

## Political Aspects of Formation of Polycentric World in Conditions of «Hybrid Wars»

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### Abstract

The article researches the political aspects of the formation of a polycentric world today. The idea of a new polycentric system of international political discourse of Russia, the USA and the European Union is examined. The intensification of the global geopolitical, geo-economic and informational competition between international political actors is analyzed. The author comes to the conclusion that competition policy of the key actors of world politics, which is realized in the strategies of «hybrid wars» and counter-strategies, becomes a long-term factor in world political dynamics which can have a significant impact on the transformation of world order, reinforcing its polycentricism.

**Key words:** polycentric world, «hybrid war» strategy, discourse.

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**T**he formation of a polycentric world occurs on the background of the unfolding debate about the specific execution of the future world order. A growing number of researchers in Russia and abroad discuss the trend of hegemony erosion as a way of organizing international relations. Some researchers consider the extinction of hegemony mainly as a result of the development and interaction of two processes — the reduction of the relative power of the USA and the increase of developing countries in economic and political

authority [4]. others highlight the objective impossibility of «sole» domination in the conditions of aggravation of global problems and the arising of qualitatively new challenges [10].

In the article, it proves necessary to consider the political problems of the formation of a new polycentricity in the context of current world political trends, as well as to analyze any notions regarding the formation of a polycentric world at the level of international political discourses of the key international political actors. Carrying out this kind of

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research will bring to a better understanding of the conditions under which a new polycentricity is being formed and will allow to identify its specific features.

The formation of a polycentric system at the present stage is realized in terms of qualitative changes of the global geopolitical and of the geo-economic situation. The multifold influence of globalization and regionalization promotes the formation of integration and quasi-integration systems, characterized by a specific institutional and diplomatic design, presented by the new economic international organizations and agreements (the Eurasian Economic Union, the Trans-Pacific partnership, «Economic zone of the Silk Road»), as well as informal intergovernmental organizations (BRICS, Friends of Syria Group).

A number of Russian researchers, while describing the specifics of establishing world polycentricity, note, that nowadays the centers of power are far from being equal. Asymmetry and the multidimensionality of the new polycentricity are caused by the fact that, firstly, along with leading centers of influence, new claimants to leadership, as well as minor, and marginal centers of power appear [5]. Secondly, they have different social structures, which are still not well established in many aspects [1]. Thirdly, in the modern world the range of tools by which centers of power are able to influence each other are expanding dramatically. The significant role in the intensification of this process is played by the development of science and technology.

Illustrating the mentioned above thesis, the American researcher A. Acharya compares the modern world with a multiplex cinema, where different movies with different plots and actors are screened in several rooms at the same time [20]. In the framework of this process the number of influential international political actors, characterized by the asymmetry of possibilities, increases. In these conditions, there are two main components of international relations and world politics: cooperation and competition prove themselves as more diverse and

multidimensional and involve military, economic, scientific, technological and humanitarian cooperation areas.

A significant trend affecting the dynamics of formation of a polycentric world is a considerable political delimitation between Russia and the USA as well as their allies in NATO and the European Union. The most vivid form of this delimitation appeared after the political overturn in Ukraine in winter of 2014. The new National Security Strategy of the US, approved in February 2015, is indicative in this case [28]. Russian researcher Rogov S. notes that Russia is mentioned 15 times in the Strategy, which is more than any other country. In the document the phrase «Russian aggression» is used 9 times, the need «to restrain Russia» is mentioned more than three times. The possibility of American-Russian cooperation is mentioned only once, which, however, will be possible only if Russia changes its political course [12]. However, it is necessary to mention, that another significant on a global scale line of delimitation, which today is more latent in nature, but in the long term could be developed more explicitly, refers to the relations between the USA and China [30].

It is important to point out that the two powers, which most actively and consistently support the formation of a polycentric world, are Russia and China. The challenge of promoting the formation of a polycentric world at the international political level was first formulated in the Declaration on a multipolar world and the formation of a new international order, signed by Russia and China on April 23, 1997 [15]. Subsequently, the commitment of the two countries to the formation of a multipolar world and new international order was confirmed in the Joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, signed on July 1, 2005 [17]. A set on active work in favor of building up of a democratic polycentric system of international relations is contained in the Strategy for development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization until 2025, which was approved in 2015 [18]

### Polycentricity in international political discourse

Let us examine the idea of new polycentricity at the level of international political discourses of Russia, the USA and the European Union. The choice of these international actors is determined by the fact that Russia on the one hand, and the United States and its Western allies, joined NATO and the EU on the other hand, are currently at the forefront of the political debate about the present and future world order.

