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The new Cold War and the emerging Greater Eurasia

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ABSTRACT

The author argues that the current state of international relations can be characterized as a new Cold War with Eurasia emerging as its major battlefield and at the same time as a second, non-Western pole of a new confrontation. The reason for it is that the United States and some European countries are trying to reverse the decline of their dominance which they have enjoyed over the past five hundred years. The current situation is much more dangerous than it used to be during the previous Cold War, but this attempt will most likely prove futile. While the world comes through a period of intensifying competition, it will stimulate reformatting of the global geopolitical, geo-economic, and geo-ideological space. The authors assume that the evolution of the international system goes in the direction of a new bipolarity, where Eurasia will play a role of a new geostrategic and economic pole, while the West, probably limited by "Greater America" will become another one. In this new international reality, the U.S. will drift from the status of superpower to the position of an important global center of power. However, at the moment the contours of Greater Eurasia are only beginning to take shape.

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1. Introduction and problem setting

Over the past decade, researchers and political writers around the world have tried to understand the nature of the mounting tensions between the U.S. and the West on the one side, and Russia, China, and some other powers on the other. For most scholars of the liberal school, the tensions between the U.S., its allies and the rising powers were unavoidable deviations from the general trend of the latter's integration into the liberal international order.

From the standpoint of the realist school of thought that emerged following the Cold War, the international order has never been able to ensure long-term stability. On the contrary, scholars pointed to the enormous potential for conflict latent in its structure. Although their fears were largely justified, the evolution of modern international politics has also caught them somewhat by surprise. Most realists focused on U.S.–China relations during the last decade. Some believed it was inevitable that the conflict would deepen or even lead to war (Mearsheimer, 2014a, 2014b), while others believed that the transformation could proceed peacefully and lead to a new balance of power (Kissinger, 2012). However, both tended to view U.S.–China relations as the main factor leading to structural changes in international politics.

Since 2014, many in the West and elsewhere have begun viewing Russia as the primary challenge to the liberal international order. According to this thinking, Moscow has

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employed military and political tools with enough success to shake the very foundations of the international rules established after World War II. From the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, the terms “new Cold War” and “Cold War II” have entered the academic lexicon (See: Trenin, 2014; Legvold, 2014).

However, despite the widespread use of the terms in the academic and expert community, the understanding of this phenomenon and its implications for international politics remains very vague. Like the “classic” Cold War, the new confrontation is described most often as a clash between Russia and the West. However, such historic comparisons can be misleading. As a result, researchers often approach the new Cold War as specific to Russia and the West, or even Russia and the U.S. without considering other structural factors influencing international politics: the rise of China and other powers, the emergence and consolidation of Eurasia, the weakening of global institutions and global interdependence, economic and political regionalization, etc.

This narrow understanding produces an incomplete picture of the new Cold War and limits the possibility for a full-scale analysis of the phenomenon.

This article considers the evolution of the international system from a somewhat different point of view. It argues that the Cold War II should be analyzed not just through the prism of the confrontation between Russia and the West or Russia and the U.S., but in the context of broader historical and geostrategic processes. Three main factors determine these processes: the relative weakening of the West and its global dominance, the strategic rise of non-Western countries, and their consolidation as an alternative power center.

I argue that the historical macro-trends and structural conflicts that defined the start of the “classic” Cold War did not disappear after 1991. However, whereas the Soviet Union and its satellites played the role of the non-Western pole during the classic Cold War period, today Eurasia – primarily in the growing entente between Russia and China – plays the role of the non-West. The emergence of this “Eurasian pole” – that is, Greater Eurasia – makes Cold War II a much more complex, multilevel, and fundamental factor in world politics.

2. Conceptualizing the Cold War II

Since the advent of the term “new Cold War” in the academic literature, scholars started to debate about the real meaning of this term. Appearing as a historical analogy, it began to be filled with content, primarily through comparison with the “classic” confrontation.

Talking about the differences between the “classic” and the “new” “Cold War” many experts have been pointing out the structural weakness of Russia and its inability to be an independent and full-fledged pole (Stavridis, 2016). This statement is debatable: although, economically, Russia is obviously weaker than the West – or even the U.S. alone – its military capabilities, primarily nuclear, are comparable. This article will argue that the “non-Western” pole is not weaker geo-economically, but in some sense even stronger than the West if to regard it as consisting not only of Russia, but of all non-Western Eurasia – or at least those parts of it that gravitate around the growing entente between Russia and China (Trenin, 2015).

Others noted the absence of an ideological component in the growing confrontation (Legvold, 2015). In the past, it was a clash between totalitarian communism and liberal-democratic capitalism. Now neither Russia nor China is trying to impose their models of development or ideology. However, they are offering an alternative. China is building an effective non-liberal economic model as an alternative to the liberal economic agenda (See: Hsu & Wu, 2014; Huang, 2008).

If Russia is offering an alternative to the modern Western ideological narrative, it is hardly an ideology, but a set of traditional values underlying the life of the international community in general and each individual in particular: respect for sovereignty; focus on national interests; refusal to interfere in internal affairs; freedom to choose one’s own political, economic, and cultural development model; faith in God, traditional family values, patriotism, and self-realization (not individualism) through service to society, the country, and the world. While a number of works are dedicated to this problem (Tsygankov, 2016), this value gap, if it exists between Russia and the West, could hardly play a role of ideological confrontation, which structured the conflict decades ago. Absence of ideologies and severe ideological confrontation is one of the key reasons why the camps of the new Cold War are so vague and not very well structured in comparison with the “classic” Cold War.

On the strategic level, the Cold War II acquires more and more features of the “classic” confrontation of the second half of the 20th century. Opinion leaders and members of the American foreign policy establishment have started to admit that the Cold War is already underway and it goes in quite an old-fashioned way (See: Haas, 2018; Blackwill & Gordon, 2018). By the beginning of 2017, the new confrontation was institutionalized and got all the elements of a long-term structural conflict. The U.S. adopted military doctrines giving the green light to new ambitious nuclear rearmament programs, openly speaking about the need to contain Russia and China as strategic competitors (US National Security Strategy, 2017). There have been also signs of a possible “missile crisis” in Europe, similar to that with Russian and American medium-range missiles in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the information space, the old West’s hostility toward China and particularly Russia has reached the level that reminds one of the worst years of the previous Cold War (in the 1950s). The campaign against Russia’s alleged interference in the American election and the search for Russian “agents of influence” look very much like the McCarthy witch-hunt, an opinion shared even by many American observers (Carpenter, 2016; Cohen, 2018). These tendencies appear to be following the Cold War-era pattern.

In the economic sphere, sanctions and countersanctions are becoming a norm. Although most of the anti-Russian sanctions are formally linked to the Minsk process and compliance with the Minsk accords (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2016, p. 3), in terms of the rising Russia–West confrontation it looks more and more like a system of long-term economic and technological containment reminiscent of CoCom – Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls. The Russian leadership says openly that the

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