**POLITICAL CATACLYSMS AT THE START OF THE CENTURY, THE EROSION OF THE EUROCENTRIC INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SYSTEM, AND THE TRUMP PHENOMENON**

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***Abstract***

The recent crises in Ukraine, East Asia, and the Middle East and the far right trends in the public opinion and government policies of a number of states in Europe, Asia, and North America, culminating in the emergence of the Trump phenomenon, indicate the existence of deep shifts in the global international relations system. These shifts could be much more significant than the

widely discussed erosion of the US international monopoly and are related to the global transfer of the world economic and political power center from North Atlantic to the Pacific Basin. Essentially, quickly collapsing is the Eurocentric system that has dominated the world since the end of Fifteenth century. Meanwhile, the Western, and especially the European elites refuse to recognize the scale and the potential consequences of these processes. One of the most dangerous aspects of this policy is the continuous anti Russian campaign, which, ironically, is exaggerating both the RF power capabilities and its threat to the Western interests and is pushing Russia towards China. The virtual reality, created by this approach, deviates significantly from the actual one, and handicaps the Global North’s ability to deal with the newly emerging threats. Ensuring stability of the international system would require the recognition by the Global North of the seriousness of the ongoing systemic changes, the return to the acceptance of the state sovereignty concept, and the abandonment of attempts to impose its will on the others under the pretext of single mindedly formulated globalization slogans. The Trump phenomenon represents an attempt to grasp the scale of changes taking place within the international system and adjust the goals and methods of US foreign policy to the new political reality. Nevertheless, Trump’s policies encounter strong resistance on the part of most of the traditional American elites.

***Key words:* Eurocentric system, sovereignty, empire, hegemony, globalization, «westernization», Global North, Global South, self-determination, Third World, colonialism, imperialism, Donald Trump, bipolarity, unimultipolar system, power politics, “soft power.”**

The political crises evolving in Ukraine, East Asia, and the Middle East are just some of the testimonies to the massive and rapid geopolitical shifts taking place within the world international relations system. The Europeans’ panic reaction to the refugee flow from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); the quickly growing popularity of the extreme right political movements and parties; the conservative shifts in the policies of a number of governments, including those democratically elected; the conversion of some subversive international nongovernmental organizations (including the openly terrorist ones, such as al Qaeda, al Shabaab, Boko Haram, and the Islamic State) into the world scale political players along with some other consequences of the “color revolutions” and other political experiments of the recent years pose some interesting and significant challenges for the international community. These challenges, taking place along with the quickly growing influence of China and India and the formation and quick functionional expansion of such non-Western intergovernmental organizations as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS, represent just some of the links in a chain of events, marking the global shift of the world economic and political power centers from North Atlantic to the Pacific Basin.

The significance of the ongoing changes was depicted in recent years in the feverish attempts by the United States to create new regional structures in the Pacific region that would exclude China and Russia and represent a counterweight to SCO and BRICS. Especially indicative in this sense was Barak Obama’s Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) initiative that has failed to get the Congressional approval.

Still, the inconsistent and conceptually fraud policies of the Bush and Obama administrations in the Middle East along with Russia’s increasing activism in that region have led a number of observers to a conclusion that the world is witnessing the evolving crisis of the unipolar (or Huntington’s unimultipolar[[1]](#footnote-1)) system that was based on the US monopoly and emerged with the end of the Cold War and the USSR dissolution in December 1991. This view, in particular, was formulated by Russia's President Vladimir Putin in his October, 2015 speech at the 70th UN General Assembly meeting, in which he claimed that « after the end of the Cold War the world was left with one center of dominance, and those who found themselves at the top of the pyramid were tempted to think that, since they are so powerful and exceptional, they know best what needs to be done and thus they don’t need to reckon with the UN, which, instead of rubber-stamping the decisions they need, often stands in their way. That’s why they say that the UN has run its course and is now obsolete and outdated. Of course, the world changes, and the UN should also undergo natural transformation. Russia is ready to work together with its partners to develop the UN further on the basis of a broad consensus, but we consider any attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the United Nations as extremely dangerous. They may result in the collapse of the entire architecture of international relations, and then indeed there will be no rules left except for the rule of force. The world will be dominated by selfishness rather than collective effort, by dictate rather than equality and liberty, and instead of truly independent states we will have protectorates controlled from outside” [1].

The first steps by the new, Trump administration indicated a desire to significantly revise the US geopolitical priorities: esposing the return to a traditional understanding of the state sovereignty principle, suggesting a less interventionist and ideologically motivated military policy, recognizing the ongoing geopolitical shift towards the Pacific region, and viewing China as the major and quickly growing political, economic, and military threat to the United States, Trump (along with his campaign strategist Steve Bannon) insisted on deemphasizing the significance of NATO and Europe in general and treating Russia as a counterweight to China and a potential US ally both in East Asia and in the Middle East. He also considered the process of globalization and the global system, incrementally built in the initial post Cold War period on the basis of such mechanisms as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and designed to create economic advantages for the largest and presumed at that time to be the most effective US economy, more as a liability than an advantage for the United States. In Trump’s view, at present, this system benefits China (admitted to WTO in 2001) rather than the US, and should be destroyed or at least modified significantly. This has further reinforced Trump’s desire to take steps aimed at weakening China[[2]](#footnote-2) (including the improvement of the US-Russia relations) and protecting the American industry and agriculture from what he viewed as an unfair competition on the basis of rebuilding the economic protectionist barriers and stopping the undocumented immigration.

