The Future of World Order

Building a Community of Common Destiny

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Abstract: This article briefly examines the political and ideological aspects of Western countries' post-Cold War approach to the world order. The Western triumph in the Cold War is generally attributed to reasons that are largely erroneous. The ongoing crises in international relations reveal structural inconsistencies, which have been present in the United States' foreign strategy since the collapse of the Soviet Union and have contributed to the subsequent erosion of the global order. The article analyzes the new trends of globalization resulting from the unexpected victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. It concludes that Russia and China have now largely recognized Washington's failure to establish a unipolar world system and to legitimize it through various political and media mechanisms and techniques. It suggests that it is only through the solidary development that both China and Russia are currently championing with their recent grand integration initiatives that a more successful and sustainable multipolar world benefiting every nation on the planet can be built and maintained.

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Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 U.S. presidential election indicates that a severe crisis has overtaken the West and, particularly, the United States as the global leader. To a large extent, this is caused by the policies that Western countries have been carrying out over the past three decades. Latent tensions have been accumulating in American society for quite a long time, yet they were pitifully neglected by the government. This led to a massive wave of protest voting, delivering Mr. Trump to the very top of American politics in the end. This is a heavy blow to the Western political system, which has barely recovered from the shock of Brexit. Today, the world is on its way toward major changes. This article reviews the processes that are largely responsible for the transformation and sketches a viable path toward a more just and sustainable world order.

Has History Really Ended?

In the early 1990s, somewhat euphoric after their victory in the Cold War, Western political scientists announced the dawning of a new age — an age of perpetual peace. Their belief was based on a premise they saw as the obvious truth: values of the Western civilization triumphed over those of all others, with their universality ruling out the possibility of conflict by definition. But these Western political scientists forgot that conflict is an integral part of any development. They neglected the simple truth that any system, whether it is a living organism, a complex device, or a modern society, consists of a number of elements which, taken in their pure form, are incompatible with one another. They are arranged in a specific order, which supports the system and makes it viable through synergy. That being said, transformation is a key property of any system. Its components are in a state of perpetual conflict with each other. Contradictions are resolved by advancing to a new level of synthesis, propelling the system to evolve continually.

This model describes the sociopolitical development of mankind over millennia. Many attempts have been made to standardize humanity's

fundamental trends, to bring them all to a common denominator. Such attempts have invariably failed. Human societies — with all their complexities — could not be forced into the Procrustean bed of dogmas. As noted by Oswald Spengler, Western civilization, with its ambition for uniformity and a tendency for never-ending expansion, has too often suffered the consequences of its ideas about the world being misinterpreted.¹ Crusades, religious wars, and the Inquisition led only to bloodshed, social division, and cultural decline. However, the wave of enthusiasm that swept the world in the early 1990s over the approaching age of “perpetual peace” was not the first of its kind. Even before that, the West had been propagating the so-called “end of history.” Early liberals, led by John Locke, expressed the same idea as early as the 17th century. On the eve of World War I, almost all thinkers, irrespective of their political views, wrote about the global triumph of Western-liberal capitalism. Even Karl Marx, while predicting its impending decline, argued that the global spread of Western-style economy and the Western way of life is ultimately inevitable.²

In this sense, the ideas put forward by Francis Fukuyama and other proponents of “the end of history” are not original. Fukuyama wrote that, in the modern world, conflicts between ideologies have been replaced with a fight for more effective strategies of satisfying human needs in a global consumer society. In other words, the debate now revolves around finding the most effective way to achieve the same goals (predominantly economic in nature). The final triumph of liberalism remains far off; but so far, there has not been any alternative to it, despite the surge of Islamic fundamentalism and nationalism. The birth of a new potent ideology is extremely unlikely, and even if one does appear, there is little hope that it will offer anything other than a slightly different variation on liberalism, under which “all prior contradictions are resolved and all human needs are satisfied.”³ Still, Fukuyama admits that “the end of history” does not mean a complete absence of conflict—isolated manifestations of ideological rivalry will be localized to “the margins of civilization,” within the world’s periphery,

¹Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), pp. 98–137.

³Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Perennial, 2002).

which will remain a battleground for a very long time. Conflicts will also arise between different regions of the world or between forces representing “history” and “post-history.” Despite all that, the “roadmap” into the future was painted with confident strokes.

In different ways, these and similar optimistic or moderately optimistic ideas expressed by writers with a keen understanding of the global system were used to justify the fact that, in a globalizing world, the success of a state was no longer determined by the same factors as in the past. In other words, military power was no longer as important for survival and prosperity in the new, “smaller” world, where nations are increasingly interdependent; hard military power was giving way to other factors, including the economy, innovation, and other so-called “soft power.”

Post-Cold War
optimism for lasting
peace is fading amid
the turbulence and
uncertainties of
today's world.

Post-Cold War optimism seemed justified for almost a decade. The impression was that the world had become a considerably safer place, with two superpowers no longer teetering on the brink of a nuclear holocaust, not least because one of them no longer existed, and the elites of the newly independent states that had emerged out of its collapse were busy with more pressing matters. This launched a “perestroika” of sorts, but this time it was to transform the global politics. Each country had its own view on how the international system was to be reorganized, but everyone hoped that globalization would prove to be a positive and natural phenomenon, while the costs could be managed through collective efforts. Almost a quarter of a century later, it turned out that there was no guarantee of security even for successful states, that borders were not established once and for all, and that international norms were interpreted in such a way that it might seem as if countries were interpreting very different sets of rules.⁴ For years now, both politicians and members of the scientific community have been saying that the world has entered a period of turbulence and uncertainty.

⁴Geoffrey Best, *War and Law since 1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

Barriers to Power Rebalance in the Post-Cold War International System

Why, then, are people talking about “the return of geopolitics” and a “new Cold War”? Analysts tend to explain these developments by pointing at the rise of the new centers of power that call for the recognition of their new standing in the world, as opposed to the roles they were given after the collapse of the bipolar system. The other factor is the difficulties that the West faces in its attempt to preserve the rules of the game that were established during the Cold War or shortly after its end.

Notably, as American political scientist Walter Russell Mead explained,

*China, Iran, and Russia never bought into the geopolitical settlement that followed the Cold War, and they are making increasingly forceful attempts to overturn it. That process will not be peaceful, and whether or not the revisionists succeed, their efforts have already shaken the balance of power and changed the dynamics of international politics.*⁵

So, the blame is put either on these “revisionist powers” seeking to undo the consequences of their “defeat” in the Cold War, or on their respective governments, which lack the capabilities of transforming their countries into liberal democracies, but have a need to maintain the political and economic order established by their predecessors. Since this order is defective in nature and the regimes are weak, these illiberal powers start becoming a source of trouble, thus the West will try to discipline them by applying a wide range of soft and hard power tools like sanctions.

When reflecting on the causes of the internal fragility which characterizes the existing system of international relations, it should be noted that the Cold War was, in fact, a fairly stable attempt at institutionalizing and thus containing the inevitable global propensity toward conflict. The Soviet-American confrontation used to be the axis of the global system around which the vast majority of problems in the world revolved. Many

⁵Walter Russel Mead, “The Return of Geopolitics: The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (May/June 2014), pp. 81–87.

did not like this, but this situation was objectively conducive to resolving these issues, as it is easier to reach compromise in a dialogue between equal opponents. The Soviet Union and the West existed under different value models, but they were united by a common understanding of the true potential held by the opposing party, as well as the shared responsibility for global security. By the 1980s, the Cold War had transformed from an actual confrontation into an institutionalized form of international order. The two blocs competed with one another, thus maintaining the status quo. The Yalta system remained stable as it relied on its two “legs.”

