

New Zealand and small pacific states towards US-China global contest

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Abstract: *In the presented research, the theoretical basis is constructivism and critical geopolitics. In the face of the intensifying US-Chinese rivalry, the main theater of which is the Pacific, the question arises about New Zealand's position of other small and micro states in the Pacific towards this rivalry. While trying to understand what policies are pursued by the states of this Pacific region in the face of the American-Chinese rivalry, a deep dichotomy and ambivalence of attitudes among small states were noticed. At the same time, it was indicated that it is cultural factors and language, mental and consciousness processes that have a profound impact on shaping the policy of states within the framework set by geopolitics.*

Keywords: GEOPOLITICS, CONSTRUCTIVISM, PACIFIC, SMALL COUNTRIES, NEW ZEALAND, USA, CHINA

1. Introduction

New Zealand seems to be a small player on the world chessboard, yet it remains in the spotlight of the two greatest powers of our time, the People's Republic of China and the United States of America, which have sought Wellington's favor and continue to do so in different methods and with different results. The facts about New Zealand are such, that it is the so-called a little strongman in international politics, which I will try to explain to the reader in the course of my discussion in this book. At the outset, I can point out that the key position of New Zealand, both for the US and China, is mainly due to three factors: economic, cultural and political, and yet the main factor is the geographic location of New Zealand.

Why us, Poles, should be interested in the issue of New Zealand's policy towards the American-Chinese rivalry. This is mainly due to the fact of a specific *Zeitgeist* and the conditions in which the world finds itself in the present period, which should be called the times of the great turning point - not the first, and probably not the last, in the history of the world. Similar to those in the history of international relations and in the history of the world, the great battles such as Hastings in 1066, the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the contractual discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1493 and the Napoleonic wars, the Spring of Nations, as well as mass industrialization and subsequent industrial and technological revolutions [1]. Basically, it should be acknowledged that taking up the subject of New Zealand policy from the Polish perspective guarantees a very distant perspective, from a country that is close to us in terms of civilization, but more culturally distant from us or from our European neighbors. Thus, it is a cognitively valuable perspective, satisfying curiosity, but also the need for knowledge about the contemporary world and political processes that drive current changes with unprecedented dynamics. The ever-growing role of the Pacific region is not without significance - especially in the economic sense, and the continuous shifting of the center of gravity of the world and global affairs to this region, where New Zealand is also located, has been going on for several decades, hence it is written about the age of the Pacific, which is becoming become the main focus of US foreign policy [2]. This country finds itself in a situation in which Poland may find itself in the future, and in which Poland has found itself many times in the past. This is a historic moment in which New Zealand finds itself between the great quarries from under which the world of current geopolitics emerges - the two quarries between which the antipodes are China and the USA, which generates a location

unprecedented in the history of New Zealand, in which it has to choose a camp to which it will belong. In the past, when New Zealand fought in the Second World War, it was not an independent country, but a dominion, similarly in the First World War. This meant that it had little influence on the foreign policy of the British Empire, which was the dominion, and the influence of New Zealand on the foreign policy of London after the Congress of Vienna can be considered only slight. Currently, New Zealand is an independent player on the international arena, the country is endowed with high trust of its partners and enjoys a reputation of a well-established, consolidated democracy. Although, of course, it also has its own internal problems, such as postcolonial issues and housing policy problems [3]. However, in the face of the importance and status that New Zealand has gained in the world, this country may lose as well as gain a lot, depending on what position it adopts in the period of tensions and possible US-Chinese conflict. From New Zealand's policy towards this rivalry, there may be a lesson for the future for Poland, although we are in a completely different place in the world, the issue of the collision of American-Chinese interests in Poland is very possible in the near future. There was already a prelude to this in connection with the dilemmas that arise from possible profits for Poland from the silk route, as well as losses for the state, if we sided with the Chinese, then Poland will certainly cut its position in the eyes of the USA and the alliance with the Americans will loosen up a lot. . In the case of New Zealand, it is not only about economic and cultural matters, although I wrote so above, but also all the factors that will affect the national security in this country in connection with the American-Chinese rivalry are important. Moreover, geopolitically, the location of New Zealand is somewhat analogous to the Polish situation in the past - between Russia and Germany, where both forces pressed Poland to take one side of the conflict, and Poles remained in their positions, striving to preserve sovereignty thanks to Józef Beck's equilibrium policy, which, as the course of events showed, did not guarantee Poland's security. So it is also worth considering what smaller states can do to survive in times of conflict between superpowers or pretending superpowers. Another important perspective of this research is also a scrupulous insight into the position that, on the example of New Zealand, liberal democracies adopt towards Chinese politics and politics in China.