Meanwhile, the processes we are witnessing today might turn out to be much deeper and more complicated than the consequences of Donald Trump's unorthodox political views and behavior or even the simple erosion of the US monopoly in the world economic and political system.

**A Bit of History and Geopolitics**

In order to appreciate the scale of both the current and the possible potentially in the foreseeble future geopolitical shifts, one needs to remember those distinctive circumstances under which the current economic and political systems were formed. Speaking more specifically, the future dynamics of the international relations were defined by the two key events. First of all, one must look back at the year 1492. The Christian Europe's increasing tensions with Turkey and the growing isolation from Persia, India, and other countries of the East (and with them, the tightening access to the Eastern spices and other strategically important goods of that time) pushed Europeans to start seeking fevereshly the alternative routes to «India.»

The leadership in this process was assumed by Spain and Portugal—the young and just forming essentially states that only recently were liberated from the culturally and religiously alien Arab Moslem imperial control. In their search, the two chose basically the opposite approaches: Columbus in 1492 sailed to the West, quite unexpectedly and even unwittingly finding the Americas, while Vasco de Gama in 1497 moved to the South and then, the East, exploring and opening up for the European control not only the sought after India, but also the vast spaces in Africa, the Middle East, and South and East Asia. Thus for the first time in human history, a truly worldwide economic and political system was being formed—the event that radically altered the flow of the world history.

Nevertheless, one should not forget that these events came in the footsteps of some equally significant developments on the other side of Eurasia—yet in 1405, practically a century ahead of the Europeans, the Chinese naval explorers went along the coast of South Asia and reached the shores of East Africa, thus creating for China some unique leadership opportunities in terms of the territorial expansion and the political and economic advantages for that largest and strongest world power of the time. Meanwhile, after about thirty years of exploration this course was reversed, the fleet, destroyed, and China opted to stop all contacts with the newly found territories—the decision that was as important in terms of the future direction of the world history as the later territorial explorations by Columbus and Vasco de Gama. While cited are different reasons for this decision, the Chinese leaders' desire to protect the ethnic and cultural homogeneity of their country (quite in contrast to the imperial aspirations of the European leaders) has probably played in it a significant role.

Under these circumstances, the Europeans acquired at the end of the Fifteenth century an opportunity not only to become the leaders in the world territorial explorations—essentially, they obtained a monopolistic ability to establish political control over most of the world regions, and with it, the right to use the world resources to support their continent's accelerated economic and technological development. More than that—very soon the Europeans started to follow the path of subjugation, exploitation, and forceful civilizational transformation of the culturally alien regions—in a sharp contrast to China (still by far the largest and the strongest country on Earth[[3]](#footnote-3)), that has rejected such an expansionist approach (or at least, in a way similar to that of Russia, limited it to the territorially adjusent, contuguous, and civilizationally relatively close mostly continental territories).

These circumstances led soon to the formation of a significant gap between Europe and other continents and civilizations, further increasing the former's advantages. Still, even this was not enough: the Europeans did not simply establish their control—they imposed their languages, religion, and culture along with the basic elements of their economic, political, and legal systems on the residents of other continents. The parallel proliferation of slave trade and some other forms of involuntary migration as well as the targeted creation of the ethnic loyalist proimperial groups from the ranks of the preselected local elites led to the formation of the «native» immigration to the colonial metropoles (first of all, with a goal of educating and indoctrinating the future members of the colonial elites) and some white «settler» colonies. Thus essentially, the elements of the «soft power» policies were introduced, way before this term was coined by Joseph Nye. Ironically, with time, this policy has become an important factor of the ethnic, religious, and cultural societal erosion—both in the imperial states and the settler colonies.

Thus starting at the end of Fifteenth century, rapidly forming was the world Eurocentric system. Already at that time, this process proceeded under the slogans so familiar now—of the Europeans' «civilizing» role—at that time, the core issue being the proliferation of Christianity.

The 1648 Peace of Westphalia and the resulting absolute understanding of state sovereignty have further strengthened and legitimized the leading European powers' control over their expanding colonial possessions and provided the legal foundations for their ability to both exploit the resources of their colonies and to influence the cultural identities of the colonial people.

The end of Eighteenth—the beginning of Nineteenth centuries were marked by the collapse of a number of the «first wave» territorially contiguous colonial empires in North, Central, and South America (primarily, the Spanish, British, French and Portuguese. In the Nineteenth century, the same fate awaited the Meditteranean Ottoman Empire, pressured by Russia and the nationalistic uprisings within its territory).

With the formation of the United States in 1776, the world map and the international balance of power started to evolve: already by the end of the Nineteenth century, the world political center shifted from Europe proper to the North Atlantic. Still, the international political system remained esentially Eurocentric, because both the United States and Russia along with Canada, joining them later, remained states controlled by the Christian elites speaking some of the major European languages. In addition, two more events that occurred in the Nineteenth century, further consolidated the Eurocentric character of the international system. The proclamation of the Monroe[[4]](#footnote-4) Doctrine in 1823 has legitimized the new, more informal yet effective methods of the US control over the nominally independent by now states of Latin America—by the end of the century, it would be supplemented by such concepts as Teddy Roosevelt's Monroe Doctrine Auxillary, the Gunboat Diplomacy, and the suggestion for the US government to «speak quietly, but carry a big stick», leading to the increasing US self perception as a world policeman (although at that time, still operating outside Europe) and further accentuating the US right to use force against other countries, first of all, those in Latin America and increasingly, in the Pacific.