The almost instantaneous collapse of the Soviet Union came as a shock to the Western establishment. The vast majority of American analysts did not expect, in the medium term, any crisis development capable of putting an end to the Soviet Union’s very existence. In 1983, Stephen F. Cohen, a professor at Princeton University, declared that the Soviet system was stable and durable. This notion was widely accepted at the level of U.S. intelligence. After the collapse of the Soviet Union,

Though marked by confrontation and crises, the Cold War was a stable mechanism in containing major global conflicts.

CIA officials acknowledged that they had seriously underestimated “the growing, systemic economic problem” within the Soviet Union.⁶ The few analysts who did predict the collapse of the Soviet bloc were generally seen as alarmists. Released in 1965, the work by the French researcher Michel Garder entitled *The Death Struggle of the Regime in Soviet Russia* was regarded in academia as requiring to be taken with a pinch of salt.⁷ Even the staunchest opponents of the Soviet regime leaned toward the idea that its existence was guaranteed for at least a few generations. For example, Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote in 1976 that “...political changes [in the U.S.S.R.] are produced very slowly through social change. And that one must wait

⁶Milo Jones and Philippe Silberzahn, *Constructing Cassandra: Reframing Intelligence Failure at the CIA, 1947–2001* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2013).

⁷Michel Garder, *L’Agonie du régime en Russie soviétique* [*The Death Struggle of the Regime in Soviet Russia*] (Paris: Table Ronde, 1965).

for at least several generations before social change begins to be significantly reflected in the political sphere.”⁸ If the active lifespan of one generation, which is 25 years, is taken as a unit of measurement, it is not difficult to calculate that Brzezinski gave the Soviet Union at least 50 more years.

The events of 1985–1991 were first regarded by Americans with caution, then with optimism and, finally, with glee. The enemy of the United States in the Cold War collapsed so quickly and so suddenly that it seemed almost inexplicable. The Western establishment, which until recently had been so prudent and rational in its assessment of the global balance of power, suddenly decided that everything could be explained by some predetermined circumstances that had favored the United States and its allies from the very start. This led to the establishment of a value-based explanatory model which has dominated the minds of Americans and Europeans up to this day. The outline of this model could be seen in the “victory speech” made by President George H. W. Bush on December 25, 1991: “That confrontation is now over.....This is a victory for democracy and freedom. It’s a victory for the moral force of our values. Every American can take pride in this victory.”⁹ This was, however, a dangerous distortion of reality. The Soviet Union seemed to have magically vanished, defeated by the “correct values” of the West — but this was far from the case. This simplified explanation of the largest political metamorphosis in modern history made Western politicians and intellectuals adopt a wrong point of reference, to which all the failures that followed were closely linked.

The system that had existed during the Cold War did not disappear into thin air with the collapse of the Soviet Union. No efforts were taken to restructure it, to give it a new and stronger footing. The notion of “the end of history” promoted a sense of confidence that the Western set of values is

⁸Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Soviet Politics: From the Future to the Past,” in Paul Cocks, Robert V. Daniels, and Nancy Whittier Heer, eds., *The Dynamics of Soviet Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 351.

⁹“End of the Soviet Union; Text of Bush’s Address to Nation on Gorbachev’s Resignation,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/26/world/end-soviet-union-text-bush-s-address-nation-gorbachev-s-resignation.html>.

universal, and therefore valid. In the years of Perestroika, Soviet intelligentsia used to mock the slogan used by the Communist Party Central Committee: "The teaching of Lenin is all-powerful because it is true." Meanwhile, the prevailing ideology in the West was based on the very same premise. In reality, an attempt was made to preserve the old system of international relations, centering on superpowers and military domination. Only this time, instead of two superpowers, there was supposed to be a single one, resting upon the foundation of a "correct" set of values. In other words, the old system survived, but was left in an extremely unbalanced state. Instead of two legs, the whole structure now rested on just one.