2. Situation on the Pacific

New Zealand-Chinese and New Zealand-American relations became tense before the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 Covid-19 pandemic, therefore I would like to introduce the entire political process that led to the current international situation in this part of the world. It should be recognized that this is a study of tripartite relations taking into account the geopolitical conditions of New Zealand and small countries on the Pacific.

Opening the reading, it is worth considering the words of former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull (Prime Minister in 2015-2018), who rejected the analogy of the current situation of China with the USA in the 19th century, used by many commentators and analysts, stating that China may impose its version of the American doctrine Monroe (1823), blocking the entire region for its domination. M. Turnbull considered this "inappropriate analogy" [4]. However, shortly after this statement, a year later, the then Prime Minister of Australia recognized that some people were afraid that one day China would impose the Monroe Doctrine on the southern hemisphere and dominate the region, marginalizing other nations, especially the American. Is such a scenario likely? How is New Zealand preparing for the changes taking place, and what positions is it adopting? The issue is extremely important, because, as Marcin Lason wrote in 2018, the increase in tensions between China and the US may lead the authorities in Wellington to an uncomfortable position and the need to declare on one of the sides, which will not take place without losses for New Zealand [5], and this claim he is not an isolated researcher.

Already in 1991, the New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade emphasized at a meeting with Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Krzysztof Skubiszewski that the Pacific region was a traditional sphere of influence for the United States [6]. This status quo in the 21st century was challenged by China, which has become the United States' rival to the role of a hegemon and creates alternative economic systems and initiates the processes of political integration in the region, without the participation of the United States. China's leadership model, Xi Jinping, has an impact on throwing the gauntlet over the global leadership of the United States, including the fact that in 2018 the term of office of the Chinese president was abolished, thus opening the door to lifetime for Xi Jinping [7]. Thus, as Jacek Bartosiak writes, "East Asia has become bipolar with China as the main economic actor and the US as the main security player" [8]. However, the situation is so dynamic that China also appears as a security supplier not only in East Asia, but also in the South Pacific. It is also pointed out that the rivalry between China and the US does indeed resemble the rivalry between Athens and Sparta in the Pacific before the Peloponnesian War. Characteristic of attempts to forecast future events in the Pacific is that Chinese intellectual elites encourage and show political elites methods of gaining a strategic advantage over the US. Southeast Asian and Pacific pundits such as former Singapore leader Lee Kuan Yew argued that "If the US does not maintain its position in the Pacific, it cannot be a global leader. America's fundamental interest requires it to maintain its position as the most important power in the Pacific. Giving up this position would diminish America's role worldwide" [9]. In turn, China has demonstrated in the past that it is able to openly cooperate with the US, most evidently after the US-China rapprochement initiated in 1972 by Henry Kissinger and President Richard Nixon. Nevertheless, deep cultural differences, different societal expectations as to their role in the world, and the influence of

leadership units - especially in China, on the directions of foreign policy may determine China's further steps in the Pacific region, especially if China feels threatened and encircled by the US and its allies, which it may provoke a preventive war on the part of China - at a time that China deems convenient for itself [10]. China certainly lacks significant formal and informal allies in the Pacific. The United States, on the other hand, has formal defense agreements with six major players in the Indo-Pacific region: Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand. In contrast, India, Indonesia, Singapore, Taiwan and Vietnam maintain a strong defense policy and arms dependency on the US [11]. Is New Zealand really an example of a lose-lose situation?