No less fateful were the decisions of the 1878 Congess of Berlin. They have officially divided the nations of the world into the civilized and the uncivilized ones, offering the «civilized» (overwhelmingly, the Christian states of Europe and the Americas) the absolute right to establish both the *de facto* and the *de jure* control over most of the world. Now such actions were declared to be, in the words of Rudyard Kipling, «the White Man's burden» [9] – not just the right, but even the «moral obligation» of the Eurocentric system's elite to fully control its periphery.

The forms of such control could vary—from the legally recognized colonization of most of Africa, South Asia, and Oceania to the *de facto* division of formally still independent China into the zones of extraterritorial control by the leading European powers.

**The Geopolitical Realities of the First Half of the Twentieth Century**

The entering World War One by the US in 1917 marked the beginning of a new stage in the Eurocentric system's evolution. The Fourteen Points, proclaimed by President Woodrow Wilson, declared the democratization and the self-determination principles [14, 302-303] as a foundation of the new international political order. This generally noble initiative brought with it a number of challenges. The «democratization,» imposed on the war’s losers, was made a necessary requirement for signing a truсу, and then, peace treaties with each of them, openly questioning the state sovereignty principle[[5]](#footnote-5) and allowing the victorious powers to influence from the outside the internal political order of states, officially recognized as the defeated guilty parties (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey). Not surprizingly, in many cases, the political systems, imposed from the outside, and those leaders that accepted this arrangement were frequently perceived by the populations as the enemy's «Trojan horses.» In this sence, the fates of the Weimar Republic and its founders were quite indicative.

In the case of self-determination, the situation turned out to be even more complicated. This concept, in a sense also embodying the rejection of the state sovereignty principle, has turned out to be quite amorphous while its implementation was highly inconsistent. The organizers of referenda on the self-determination of the compact ethnic minority groups within multiethnic empires, and those who supervised the formation of new, presumable nation states and the redrawing of the existing interstate borders did everything possible to inflict maximum damage and humiliation on the war losers.

The result was not only the complete rejection of the Versailles and other post war treaties by significant shares of the populations and political elites on the losing side: the biggest problem turned out to be the formation in the newly formed (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Czechoslovakia) or the drastically expanded (Romania and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovens, formed on the basis of Serbia, Montenegro, and the former Austria-Hungarian and Turkish provinces) «victorious» states of the new significant minorities. To a large extent, those represented the members of the former «imperial» nations: Germans, Hungarians, Turks as well as Russians, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians who have also found themselves living outside their historical motherlands (even though Russia legally was not a losing party).

Meanwhile, many of the newly formed states have positioned themselves as representing the interests of the new, «state building» nations, limiting the rights of minorities or even refusing to recognize their very existence. The interwar Poland represents a characteristic example: the share of ethnic Poles in its population in 1921 was 69%, while Ukrainians and Byelorussians accounted for 18.5%, Jews, 8.1%, and ethnic Germans, 3% [5, 248, 264])(see Table 1). Such policies were lowering the legitimacy of the newly forming states in the eyes of significant shares of their populations, thus leading to their long-term destabilization.

**Table 1. The Ethnic Structure of the Population of Poland (The 1921 and 1931 Census Data).**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Nationality | 1921 Thousand | 1921  % | 1931 Thousand | 1931  % |
| Poles | 17509 | 69,0 | 21993 | 68,9 |
| Ukrainians | 3887 | 15,3 | 4442 | 13,9 |
| Jews | 2045 | 8,1 | 2733 | 8,6 |
| Byelorussians | 1073 | 4,2 | 990 | 3,1 |
| Germans | 769 | 3,0 | 741 | 2,3 |
| Others | 102 | 0,4 | 1018 | 3,2 |
| Total | 25385 | 100,0 | 31917 | 100,0 |

Source: 5, 248, 264.

Not surprizingly, most of the newly-formed states turned out to be weak internally and quickly lost their even formally democratic character, while the self-determination principle became the subject of political bargaining and populist demagogy—in particular, it was frequently and eagerly cited by both Adolf Hitler and the Japanese leaders as justifying their expansionist policies. This was especially graphically shown in the cases of the 1938 Munich Deal and the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria [see, for example, Adolf Hitler in 2, 79-84 и 676-692, and the discussion of the Nazi and the Japanese policies in this regard in 13 and 15].

No less pauinful was the fact that the declared principles were applied only in regard to Europe, while the Turkish and German colonies in Africa, Asia, and Oceania were divided among the UK and its dominions, France, Belgium, and Japan.

**The Cold War and the Formation of the Bipolar World**

The end of World War Two has led to a temporary total loss of sovereignty by the losing states along with a wide scale revision of state borders and massive migrations—both the voluntary and the forced ones. Meanwhile, the position of the colonial peoples has not changed much. Besides that, while the US has essentially acquired a monopolistic position, especially in the economic sphere, the world system mostly retained its Eurocentric character: during the Cold War (1947-91), not only both superpowers continued to represent primarily the European languages and cultures—their major zone of contact and potential conflict was still located in Europe.