Russia considers the formation of a polycentric world as a movement towards democratization of international political decisions at a global level. The establishment of a democratic world order is associated with more equitable access for developing and responsible states to the advantages of globalization and the development of mechanisms that can protect members of the international community from its negative effects [3].

The foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation 2000 claims that «Russia will accomplish the creation of a multipolar system of international relations that really reflects the diversity of the modern world and the diversity of its interests» [8]. In the foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation 2008, the «emerging multi-polarity» is regarded as one of the «fundamental tendencies of contemporary development» [9]. In the foreign policy concept 2013, as well as in the national security strategy 2015 it is shown that polycentric world is in its establishing stage. It follows from the documents that in the process of formation of a new polycentric model of the world there is an intensification of the contradictions associated with the irregularity of global development, widening the gap between the welfare levels of the countries, struggle for resources, access to markets and control over traffic arteries. The analysis of Russian strategic documents shows that the current stage of world development is understood as a transition period [6]. When previously unknown conflicts and risks encounter, but at the same time the new basis for co-

operation of the centers of power is formed [16]. In addition, in the official documents, Russia is gradually evading from the term «multipolarity», replacing it with the concept of «polycentricity». In the fundamental monograph «Russia in a polycentric world», published under the editorship of A. Dynkin and N. Ivanov, it is stated that the term «multipolarity» is incorrect, since polarity itself involves not only the opposition of the poles, but also their binary opposition [14].

For better understanding what constitutes the formation of a polycentric world from the Russian point of view, it is necessary to understand what it replaces. It is important, in particular, to note that authoritative Russian researcher on international affairs E. Primakov admitted that the purpose of the artificial construction of a unipolar world order was the basis of a number of ideological constructions, political and military actions; however, he rejected the existence of unipolar world as a historical reality [11]. Another prominent researcher A. Bogaturov in order to characterize the world order of the 1990s introduced the scientific term «one and a half polarity» [2]. In this case, the military-strategic parity between the USA and Russia despite of fundamental mismatch of possibilities on other issues of the total potential was emphasized. In his speech at the plenary session of the International discussion club «Valdai» in 2015, Vladimir Putin proclaimed that the modern world should be considered as ambipolar as the power is extremely scattered. This thesis suggests a reference to the concept of R. Haas, according to which the main feature of the twenty-first century will be ambipolarity — a world political situation when dozens of actors render different, but significant impact on the affairs in the world. The examples above suggest that within Russian international political discourse the problem of deconstruction of an artificial hard opposition of unipolarity and multipolarity as alternatives to global development

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is solved. It seems that in the speech of President Vladimir Putin the discussion about the form of the polarity of the contemporary and the future world is closed. We believe that the formation of a new polycentricity, which is referred to in both official Russian strategy documents and international documents of key for Russia international organizations, may be associated with the ambipolar world situation.

Russian researchers examining the perspectives of a polycentric world formation dynamics, emphasize that the scenario of confrontation between the alliances of the so-called «authoritarian» and «democratic» power centers, the probability of which is described by some foreign researchers [26]. objectively cannot be the basis of a new system of confrontation, similar to the ideological confrontation which took place during the Cold War. The growing inter-civilizational contradictions taking the form of intercultural, interreligious and interethnic conflicts, including military ones, could undermine the stability of particular power centers, however there is a small probability of it becoming the basis for a full-scale global confrontation, as the internal structures of civilizational identities are too complex and contradictory [7]. Russian researchers associate the confrontation rise in world politics not with the «rise» of new centers of power, but with an aggressive unwillingness of the US and its allies to accept the process as an objective and inevitable one.

The growth of global turbulence allows Russian experts to claim that the possibility of a military conflict between the great powers today ceases to be hypothetical and becomes real. However, the next Russian thesis is that the growth of confrontation creates objective demand to produce effective international mechanisms in order to resolve potential crises. It is assumed that a narrow corridor of cooperation will gradually expand. There are authoritative studies, which state that in the years to come Russia, the USA, the EU and China will have to take joint efforts aiming the stabilization and peace-

ful resolution of crises and conflicts in the global zone of instability stretching from the «greater Middle East» to Pakistan. Other scenarios are positioned from the side of negative consequences for the United States and its Western allies. The first negative scenario involves the formation of a systemic confrontation between China, Russia and their allies on the one side, and the United States, as well as their European and Asian allies, on the other side. In this case, the United States will have to be extremely overstrained. The second scenario involves the further partial restraining and isolation of Russia, as well as the strengthening of confrontation between Russia and the USA. In terms of this scenario, the extension of the influence of a third party will take place: in particular, China, India and other regional powers who will benefit from this confrontation and strengthen their position in Eurasia and in the world to the detriment of the United States [21].