Effects of this change were quick and consequential, despite the relatively strong momentum retained by the United States after its victory in the Cold War. The first difficulties came not from outside, but were rather domestic in nature. The Cold War used to benefit powerful industrial entities working for the defense, primarily in the United States. Overseas, their interests were largely expressed by the military. General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1989–1993), was concerned that the perceived reduction in the level of external threats, constant demands to cut military spending due to a growing federal deficit, and overall unfavorable economic conditions could objectively result in significant reductions of military expenditure, as well as a number of other consequences, which the military — at some point — would no longer be able to prevent. Powell looked for an opportunity to abandon the principle of strategic planning based on analyzing the existing and potential threats to the national security of the United States, and to replace it with a new approach, under which the United States would maintain its supremacy and would be able to secure its long-term national interests as well as those of its allies' in case of any significant developments either globally, or in the regions that are of special interest to the United States.¹⁰ Under his new doctrine, Powell introduced the concept of "base force" to denote the minimum level of military power, without which the United States would

¹⁰Alexandra Homolar, "How to Last Alone at the Top: US Strategic Planning for the Unipolar Era," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 34. No. 2 (2011), p. 194.

lose its superpower status, as well as its capacity to observe and enforce its global commitments.¹¹

The U.S. endeavor to maintain its military supremacy has become a major barrier to power rebalance in the post-Cold War era.

This new vision of the role of the United States in the world was closely tied to the interests of the American military-industrial complex. The Cold War was serviced by an entire infrastructure, which risked becoming irrelevant as the global confrontation came to an end. As a result, all sorts of “makeshift” theories began to emerge, with the goal of finding a new “domain” for the military. In the 1990s, the U.S. government initiated a process to

develop new doctrinal documents that emphasized the need to maintain America’s military supremacy, enunciated the principle of active participation in shaping the global strategic environment, and also spoke about preventing the emergence of a rival state in the future.¹² In addition, its first post-Cold War public document on national security, the Regional Defense Strategy, stressed the need to ensure the capability of the U.S. armed forces to be simultaneously involved in more than one conflict on the scale of Operation Desert Storm.¹³

This implied not only preserving the military-industrial complex at the Cold War capacity, but also building up new military potential. The West was unable to reorient its policies toward a peaceful global involvement. The system of international relations was stuck in a limbo, and maintaining this post-1991 fixed state demanded constant stimulation. One way to escape this was to recognize post-Soviet Russia as a full-fledged actor of international politics. This would have helped to restore balance to the skewed global system. The very logic of the foreign policy demanded the same thing. Everyone vividly remembered the disastrous consequences of

¹¹Linda Robinson *et al.*, *Improving Strategic Competence. Lessons from 13 Years of War* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2014), p. 96.

¹²Homolar, “How to Last Alone at the Top: US Strategic Planning for the Unipolar Era,” pp. 201–202.

¹³Dick Cheney, “Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy,” January 1993, http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/pdf/naarpr_Defense.pdf.

the *Treaty of Versailles*. The attempt by the victorious powers to rule the world to the detriment of those who were considered outsiders — Germany and Russia — led to a catastrophe. In the 1990s, the West found it expedient to invent an ideological cover-up that would make it possible to use rhetorics in order to avoid addressing the issue itself.

One cannot say that this was a predetermined outcome. In the 1990s, the Clinton administration tried to pivot the country's overall trajectory. One of his priorities was to reduce defense spending by downsizing the armed forces and restructuring the military. It should be noted that this campaign enjoyed popular support. However, by this time, there had already been consensus regarding the objectives of strategic planning, including the "two-conflict standard," and as a result, the Clinton administration faced significant obstacles when trying to implement its election promises. During Clinton's second presidency, the United States' defense spending returned to the Cold War average.