3. Theoretical basis and scientific questions of the research

As Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote in his excellent book *Great chessboard*: "Apparently Napoleon once said that if you know the geographic location of a country, you also know its foreign policy" [12]. In this sense, it should be assumed that New Zealand and small states on the Pacific are now a geopolitical pin on the global geopolitical chessboard. This study is part of the study of geopolitics, because as Leszek Sykulski wrote: "Geopolitics can also be treated as a way of thinking, a kind of reflection on international affairs" [13], while to the situation of New Zealand we can apply this observation that "Geopolitical rivalry is the art of introducing mistake. The greatest victory in geopolitics is to achieve the political goal without the use of military force" [14], the main goal of geopolitics, according to this author, is "to control the noosphere, the „mental mantle of the Earth', the sphere of the consciousness of societies" [15]. Moreover, important are the indications of Carlo Jean, who wrote about how to approach geopolitical hypotheses and what is significant in this scientific process: possibilities taking into account the interactions it enters into with other factors operating in the same territory as well as the response of the international environment. ' Zbigniew Brzezinski also announced that the possible unification of the Heartland by China, especially by dominating the European peninsula, will mean the end of American domination - both in Europe and everywhere in the world [16].

Therefore, in this study, not only hard and amoral geopolitics is important for the explanation of phenomena and events, but also the behavior and attitudes of individual political actors and their beliefs, views and system of values. They are crucial, among other things, for shaping foreign policy, as is clearly illustrated by the language of Chinese diplomats who recognize Australia as "the US sheriff's deputy," but such harsh rhetoric still does not touch New Zealand. Why?

Referring to David Lai's analyzes, one should consider whether games such as weqi (go) and chess are the correct analogy to China's rivalry with the West, and especially with the US? [17] Does China follow the rules of the weqi strategy, and the US follows chess? So what is New Zealand's strategy? A clue may be the statement of New Zealand Foreign Minister Damian O'Connor, who called on Australia, whose relations with China are most inflamed to show greater respect for its Chinese partner and use a more diplomatic language, which made politicians in Canberra bewildered. Australia's Trade Minister Dan Tehan replied that Australia's actions are based on the national interest. Australian politicians admit that the statement by the New Zealand minister touched them and put into question their Trans-Tasmanian

friendship. The Chinese media have recognized that Australia and New Zealand's attitudes toward China are as different as fire is different from water. New Zealand's approach is perceived as abandoning the care for democratic values in favor of the development of economic relations. Social activists from humanitarian organizations, in turn, are proud of the attitude of the Australian government and point out that the use of a more diplomatic language is New Zealand's open consent to human rights violations in China [18]. Could this attitude of New Zealand damage its international reputation as a country that is not only a consolidated liberal democracy, but also promotes democracy in the world and strengthens democratization processes? The situation is all the more complicated that, according to a recent Pew Research Center study, 67% of New Zealanders have a negative opinion of China. Nevertheless, they find it as important to maintain trade relations with China as well as with the US, quite differently from Australians who prefer trade relations with the US to relations with the PRC. Still, 80% of New Zealanders, compared to 78% of Australians, prioritize the promotion of human rights over the development of trade relations with the Middle Kingdom [19]. In recent years, differences in the approach to defense and security policy in the South Pacific region between Australia and New Zealand have emerged. While New Zealand comes up with the concept of a "reset of relations in the Pacific", Australia has been showing a clearly different position for several years, guided by the policy of full involvement, also militarily, in the region. The consequence of this are also separate positions of these countries towards the US and China, which calls into question the form of their existing, seemingly intact alliance. Instead, there are at least four areas common to Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Island States, namely: promoting an international order based on shared standards; shared commitment to crisis engagement; dedicating resources to regional action and regionalism in the Pacific area; shared commitment to trade liberalization. Despite their differences, Australia and New Zealand have a lot in common, including the brotherhood of arms and the legend of ANZAC (Australia and New Zealand Army Corps, 1915) and ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, United States Treaty, 1951). Joint defense efforts in the South Pacific area were expressed in the *Closer Defense Relations Agreement* of 1991 and in the 2011 *Review of the Australia-New Zealand Defense Relationship* [20].

