he promised to impose taxes of

45% on Chinese imports, a decision that would open the door to a commercial war with unpredictable consequences.

Despite this grandiloquent threat, Trump's arrival in the Oval Office is still good news for China in many other respects. First, a strong reduction of US military intervention in the region is expected, within the framework of the isolationist vision that has been proclaiming the New Yorker tycoon.

In that sense, the controversial Philippine President, Rodrigo Duterte, had surprised weeks ago the American diplomacy after announcing a 'separation' in the relations between both countries. He did so during a State visit to Beijing, seemingly operating a definite realignment towards China and Russia. The Philippines, where the United States has important military bases, has historically been one of their main allies in Asia.

In turn, the rapprochement between Manila and Beijing consolidates Chinese supremacy in the dispute over the sovereignty of the South China Sea. The sentence of the International Court of Justice last July, in favor of the Philippines' claim on the Spratly Islands, seems to have been relegated to the past. Now, both sides are aiming to channel the dispute bilaterally. Exactly what China intended from the beginning of the controversy.

Of course, the US military step back in Asia is also celebrated by Russian President, Vladimir Putin, with whom Trump exchanged praise on several occasions. But above all, Mr. Putin basks in Trump's promise of reducing funds for NATO, favoring

Russian expansionism over Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

At the same time, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which had been Barack Obama's big bet to contain China's economic influence in Southeast Asia, will surely be dismissed by Trump. This change revitalizes Chinese President Xi Jinping's ambitious plan of 'One Belt, One Road', which will connect China with Europe, boosting cooperation with almost all countries in Asia and part of Africa.

It should also be recalled that recently a new BRICSA summit was held in Goa, India. The most relevant outcome was the historical agreement on economic, financial and military cooperation signed between Russia and India. It was another great frustration for the United States. Obama's Administration invested heavily in strengthening India as a retaining wall in front of the Chinese and Russian tandem.

Likewise, India and Pakistan (harshly confronting each other because of territorial disputes) were incorporated last June as members of the Shanghai Group. It is an ascending interstate organization led by China and Russia, also including four countries from Central Asia.

The gloomy US perspectives in Asia are complemented by the nuclear tests and constant threats of the ruthless Kim Jong-Un, whose missiles can reach Alaska. Trump said he is willing to talk to the North Korean leader, although it is hard to imagine how such a dialogue would be like. Anyway, the situation in North Korea, first and foremost,

should seriously worry its Chinese and Russian neighbors.

The reasons for the American decline in Asia, a region that is set to be the epicenter of the global economy in the 21st century, are diverse. Among others, the US privileged during the last years the fight against international terrorism, focusing efforts and resources on the Middle East.

Nonetheless, Trump would now not only retreat the United States from Asia, but also from Europe and the Middle East. Such a move would open a scenario of great uncertainty and concern for many historic allies of the United States, heavily dependent on the US military and financial support to ensure stability in their respective countries.

China and Russia, the great beneficiaries of this new situation, will surely continue to expand their strategic alliance and consolidate their hegemonic position in Asia, with an expected greater prominence and integration of India.

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