For American international political discourse, the use of the concept of «polycentric world», as well as the term «multipolar world» is not typical. It is significant that these concepts do not come up either in American national security strategy 2015, or in the Epistle of B. Obama to the U. S. Congress 2016 [32]. According to the US concept, the emerging world is defined as the world of changes, associated with the strengthening of «rising powers» that threaten the USA and its allies. New world, from the American point of view, primarily correspond to the world of turbulence and conflicts. Unpredictability and threatening capacity of the emerging new world is constantly emphasized in the reports of the leading «think tanks» of the United States [22]. In general, the USA is focused not on the emerging polycentric world, but on its special role as a world leader in new conditions.

Recently, European researchers have begun to consider the European Union as a center of global influence. They noted that the centers of power of the future world will not be represented by separate states, but

by the interstate associations; noting that the European Union is the most successful example of regionalism. Today, when an aggravation of international tension takes place, European analysts confess that the EU is not well prepared to deal effectively with the turbulence. This, in particular, may be shown by the inability of the European Union to solve internal socio-economic problems and settle the conflicts on its borders [29]. This situation is objectively constraining the freedom of the EU moves.

European experts in the predictive report of the inter-institutional group of the European Union European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS), «Global Trends to 2030: Can the EU meet the challenges ahead?» named the USA, the EU and China the «big three» of the future leading economies of the world [24]. According to the authors of the report, the prospects for the future of

the EU are associated with the positive conclusion of the American-European negotiations on forming a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with further joining of China. At the level of practical politics and political discourse the European Union, being an ally of the USA, also demonstrates the desire to develop a long-term relationship with China. In May 2015, during the strategic dialogue between China and the EU, held in Beijing, the EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy F. Mogherini stated that the parties of the negotiations are «true strategic partners». Because of the 17th EU-China summit, held in June 2015, a joint statement, according to which the parties have supported the cooperation of the Chinese project «Economic belt of the Silk Road» and the European Fund for strategic investments, was accepted.

### Polycentric world and the «hybrid wars»

Many leading Russian and foreign political analysts comprehend modern world political space as the space of global geopolitical, geo-economic, and informational competition between leading international political actors getting a sharper form. The most confrontational form of the demonstration of this competition today is the so-called «hybrid war».

In contemporary international political science, the concept of «hybrid war» is very disputable. Some researchers consider that, in the framework of the given concept a qualitatively new phenomenon in world politics has been found. Others suggest that hybrid nature has more or less characterized wars throughout the history of international political conflicts.

According to the research of American military theorists, «hybrid war» is a modern version of the war as an armed warfare. The combined nature of «hybrid wars» is caused by the fact that classical military violence is combined with irregular forms of confrontation: terrorist activities, cyber attacks, eco-

nomical and diplomatic sanctions, information sabotage and other destructive components. The ability to withstand in contemporary conflicts in physical, informational, cybernetic, cultural, cognitive spaces has also contributed to the emergence of the term, adequately reflecting the spatial multidimensionality of a modern war.

A number of objective factors contribute to hybridization of a modern war, including the international legal prohibition of aggressive war, the possession of nuclear weapons by the great powers, the erosion of state sovereignty, the expansion of the illegal market of weapons, growing number of terrorist extremist organizations, as well as the crisis of the traditional model of world leadership and its characteristic forms of world order.

As a rule, «hybrid wars» are led by a specific symbiotic entity. Along with non-state actors, it involves the states, acting either directly (through some pressure), or as open or secret contributors [23]. Non-state actors and conductors of «hybrid wars» may involve the media, terrorist organizations, armed

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extremist groups, radical political opposition, and rebellious paramilitary structures. In a «hybrid war» financial-economic organizations involved in the policy of economic sanctions, special services, oligarchic groups, nationalist and pseudo-religious structures may be used. The formation of the complex configuration of actors and participants of a «hybrid war» allows us to consider this phenomenon as an indirect and undeclared war without an explicit subject (a sole control center). Conducting a «hybrid war» allows the states to avoid responsibility, because this form of confrontation takes place beyond existing norms and rules developed by states and for the states. Combining these components makes it possible to effectively undermine the stability within a state, to resist the attempts of the state to pursue an independent foreign policy. In some cases, a «hybrid war» may provoke armed conflicts within the states, in their border zones, or to create preconditions for their explosion in the future.