Recently, China's aggressive rhetoric and aggressive actions in the Pacific region have been increasing. The directions of China's rhetoric are visible in the so-called Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy, which largely takes place in the virtual world, e.g. on Twitter, while aggressive actions are mainly observed in the South China Sea, where China in 2020 gave names to 80 minor islands and rock points above sea level. In addition, China sank one of the Vietnamese vessels that was sailing around the Paracel Islands. The tense situation in the region is also reflected in the growing US-Chinese rivalry in the region. One of the signs of this situation was the recent expulsion of The Wall Street Journal journalists from China and Chinese journalists from the USA. Journalists of the American title wrote the text: *China Is the Real Sick Man of Asia*. At the same time, it is noted that also in China, there is no agreement in the diplomatic establishment regarding the confrontational foreign policy [21].

I have assumed in this research that New Zealand, and the rest of the Pacific's small and micro-states, with China and the US are key to their survival and prosperity, and key to their national security. As Polish diplomats concluded, "New Zealand must export in order to live" [22], and both China and the USA are key

economic partners for Wellington. However, contrary to what is reported in the literature on the subject, I hypothesize that both China and the USA do not treat New Zealand as a small country, but as a significant player in international politics, mainly because of the prestige that New Zealand enjoys among other countries in the world, as a country with a consolidated democracy and a developed civil society, and a strong and innovative economy based on exports. In order to solve this hypothesis, the following research questions were posed: What is the significance of New Zealand for the American-Chinese rivalry? What place do small and micro-states of the Pacific have in the foreign policy of the US and the PRC? To what extent can New Zealand's territories be considered key to US-Chinese rivalry? What is New Zealand's importance in international relations and in the Pacific region? What internal and external factors influence New Zealand's policy towards China and the US, and towards their rivalry? What is New Zealand's place in major geopolitical theories? What is New Zealand's place in the foreign policy of China and the US? How important is New Zealand's geographic location for its relationship with China and the US? What are the significance of cultural and civilization factors in New Zealand-Chinese and New Zealand-American relations? How have New Zealand's relations with China and the US been historically? On the basis of political thought, what currents dominate New Zealand political thought regarding the approach to US-Chinese rivalry? What is the place of the Pacific and especially the South Pacific in the political and strategic thought of the Americans and the Chinese? What tools are China and the US using to attract New Zealand to their political camp? What is New Zealand's geopolitical code? What is New Zealand's attitude towards US-Chinese rivalry against the background of Australian policy? What attitude are small and micro states in the South Pacific taking to US-Chinese rivalry? What place has the Pacific and the South Pacific in particular had in the political thought of the main political leaders in the US and the PRC? What is New Zealand pursuing its foreign policy with respect to the US-Chinese rivalry? How were New Zealand-American and New Zealand-Chinese relations developed? What are the key issues in the tripartite relationship between New Zealand, the US, and China?