"Controlled Chaos" and the Limitation of Neoliberalism

In the new context, Russia remained a "secondary" power. A new pattern of behavior has formed in the West with respect to Russia: Russia was treated as a vanquished power, but without using the word "defeat." It looked like an outstretched hand, like an offer of friendship. But in reality, it had nothing to do with friendship. An important metamorphosis has taken place in international relations, the essence of which was well outlined by Henry Kissinger, who stated that the viability of any international order depends on how effectively it maintains balance between legitimacy and power. Both are subject to evolution and change. However, when this balance is disturbed, Kissinger says, the limiting mechanisms fail, which gives room to unbounded ambitions and unrestrained actions by some of the global actors; a reign of chaos begins, which lasts until a new order is established.¹⁴

In other words, the system had lost equilibrium, and stability could not be restored, leading to problems in the early 2000s. In addition to foreign policy debacles, such as those in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, domestic

¹⁴Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History* (London: Allen Lane, 2014).

problems began to shake the United States — all of this against the backdrop of the world economy plunging into a crisis. The American leadership urgently needed to find a new framework of global domination, to invent some kind of a substitute international system that would allow the United States to retain its standing. The solution found was in the form of a mechanism that was intended to institutionalize the “clash of civilizations” policy. There is nothing new about this approach; it is a return to the good old “divide and conquer” strategy. Contradictions between states and nations are artificially inflated, followed by the involvement of the “world’s policeman,” playing the role of *tertius gaudens*, or the so-called “rejoicing third.” This leads to a situation of controlled chaos, which creates the illusion that the world would plunge into the abyss, were it not for the administrative role of a single core power. In this way, Washington manages to kill several birds with one stone: they create a basis for maintaining the U.S. global hegemony, form the corresponding narrative, and solve the problems of financial-industrial groups.

The U.S.’ global strategy underlining “clash of civilizations” has, to a large extent, led the world into “controlled chaos.”

A good example of such policy is the current situation in the Middle East. The West decided to redirect the politically unstable region into the “right” direction by staging a number of “controlled explosions.” Western strategists believed that by setting these explosions off in the countries with rising tensions, they would extinguish these brewing conflicts, thus preventing them from spilling over onto global politics. The conviction that events in any part of the world

can be managed from a single office in Washington was a fatal mistake on the part of Washington. The region did explode as planned, but Western strategists were unable to contain the resulting shockwave. Today, there are voices within the American academia which say that the United States is responsible for the “controlled chaos” created in the Middle East, if not in the world at large.¹⁵

¹⁵John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, “The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (July/August 2016), pp. 70–84.

The Middle East is not the only example of the enormous costs of the proposed model of international relations. Washington's transformation into a single center of global power did not bring security or stability, but resulted in chaos and the disintegration of social and political constructs which, as the outcome of the U.S. elections seems to show, also had an effect on the minds of the American people. The institutions of global governance, formed within the framework of the Western-centric model, could not effectively cope with the tasks they were given. From the political standpoint, this problem manifested itself as an aggressive and forceful expansion of the neoliberal model, which disregards history and is disconnected from the specifics in the development of each particular state, region or civilization.

All these phenomena led to a potential rise of conflict in modern international relations. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ideology of confrontation between socialism and capitalism was refashioned into the need to defend against "terrorism" and "aggressive" global behavior. As for economy, this ideology transformed into a system based on the concept of limitless potential of the U.S. economy and its unconditional right to dominate the global market. The usefulness of all these notions has long been exhausted. However, it was these basic concepts that destabilized the overall global situation and, as a consequence, made political systems unstable and fragile, leading Joseph Stiglitz to announce the end of neoliberalism. Now that Donald Trump has won the U.S. presidential election, there is real factual evidence in support of these theoretical claims. By voting for someone from outside the political system, the American people expressed their distrust of the American establishment, its values and ideology, and demanded change.

Seeking a New Equilibrium in Russia-U.S.-China Relations

Defending its vital interests, Russia was forced to challenge the existing system of international relations, which was already fine-tuned to suit the needs of the West, represented by the United States. Since Russia has embarked on the road of defending its national interests in the face of a turbulent world, it will not retreat or deviate from this path.