Besides that, the very essence of the bloc system embodied the limits on the sattelite states' sovereignty: not only they were losing significant parts of control over their foreign and internal policies—those countries also had to imitate the political, economic, and military systems of the bloc leaders, declaring publicly the adherence to their ideologies. Meanwhule, already in the initial years of the Cold War, the colonial system started to erode. This erosion was expressed in the formation of a principally new political situation: emerging started the Third World, defined primarily in the negative terms: while extremely heterogeneous, its members had one thing in common—they did not belong to either the First (market democracies) or the Second (Communist states) World. The formation of this quite amorphous body led to significant changes in both the Cold War mechanisms and the system of international relations in general.

On the one hand, the Third World formation in a situation of the bipolar divide has given its member states some freedom of maneuver and the limited opportunities for political and economic bargaining with the two leading superpowers. On the other hand, the new situation has immediately turned the Cold War into quite a hot one, allowing the USSR and the USA to move their competition (to a degree) into the the Third World, sponsoring numerous military conflicts by proxies without incurring much of a risk of their escalation to a global war level. Thus the sovereign rights of many newly formed states were limited by the actions of superpowers that were pursuing their own selfish interests.

Simultaneously, the methods of economic control over the former colonies have also changed—as the Dependency theory adherents would have said, visible was a shift towards its indirect forms, through the Bretton-Woods system's mechanisms—the unequal exchange and the transfer of low-profit, labor-intensive, and dirty industries to the developing countries. The Development theory, that served as the ideological foundation for these policies, has used argumentation, in a way quite similar to Marxism—namely, that there existed only one, universal way of development—in this case, through the formation of the Capitalist economies on the basis of a blind imitation of the Western model.

Regardless of a number of success stories (first of all, the heavily subsidized by the West states and colonies, designated to serve as the appealing showcases for the Communist states (such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea) and the Third World countries (it would be useful to mention here that these were primarily the «Western» segments of the ideologically divided countries (West Germany had a similar role to play in Europe). The result of these policies was the further widening gap between the First and the Third World countries and the formation of economic, financial, and technological depencency of the latter.

Overall, regardless of these and some other successful examples, including the resource base nationalization by many developing countries and the consequent increase of prices of many types of mineral resources along with the formation of the Non-Alignment movement, OPEC and some other important international organizations in the 1950-1970s, the gap between the First and the Third World remained wide, and in many cases, has even grown.

**The Collase of the Bipolar System and its Consequences**

The 1991 fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War and the bloc system resulted in some very serious and quite unexpected changes in the structure and the functioning of the world economic and political systems.

First of all, the Second, Communist World has essentially collapsed, with its members joining the ranks of either the First or the Third Worlds, that evolved into the Global North and the Global South.

Second, within this new configuration, the Global South has turned out to be more vulnerable than it was during the Third World era: its members lost their ability to balance between the two major blocs and are facing now the monopolistic and quite monolythic Global North that is dictating the rules of the game.

Third, even though in most cases, the major powers are not interested anymore in sponsoring the conflicts in the Global South, they frequently do not strive to stop such conflicts that do not carry the threat of escalation or territorial expansion or are located in the regions that have no particular resource or strategic importance for them. The drastic contrast between the Western reaction to the simultaneous bloody ethnic and religious conflicts in the European Balkan states and Africa's Rwanda in the mid-1990s serves as a shocking illustration of this new post Cold War geopolitical reality.[[6]](#footnote-6)

As a result, forming are «zones of hopelesness»—lacking adequate resources and infrastructure, politically unstable, and thus getting neither the state nor the private external investment countries and regions. Such zones are becoming the breeding grounds for poverty, political extremism, military conflicts, and the organized crime activities (including piracy and various types of trafficking) as well as the source regions for mass refugee and emigration flows. Many of those are also located in the environmental risk zones—the fact that can further worsen the situation in a long-term perspective.

The deep changes also occurred in self-perception and the policies of the Global North. The collapse of the Soviet Union was perceived there not just as the West's political victory—it started to be considered as a confirmation of the First World's moral righteousness and the superiority of its economic and political model, viewed since then as the only right and possible one—and, following Francis Fukuyama's famous statement, talks about «the end of history» started yet again [4, 3]. Respectively, the acceptance of this model became the necessary precondition for the admittance of the Global South countries into the «civilized» club. Again, as it was already in 1492 and 1878, the former West has unilaterally taken upon itself the «civilizing» mission.

In the economic sphere, this trend was expressed through the proiferation of the Globalization concept—essentially, meanwhile, it was the Westernization—the formation of the world economic system on the basis of the Liberal International Economic Order, the Bretton Woods model (revised after 1971), and the Washington consensus. The IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO (formed on the basis of GATT) memberships have expanded drastically and became essentially a necessary requirment for a state's international legitimization. Meanwhile, the membership in these organizations required the introduction of radical market reforms and the opening of the (frequently weak) national economies to the international competition. Essentially, this meant the introduction of new limits on state sovereignty.

Even more radical changes were taking place in the political sphere. Starting with George H.W. Bush's New World Order doctrine, declared during the 1990-91 «Desert Storm» operation in Kuwait, every American administration was declaring the Western political model's universal applicability and claiming the right of the Global North to arbitrarily limit or completely reject the sovereign rights of the «faulty» states.