Conducting the research, the constructivist position on international relations was used, the effect of the theoretical perspective adopted in this way is the assumption that relations between states are simply a resultant of such issues as culture, language, religion, and the general system of values through which relations with other states are "constructed". Thus, an important role in creating international relations is played by identity - individual, ethnic, national, etc. Thanks to this approach, social and political determinants influencing international relations have been taken into account. The fundamental importance in the constructivist approach is ascribed to the norms of social life, ideas and value systems. In this sense, the international world as well becomes "a derivative of human consciousness, knowledge ..., concepts and theoretical assumptions". In the perspective of one of the founders of constructivism in the theory of international relations, Alexander Wendt: into relations based on rivalry ", is also to show the character of states in an anarchic international system. The rivalry between states is born evolutionarily, historically, it takes place in stages. On the other hand, states adopt attitudes towards each other on the basis of socialization in the international environment, including and thanks to the intersubjectivization of the values that make up this system. In this approach, moreover, A. Wendt indicates that the so-called the logic of an anarchic Lockean society, which boils down to the creed - to live and let live. Hence,

competition does not have to mean hostility. The process of rivalry between states in the modern world, however, presupposes the recognition of international law and rules that are adopted as binding, and what distinguishes the Lockean model in this context is the permission to use force within the framework of rivalry between states - but only within the limits - "live and let live" - as A. Wendt wrote. According to A. Wendt, rivals, even in a situation of war, will limit the violence and the scale of the use of military force. In this system, even theoretically, there is a relative refraining of states from open conflict. A. Wendt calls the attitude of states through mutual competition "the Foucault effect" - "the thesis that a self-regulating, possessive individual is the result of a particular discourse or culture" [23]. It is also important to understand that armed conflicts have never occurred between the states of the liberal democratic regime.

There is no doubt that New Zealand has been part of the global Pax Americana since the collapse of Pax Britannica, and is geopolitically strongly affiliated with Washington's center of power. It is the same element of what geopoliticians would call a maritime empire whose territory will in principle conflict with the power centers of the land empire, so in this case China. It is therefore part of the eternal rivalry between tellurocracy and thalassocracy. With regard to the creators of classical geopolitics, Alfred Mahan should be mentioned as a geopolitician who grants the primacy of sea power over land power, because sea power is able to ensure control over transport routes. The attitude and policy of New Zealand are not without significance for the attitudes of its closest economic and political partner, i.e. Australia, which has adopted a strategy of strengthening relations with the United States, thus joining Washington's strategy, blocking Beijing's influence and increasing the importance of the Middle Kingdom, especially in the region. Pacific. Researchers of international relations notice that the increasing US-Chinese rivalry will force Australia and the countries of the region to clearly opt for either side of the conflict. By contrast, New Zealand and other small states in the Pacific are structurally involved in the geopolitical rivalry between the US and China, and any rapprochement with Beijing or Washington will come at the cost of distancing and damaging relations with the second power. This is also related to the dilemma for New Zealand and other small countries in the region, the need to choose a side in a possible open armed conflict [24].

4. Small states political situation in the Pacific

China's ambitions in the South Pacific among the countries of the region are related to several key issues, one of which is the isolation of Taiwan in the international arena by tightening relations with the countries of the region, thereby abandoning relations with Taipei. To ensure loyalty among new allies, the PRC uses a wide range of tools, but mainly it is economic aid. The problem for Beijing was serious as early as 2013, because out of 23 Pacific states, 6 recognized Taiwan, including Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Palau, Nauru, Tuvalu and Solomon Islands. In addition, China is one of the major donors to the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the South Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO). As early as 1997, the PRC invested in a satellite observation station on Tarawa Atoll in Kiribati. It was assumed that these installations were also aimed at espionage on the American missile launchers located in the Marshall Islands. The ports in Fiji, on the other hand, are operated by a Chinese fishing flotilla, which is seen as a camouflaged vessel intercepting American intelligence messages from Micronesia. China is also looking to enter the exclusive economic zones of the region's countries. For about two decades, China has been successfully expanding its soft power among the countries of the South Pacific. China manages to build an image of a country taking