Nowadays, the geopolitical and geo-economic importance of key regions of the world such as Eurasia and North Africa, contributes much to their transformation into the space where world political confrontation reaches the scale of a «hybrid war». In these conditions in modern world politics a counter-strategy is implemented, which not only opposes the wars of a new type, but also promotes a constructive form of joint development [19].

American politicians and military men blame Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, radical Islamic organizations operating in the middle East and Africa («Taliban», «al-Qaeda», «Islamic state»), as well as transnational criminal organizations fueled by migrants from less-developed regions, particularly from Central America, for waging a «hybrid war» [34]. The USA find the demonstrations of a «hybrid war» in the strategy of Iran in its support of the military actions of Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria. The policy of the PRC to promote its interest in the South China Sea is also positioned as a «hybrid war», in

which long-standing territorial disputes with a number of border states of South-East Asia are actualized. Russia is accused of conducting a «hybrid war» in Ukraine, experiencing a political crisis, and in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, depending on Russian energy resources. Thus, the concept of «hybrid wars» allows the USA to characterize certain disadvantageous actions of the strengthening states as aggression and to define these actions, including official political statements, as a new form of war.

American military theorists formulate the idea of the necessity of a global strategy of restraining the actors, conducting «hybrid wars». A response to the wars of a new kind must be the expanding of cooperation of military and civilian agencies and institutions forming the national power of the USA. NATO, dynamically developing its internal networks, is positioned as a major resource of counteraction to «hybrid wars». It is important to note that the efforts of the North Atlantic Alliance possessing the «hard power» are not sufficient to oppose «hybrid threats». Cooperation with the European Union owing the «soft power» should help NATO to compensate the lack of non-military tools to counter the new challenges. Thus, the issue of confrontation with «hybrid threats» concerns not only the United States, but the entire community of Western countries, according to the US military theorists [27]. Generally, this strategy meets the formal approval in ensuring of a favorable balance of power for American leadership in the critically important regions of the world [25].

«Think tanks» of the European Union are now actively analyzing the phenomenon of «hybrid threats». Experts and politicians of the European Union are more cautious in blaming Russia and other non-Western states in conducting «hybrid wars». There are publications which indicate that a «hybrid» tactic was previously used by the United States. This specifically refers to the period of confrontation between the Soviet Union and the USA in Afghanistan in the 1980s [31]. Officially, the EU politicians do not tend to accuse Russia of

conducting a «hybrid war»; however, at the level of the leading mass media of the largest European countries, particularly in Germany, this kind of accusations regularly come up [35].

According to the national security strategy of the Russian Federation 2015, the USA and its allies seek to keep their dominance in world affairs and therefore oppose Russia conducting an independent domestic and foreign policy. The document states that the United States policy of restraint involves the application of political, economic, military and informational pressure on Russia [13]. The thesis is explained with a number of circumstances facing contemporary Russia. First and foremost, a significant reduction of safety of Russia occurred as a result of the political crisis in Ukraine and the following consequences. The unsettled political situation in Ukraine on the background of the aggravation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict was the occasion to strengthen political and economic pressure of the USA and its allies on Russia and to enforce military activities of NATO near the Russian borders. Continuing in fact, though with less intensity, the fighting on the territory of Donbass creates conditions for destabilization of the situation on the Russian-Ukrainian border. In order to prevent full-scale escalation of the conflict Russia supports the Minsk negotiation process.

At the same time, the permanent growth of threats from radical Islamist groups, primarily the «Islamic state», «Jabhat an-Nusra» and «al-Qaeda» spreading their influence not only in the Middle East, but also in Eurasia and North Africa, has pushed Russia in September 2015 to begin the antiterrorist operation in Syria. Owing to the efforts of Russian diplomacy, Russia and the USA managed to reach the agreement on the armistice in Syria, establishing ceasefire condition since February 27, 2016. This agreement was supported by the resolution of the UN Security Council [33].

Thus, political competition between international actors, often realizing themselves in the strategies of «hybrid wars» and counter-strategies, becomes a long-term factor of the world political dynamics and has a significant impact on the transformation of the world order, reinforcing its polycentricity. The actualization of these strategies objectively promotes the growth of pragmatism in world politics; but also significantly increases international political risks. In these circumstances, the need for the formation of a new quality of global leadership objectively increases. This leadership, in these circumstances, must be capable to develop collective approaches and implement activities, giving forehanded and effective responses to the most significant dangers and threats.

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