Under Bill Clinton, this trend was expressed in the declaration of the existence of the Universal Human Rights and the common human values (which happened to be taken, nevertheless, exclusively from the Western conceptual vocabulary) and the claim that the United States would consider Human Rights violations in other countries as a matter of its strategic interest «because our values demand it. Examples include responding to natural and manmade disasters; promoting human rights and seeking to halt gross violations of those rights; supporting democratization, adherence to the rule of law and civilian control of the military; assisting humanitarian demining; and promoting sustainable development and environmental protection” [8]. This claim was implying the right of the United States to arbitrarily limit or completely deny other countries' sovereign rights, as it was done during the military operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Somalia. The same approach would be used to impose the economic and other sanctions on states whose internal policies for various reasons did not correspond to the US wishes—in particular, Belarus, Venezuela, Serbia, Cuba, Iraq, Libya, Egypt, North Korea, Syria, Iran, Zimbabwe, and later, Russia, Uganda, and a number of other states.

Under George W. Bush, the United States, relying now on the Democratic Peace neoliberal concept, started to pursue the policies of preemptive strikes, the selective forceful removal of the authoriitarian regimes deemed to be out of favor, followed by a large-scale political engineering—the imposition on the defeated and occupied countries of regimes that were presumably friendly to the West, peaceful, democratic and pro-market oriented.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Meanwhile, the political experiments in Afghanistan and Iraq, and then, in Libya, Egypt, and a number of other countries demonstrated the dogmatic character of this approach and the low reliability of its final outcomes: the refusal to take into account the historical, religious, national, cultural, tribal, and other factors simultaneously with the destruction of the traditional political, and not infrequently, civilizational structures has led to some truly catastrophic consequences.

Of special importance was the policy of Color Revolutions, directed at the overthrow of the unwelcome regimes through the sponsorship of militant opposition groups under the formal neutrality and non-interference of the Western governments. The complete state collapse in Libya and Somalia; the rapid destruction of the state structures in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Ukraine; the crises in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen; the civil war in Syria, the deliberate actions by the President of Georgia in 2008 that were designed to provoke a global US-Russia conflict, illustrate the danger and the unpredictable character of such policies.

These events, along with uncontrollable massive refugee flow to Europe from the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, destabilized by Western actions, clearly show that the destruction of sovereign states by the external actors, however authoritarian and ineffective the rulers of the former are, particularly when those actors represent drastically different cultures, can have the most catastrophic consequences. The recent experience also shows that any attempts to evaluate the developments in other regions exclusively on the basis of the Western political and cultural criteria are deemed to fail.

**Donald Trump and the Prospects for Political Change**

The emergence of Donald Trump as a presidential contender in 2015 and his consequent victory in the 2016 US elections symbolizes the deepness of the systemic crises (both the internal and the external ones) the United States is facing.

In particular, in contrast to most members of the US political establishment and especially such dogmatic Cold War warriors as Hillary Clinton, John McCain, Lindsay Graham, Bob Poter, or Marco Rubio, Trump and his senior political advisor (until August 2017) Steve Bannon understood that the world was quickly changing and the US had to adjust its foreign policies to the new reality.

While President Trump has never given a clear outline of his strategic priorities, some of his statements indicate an ability (either his or his advisors’) to think strategically. The question remains–-does Trump have similar tactical skills in the foreign policy domain and will he be able to overcome the everincreasing resistance of the united “Old Guard.”

Clearly, the new President is a hardcore realist, putting power considerations way above the ideological or the moral ones. Trump realizes the scope of the structural changes occurring within the international system and aims at the radical revision of the US foreign policy concept. In particular, Trump sees China, not Russia, as the main US rival and a threat to the American strategic interests. At the same time, the declining Europe (and especially the weaker, less stable, and more currupt former Communist states of Eastern Europe and most of the former Soviet republics) is perceived as a liability requiring huge expenditures and strategic guarantees on the US part and not being able to offer anything valuable in exchange. The EU is also considered to be an economic competitor to the United States.[[8]](#footnote-8) This is especially important, because Europe is not viewed anymore as the ideological battlefield with Russia—respectively, the Europeans are being told to at least fulfill their legal obligations, contained in the NATO Charter, and to pay for their own defense.

Even more so, Trump, as both a political realist and a businessman, is much less than the conventional politicians and ideologues inclined to give large amounts of money or any poltical and military guarantees to the corrupt and unstable political regimes outside NATO.

Under these circumstances, Trump is willing to repeat the Nixon/Kissinger political experiment of the 1970s, when the US started to play the “Chinese card” against Russia, this time “playing” Russia against China. In addition, he considers the active intelligence interaction and information exchange between the US and Russia as the necessary precondition for any success in fighting the IS and the Islamic fundamentalism in general (in this sense, he views Obama’s policies towards both Russia and Israel as a total strategic failure).

These are the revolutionary changes that require some drastic revisions of the US foreign policy and security strategy and tactics as well as significant personnel changes—people with a Cold War mentality will never be willing or able to comprehend the new reality. In particular, Trump (in a sharp contrast to the expansionist neoliberal Hillary Clinton) is not interested in getting involved in new military adventures abroad and would prefer the US to look increasingly inwards.