The road Russia has taken is the only way to peacefully overcome the ongoing crisis of the global political system. The world can be a diverse place, consisting of multiple centers of growth, multiple ways of life; it can

also be a place where borders are transcended, where even countries that share no physical borders can still enjoy a high degree of cooperation. The new world will break the vicious circle of political crisis leading into an economic one, and back again. The flat, two-dimensional “economy and politics” model is insufficient today, no matter how its parts are rearranged. It should be transformed into a multidimensional model, which, in addition to economy and politics, also includes the human factor in its broadest sense. This is the only way to move closer to building a truly stable world order. From a geopolitical perspective, one can assume that, taking into account the inevitable processes of global integration and convergence, the impossibility of creating a sustainable unipolar system will become evident. The existing model will inevitably be replaced with a new one, the outlines of which are already discernible in the emerging model of neo-liberal globalization.

From this point of view, it is necessary to consider the future role of China in globalization and to stress the need for reaching a new consensus and equilibrium in the Russia-U.S.-China “triangular relationship.” Political decision-makers must come to realize that these three major countries, whose roles in maintaining the global stability are impossible to overestimate, are so interdependent, yet at the same time so different. It is only through win-win cooperation based on mutual respect that the international community may create a multipolar global model capable of serving

as a reliable basis for the sustainable development of all humanity. Given that the current “competitive development” paradigm makes it nearly impossible to reach such a consensus, there is a crucial need for a new ideology of “solidarity” and for a roadmap toward its realization.

In this context, one should underline the grand Chinese “Belt and Road Initiative” and its compatibility with integration and development projects that Russia has re-

cently proposed and promoted. These include, for instance, the Eurasian Economic Union and the “Razvitie” Trans-Eurasian Belt, whose principles perfectly echo those mentioned in the opening chapter of the document “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and

**New integration
initiatives proposed
by Russia and China
will greatly enhance
a stable, multipolar
world order.**

21st-Century Maritime Silk Road.”¹⁶ Both the Russian and Chinese projects propose an alternative globalization model based on holding broad and inclusive consultations, welcoming joint contributions, and offering shared benefits. Thus, the ideals advocated by the “Belt and Road Initiative” include respect for cultural and political differences, while its global mission is binding different countries together by creating comprehensive belts of development, on which could be built a harmonious global community of shared destiny. The philosophy, methodology, and general outlines of the “Razvitie” Trans-Eurasian Belt developed in Russia dovetail perfectly with the spirit of this Chinese initiative. It proposes establishing belts of integral infrastructure development across vast territories of Siberia and the Far East. This would lead to the emergence of a new socio-cultural lifestyle and improve working and living conditions in those regions, eventually creating new opportunities for the personal development of the people in those regions and beyond. The close collaboration with neighboring nations fully aligns with the principles outlined in the “Belt and Road Initiative.”

It is clear that reconsidering the course of globalization in the way that both China and Russia intend would require a complete overhaul of the system of international and intra-system relations. It is also obvious that the key elements of this transformation would include adopting a new methodology for inter-civilizational dialogue and abandoning the idea that a single set of standards and values can be imposed on all humankind. Although it is almost impossible to overestimate the role of Chinese-Russian collaboration in the creation and implementation of this new development model that is destined to reshape the evolution of globalization, U.S. policies and actions are also vital to its eventual success. There are reasons to be optimistic in this regard, because Mr. Trump’s presidency indicates that the

¹⁶It is stated in the document that “The initiative to jointly build the Belt and Road, embracing the trend towards a multipolar world, economic globalization, cultural diversity and greater IT application, is designed to uphold the global free trade regime and the open world economy in the spirit of open regional cooperation. Reflecting the common ideals and pursuit of human societies, it is a positive endeavor to seek new models of international cooperation and global governance, and will inject new positive energy into world peace and development.” See Xinhua News, “Full Text: Vision and actions on jointly building Belt and Road,” March 28, 2015, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-03/28/c_134105858.htm.

American people back the same humanistic approach to globalization that both China and Russia advocate. It means that the call for building a multipolar world is not just an act of revisionism by the two countries, but rather a manifestation of zeitgeist. It is merely a coincidence that Russia and China realized it first, while the Americans choose to join them soon after.