responsibility for the economic situation in the region. In the past, there were also strong tensions between China and the small Pacific states, including in 1980, when China decided to test ballistic missiles in the Central Pacific. It was also an incentive for China to sign the protocol of the Treaty on the Atomic Weapons Free Zone in the South Pacific in 1985, which significantly strengthened China's position in the region, among the group of Pacific states traditionally reluctant to nuclear states [25]. What is currently happening in the Pacific in the context of China's growing influence in small and micro-states of the region resembles the situation from the Cold War period, when the USSR was building its influence in third world countries trying to drag these countries to its side. The PRC played an important role in this game, becoming Moscow's enemy over time. In the Mitrokhin Archive book, there are many examples of the bestiality that Chinese communists could afford, who in the years after the communists gained power in 1949 in China were considered liberal politicians, such as Zhou Enlai, who became the prime minister of China under Mao [26]. I am writing about it because it is often forgotten that the Chinese can afford acts of brutality on an unimaginable scale. From 2013, the foreign trade of Pacific states concentrated in China and outweighed its scale with Australia. It is estimated that between 2006 and 2017, China allocated USD 1.5 billion to aid small Pacific states in the form of grants or loans. The COVID-19 pandemic gives China another opportunity to expand PRC influence in the region. It is noted that China prevails in the financial capacity to provide aid to the countries of the region, but Australia and New Zealand outweigh China in terms of the durability of the proposed solutions [27]. China, in turn, is investing heavily, for example, in the port in the capital of Vanuatu, Port Vila (where it can install the A2 / AD system). The location of the base in such a region may also threaten the shipping lines between Australia and the USA. Region of the so-called Pacific states are 14 independent states and dependent territories administered by Australia, France, New Zealand and the United States. In the South Pacific, the United States has a military presence through Compact Free Association (COFA), under which the United States is loosely affiliated with Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau. Despite the intensifying rivalry in the Pacific, the countries there are prone to diversifying their economic and political partners in order not to fall into the trap of bipolar rivalry, among those partners from outside the China-US agreement, Australia, France and India are particularly attractive [28]. Jacek Bartosiak writes that China's intriguing strategy in this respect, which is consistent with the situation of small and micro-states in the Pacific: "In Washington, it was assumed that the Chinese believe that the method of defeating the American armed forces in the region is to effectively and permanently challenge the American ability to freely project power (even without a conflict, even through the so-called strategic communication and calculations), which triggers individual political calculations of states - former US allies, and so susceptible to the overwhelming influence of the Chinese economic power. For China is developing its military capabilities in exactly this direction, and to fulfill this overarching goal, it conducts exercises, purchases and investments. China's main strategy is to use the "debt trap", whereby countries that have borrowed from China have to give up some of their sovereignty in exchange for unpaid debts [29].

5. Conclusion

On the basis of the conducted research, it is possible to notice the importance of cultural factors as well as deeply rooted and historically conditioned positions, which are more important than even short-term economic interests. Currently, it can be seen that while for the USA, New Zealand and the small Pacific states are subjects of defense policy and constitute a permanent presence of the USA in the international arena as a hegemon, for the PRC New Zealand and the South Pacific region are not a strategic area of expansion, but rather, the subject of an economic and diplomatic game. As a result, Taiwan is to be isolated on the international

arena, and small Pacific states are to support Beijing. The coming decade will be decisive for New Zealand, and its failure to decide who to get through in a possible conflict could have devastating consequences for the entire South Pacific region of which it is currently a leader. Countries smaller than New Zealand do not have long-term defense policies or strategies that would allow them to face the upcoming challenges related to the US-Chinese rivalry, so they must rely on external partners - if not the US or China, then on such as Australia and New Zealand in search of political order and security. It seems that in the near future it is New Zealand that will be the guarantor of small countries in the region, along with neighboring Australia, of their security. Ultimately, however, they will either be part of a broad coalition built by the US, or they will fall entirely into the sphere of Chinese influence, including through "dollar policy" and the expansion of Chinese quasi-military bases in the region.

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