Meanwhile, both Trump’s strategy and tactics bring with them a number of serious challenges. First, it seems clear that Trump, viewing China as the major threat to the US interests, intends to destroy or at least weaken significantly those global institutions (such as the WTO and the regional trade agreements, including NAFTA) that were formed or expanded during the last twenty-five years: in his view, these agreements and structures, designed to give advantage to the US, at present favor China and a number of other countries. He also seems to be willing to raise the tensions with that country in order to block its further growth through some kind of a new “containment” policy. This seems to be a very risky strategy that can turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy by provoking an angry Chinese reaction. In addition, it is not clear to what extent the globalization process can be reversed, stopped, or even slowed down and what the consequences of such attempts for the US and the world economies could be.

Second, Trump’s willingness to “contain” Iran also can lead to a sharp increase of tensions with that country and in that region in general—in a situation when both countries face a common threat in the Sunni fundamentalism and could cooperate in its containment. This policy also can further complicate the US relations with Russia.

Third, Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric and actions along with the promised attempts to renegotiate NAFTA and other agreements can lead to a serious worsening of the US relations with Latin America (first of all, Mexico), increase the anti-American sentiments in the Western hemisphere, and have considerable economic consequences—meanwhile, Latin America represents an important part of the very Pacific region that is becoming the center of the world power.

Forth, the anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric, including the recent attempts to either cancel or tighten DACA will also weaken the US positions on the world qualified labor and international education markets, in particular, by diverting the migrant flow from the Moslem and Hispanic states to other countries, further provoking the anti-American feelings, and creating new security threats, simultaneously leading to the proliferation of xenophobia in the US.

Finally, fifth, whatever Trump’s strategic plans are, a big unknown represent his operational codes, specifically, how will he act under the crisis conditions? The President intends to improve US relations with Russia and to avoid any further US involvement in the military operations abroad. Both of those initiatives are wise. Still, the question is—what would happen if a serious conflict of interests emerges, either national or personal ones, and it becomes an issue of pride (say, an assassination of US official abroad)? This is especially important, because Trump’s enemies in the US are ready to use any means available to discredit or hurt him in any way possible—even if their actions would simultaneously inflict damage on the national interests (as it happened in regard to the Israel and Russia-related anti-Trump provocations in the final days of Obama administration).[[9]](#footnote-9)

Trump’s reform proposals represent a real threat to the entrenched interests of very influential political groups, actively working to prevent the foreign policy changes from happening and engaged in a complex of activities aimed at discrediting Trump and intimidating his closest advisors and their families. Essentially, a very strange “alliance of convenience” has been formed that includes the leftist populist groups, the traditional liberal establishment, and the hard core right wing politicians in order to discredit Trump’s policies, turn the public opinion against him, and create a general feeling of instability in American society.

Essentially, this coalition includes most of the conventional elites, including the political establishment, the governmental bureaucracy, the “mainstream” media, the entertainment industry, and most of the academic community. The goals of these groups differ significantly: while the leftist opponents will oppose any policies offered by Trump in order to delegitimize and weaken him politically, the right-wing Republicans whose mentality was formed during the Cold War are trying to prevent the conceptual change of the geopolitical orientation of the US foreign policy, specifically, the shift from hostility to Russia to cooperation with it. Finally, the foreign policy and security bureaucracy is against any deep reforms and sharp turns of the foreign goals and methods: these people remember very well deep personnel cuts and structural reorganizations that followed in the footsteps of the triumphal celebrations of the end of the Cold War twentfive years ago

These groups will keep trying to discredit Trump’s policies, presenting them as illegal and unconstitutional, and to bloc the passage of his legislative initiatives through Congress – both to prevent the implementation of his policies and in order to create/find a reason to start the impeachment procedures, accusing him of violating the law and the Constitution. Ironically, these very different in their nature forces are willing now to use the classical “Leninist” methods—for the sake of getting rid of Trump, they are willing to provoke a general destabilization of the national political system and to infringe on the US national interests. This is a new and a very dangerous trend in American political life. It is quite possible that with time, their actions will become increasingly violent. Thus one can expect the further expansion of the anti Trump hysteria.

Ironically, the interest of those internal opposition groups in Trump’s discreditation and in provoking the general political destabilization fits very well with those of the US external enemies, first of all, the Islamic fundamentalist groups that can be expected to prepare the subversive terrorist acts inside the country and work hard to provoke the external conflicts—for example, to prevent the improvement of relations with Russia or to force Trump to use the US military abroad, in connection with the developments in such “hot spots” as North Korea, Iran, Syria, or Venezuela.

In an attempt to deal with this complicated political environment, Trump, in particular, promised to depoliticize the intelligence services, introducing both personnel and structural reforms, cutting down or completely eliminating a highly politicized Office of National Intelligence (all 16 US intelligence agencies report to its Director, who is a political appointee, and then he summarizes the intelligence information to report it to the President on a daily basis).

These steps were inspired by the unprecedented open participation in the anti-Trump campaign of the outgoing administration of Barak Obama in the later stages of his presidency, the active involvement in it right after January 20th of both the former President and the losing Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton. Both the degree of hatred and the aggressiveness of attacks against the new President and the open involvement in this campaign of the outgoing and later, former President as well as the losing Democratic candidate are essentially unprecedented in American politics.

Even more surprising were Obama’s and Clinton’s aggressive attempts to get the US intelligence and other special services involved into this campaign. They started with Hillary Clinton’s unsubstantiated claim that the intelligence had a proof (never presented credibly) of the Russian involvement in the US elections on Donald Trump’s side. Unfortunately, this dangerous and highly unethical practice already had precedents in the current US history – for example, George W. Bush’s administration has openly pressured the intelligence community to give false reports on the Iraqi nuclear program and Saddam Hussein’s alleged link to al Qaeda. Still, exercising the pressure on the intelligence services in order to discredit one’s political opponent inside the country (*i.e*. to pressure essentially the intelligence services for a personal political gain) and influence the national public opinion and thus change the internal policies of the incoming administration represents a principally new and pretty dangerous precedent in American politics.

Besides the internal political implications, this phenomenon has serious implications for the US foreign and security policy: first, the report on the “Russian hacking” has not offered a single reliable fact and was partially based on the claims already proven to be fabricated. Second and even worse, for his internal political goals, Obama has created a distorted picture of the world, exaggerating the role and importance of Russia and Putin personally, trying to harm the US relations with Israel, diminish the significance of China and the Islamic fundamentalist groupings, thus completely denying the validity of the ongoing strategic changes and creating serious threats to the US national security.

Also highly unusual is the fact that the former President has not left the national capital after his term has expired—this latter fact indicates that Obama is both eager to openly struggle against Trump’s policies and is positioning himself for a long a brutal struggle with Clintons for the control of the Democratic party bureaucratic machine and defining the future direction of the Party’s politics.

Trump also suggested cutting the central office staffs of a number of other agencies, including that of the Department of State, and expanding their field offices, and in general, stopping the political pressure on intelligence and security experts. He has also appointed an influential businessman with a huge international negotiations experience and three well known and respected generals (all known for their decisiveness and independence) to the key positions in the areas of foreign policy and national security, thus trying to lessen the influence in these spheres of the established political elites and special interests in an attempt to eliminate the regrettable Obama’s legacy in this area.

For now, Trump keeps winning over his opponents, because the same way as during the electoral campaign, the aggressive campaign against him keeps reinforcing his main message—that he is not a part of the established elites, and fights them for the sake of the “simple people.” In addition, the openly vicious and biased style of the anti Trump campaign frequently causes public reaction that is opposite to the one desired. Still, its long-term consequences are yet to be seen. Thus only time will tell if Trump manages to survive and to implement his plans, including those in the foreign policy domain.

**Lessons for the Future**

Whatever happens with American foreign policy in the foreseeble future, there are some lessons and conclusions—both the academic and the political ones—that one can derive from this historical overview.

First of all, it is necesary to stop substituting the notions—for too long, the Global North defined as Globalization the process that in reality was the Westernization: the imposition on the rest of the world of the Western economic, political, ideological, and cultural models and norms, considered to be the universal and thus compulsory for everybody. This, in particular, concerns the Universal Human Values concept—its formation exclusively on the basis of the Global North standards and cultural markers and the ongoing attempts to impose those on the other regions and cultures will inevitably fail, because they are going to be rejected by the representatives of other religious and cultural groups.

Second, it is important to recognize that even a bad government is still better than the state of anarchy and the absence of any government. The destruction of state institutions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, the attempts to destabilize minority-backed secular Bashar Asad's regime in Syria have led to the proliferation of armed conflicts and civil wars, the emergence of new extremist movements and failed states. Such actions can also have other unpredictable consequences—from the sharp oil price changes and finacial crises to the formation of massive refugee flows. Not surprizingly, many European governments, currently having to deal with the MENA refugee flow, are also not very optimistic in regard to the potential further destabilization of political situation in Ukraine and the formation of a new refugee flow oriented towards Europe.

Third, it seems clear by now that the world will not accept the unilateral Western dictate, and its resistance will have various forms, including those at the intergovernmental, state, and non-state levels—it would be enough to remenber the history of al Qaeda, Boko Haram, and the Islamic State formation. Thus the illusions of «the end of history» and the claims of the universality of the Western liberal model should be abandoned while the attempts to find a compromise with other cultures and, possibly, to form a joint coalition with them against the common threats should be made–-in particular, with the Asad regime in its fight against the Sunni fundamentalists and the Islamic State in Syria.

This is especially important, because it is quite possible that we are currently witnessing the formation of a principally new variety of totalitarian ideology and political system in the Middle East—this time, on the basis of a religious fundamentalism. Meanwhile, the Twentieth century history reminds us of the level of resource and power concentration the struggle agaist such phenomena requires. History also reminds us that the defeat of totalitarianism requires the formation of a widest international coalition and the finding of political compromises in regard to the secondary, peripheral issues.

And finally, fourth, this discussion takes us back to the very beginning of this conversation—the formation of the Eurocentric world system more than half a millennium ago. As we have mentioned already, the Europeans essentially established then their worldwide domination, simultaneously exploiting other regions and imposing on them their cultural, economic, and political models.

The famous Chinese proverb states: “God protect you from living in the time of changes.” It seems, meanwhile, that our close descendants and we are incredibly “lucky”—the Eurocentric system that has dominated and ruled the world for so long is starting to literally fall apart in front of our eyes. For two “continental” members of this system—both the US and Russia—this change is going to be painful, but they will be able to deal with it—their goal will be to “turn a head”—respectively, from the East to the West and from the West to the East. This will not be easy, especially because since now, their main partners and opponents will be the states-civilizations with the multimillenia-long histories and the non-European cultures, religions, and languages. This is going to be especially tough for the United States with its messianic ideology of the world hegemon and the principal refusal to accept the others’ points of view and cultures as the equal ones.

Another complicating for the US factor is that that country, existing for just about 240 years, is to deal now with some of the most ancient civilizations in the world. Meanwhile, the US political strategy is mostly framed by the two-year electoral cycles while its new counterparts usually define their strategies in terms of centuries. Hopefully, this is a manageable task.

At the same time, for the Europeans, the ongoing shift of the world power center to the Pacific region signifies a decisive and irrevercible loss of their positions in the world economic and political systems—the fact that their elites stubbornly refuse to recognize and accept. More than that: Europe continues, as it was happening in the Old Good Colonial days, to live beyond its means, essentially ignoring the decline in its share in the world economy, refusing to establish control over the social spending, and continuously trying to impose its political will and cultural norms on the others.

Tragically overestimating its political, economic, and military importance and consistently getting involved in the international conflicts, as it happenned in Libya, Syria, and recently, Ukraine, the Europeans are further worsening their future prospects.

Besides that, it seems that both the European and the American leaders are incapable of understanding that sanctions and other anti-Russian measures are *de facto* pushing that country into the alliance with China—and this is the trend that neither the West nor Russia should be interested in. The 2016 US electoral campaign and the unprecedented anti-Trump and anti-Russia hysteria that were initiated by Hillary Clinton and supported the majority of the US established political elites have created for Americans a virtual picture of the world that is corroded and completely separated from reality. These actions represent a real threat to the United States security.

Under these circumstances, the world’s leading political players need to search for a political compromise (presuming some degree of mutual accommodation) and the new conceptual comprehension of the evolving international system configuration and their countries’ quickly changing place in it.

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1. According to Samuel Huntington, “In the existing uni-multipolar world, the global power structure has four principal levels. At the top, of course, the United States is the only superpower with preeminence in every domain of power: economic, military, diplomatic, ideological, technological, and cultural. At the second level are major regional powers, who are the dominant actors in important areas of the world, but whose interests and capabilities do not extend as globally as those of the United States. These countries vary greatly in importance, activity, and degree of dominance. Examples include the German-French condominium in Europe, India in South Asia, and Brazil in Latin America. At a third level are secondary regional powers, whose influence is less than that of the major regional powers and whose interests often conflict with those of the major regional powers. Those include Britain in relation to the German-French combination, Pakistan in relation to India, and Argentina in relation to Brazil. Finally, at a fourth level are the remaining countries, some of which are quite important, but which exist in some sense apart from the power structure I have described.

   In this uni-multipolar world, the central relationship is that between the superpower and the major regional powers. Neither side is entirely happy with that relationship. The superpower would prefer a unipolar world and is continually tempted to act as if it were a unipolar world. The major powers would prefer a multipolar world and believe global politics is moving in that direction. A uni-multipolar world is stable only to the extent that these conflicting pulls can be balanced. In the longer term, they probably cannot be balanced, and if, as seems probable, the superpower cannot create a unipolar world, global politics will gradually evolve in the direction of a multipolar system (6)*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. # In Steve Bannon’s words, "the economic war with China is everything. And we have to be maniacally focused on that. If we continue to lose it, we're five years away, I think, ten years at the most, of hitting an inflection point from which we'll never be able to recover…One of us is going to be a hegemon in 25 or 30 years and it's gonna be them if we go down this path”(12).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In 1500, China’s share in the world GDP was 24.9%, while that of the whole Western Europe, 17.8% (the shares of Spain and Portugal were just 1.8% and 0.2%). Their shares in the world population were quite similar: respectively, 23.5%, 13.1%, 1.6%, and 0.2% (10, 378, 381). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The doctrine, in particular, stated that “The occasion has been judged proper for asserting, as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers…We…, therefore,…declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety” (11). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. It should be mentioned, however, that the first steps in this direction were made already at the start of the nineteenth century—first, by Napoleon who rejected the sovereign rights of other states, and then, by the powers that defeated him and created the Holy Alliance, guaranteeing the internal political regimes of its European member states. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ironically, Bill Clinton claimed at that time that “the true measure of our interests lies not in how small or distant these places are, or in whether we have trouble pronouncing their names. The question we must ask is, what are the consequences to our security of letting conflicts fester and spread. We cannot, indeed, we should not, do everything or be everywhere. But where our values and our interests are at stake, and where we can make a difference, we must be prepared to do so” (2). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This became known as the Bush Doctrine. Bush, in particular, stated: “To forestall or prevent… hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively in exercising our inherent right of self-defense” (11). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In a July 2016 interview, for example, Trump said of the European Union, "the reason that it got together was like a consortium so that it could compete with the United States" (7). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The last weeks of Obama’s presidency were marked by direct provocations aimed at inflicting permanent damage on the US relations with a number of countries. This includes orchestrating a UN Security Council vote on a resolution condemning Israel, the expelling of 35 Russian diplomats and their families on the Christmas Eve in 2016, and the introduction of sanctions against the leadership of the Russian security and intelligence services. All these steps were aimed at destroying any possibility of effective US cooperation with Russia in the security sphere (including blocking the exchange of intelligence information on the activities of IS and other Islamic fundamentalist groups and preventing the personal interaction of the US and Russian security officials–Obama expected that the US sanctions would provoke reciprocal moves on the Russian side, making their meetings physically impossible) and the weakening of the US-Israeli alliance. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)