

THE “POST-PANDEMIC ERA” WORLD ORDER AND RUSSIA’S STRATEGIC CHOICE

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Article history: <i>Received:</i> <p style="text-align: right;">24.10.2020</p> <i>Accepted:</i> <p style="text-align: right;">03.06.2021</p>	Abstract: The spread of COVID-19 has intensified existing global conflicts and profoundly changed the global political, economic, and security landscape since the end of the Cold War. Recently, Russian leaders and think tank experts have given in-depth consideration to the international landscape, world order, globalization process, and major-country relations in the “post-pandemic era”. They believe that as the international pattern and world order are being reshaped at an accelerating pace, Russia is facing the greatest strategic opportunity since the Crimean crisis and even the end of the Cold War. In Russia’s strategic point of view, under the new circumstances, Russia needs to reshape its foreign policy thinking, consolidate its special responsibility of the permanent members of the Security Council with the unique privileges since the founding of the United Nations, deepen Eurasian integration cooperation, skillfully manage the triangular relationship between Russia, China, and the United States, balanced relations with China by multiple forces, and strive to improve Russian-American relations.
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The global spread of COVID-19 is like a “World War” without a single shot of fire. It not only threatens the survival of mankind and damages the world economy but also has a significant impact on the world order, profoundly changing the global political, economic, and security landscape since the end of the Cold War. In a time of great change, each country is seeing the world through its lens, assessing the impact on itself, and trying to better defend its interests.

Since the end of March 2020, the situation of the epidemic situation in Russia has deteriorated sharply, and the government has been forced to change its relaxed attitude and further strengthen the anti-epidemic efforts. At the same time, Russia’s leaders and important strategic think tank top experts gave in-depth consideration to such major issues in the “Post-COVID-19 Era” as the international landscape, world order, world economy, globalization, and relations between major countries, especially the triangular relationship between Russia, China, and the United State. The strategic

choice of Russia under the great change of the international situation has been carefully planned. The general view is that at a time when other major powers are seriously damaged and the international landscape and world order are being reshaped at an accelerating pace, Russia has the greatest strategic opportunity since the Crimean crisis and even the end of the Cold War. A comprehensive summary of Russia’s strategic analysis and thinking is helpful to accurately grasp the “Post-Pandemic Era” of Russia’s strategic direction.

International landscape and world order

In recent years, various conflicts in the international community have been deeply intertwined. The global spread of COVID-19 has become a catalyst for further intensification and thrown the international and regional order into disorder and turmoil.

The Russian strategic community has keenly observed that this disorder manifests itself in many ways. First, the common interests

of mankind have been placed behind the political and economic interests. The epidemic itself has been regarded as a favorable condition for countries to enhance their geopolitical and economic status. And countries around the world are still squabbling over temporary benefits and gains. Second, populist forces are taking the opportunity to rise, social solidarity is seriously affected, and global politics is characterized by nationalism, exclusionism, xenophobia, and disregard for international law. Third, the willingness of mankind to take collective action to meet common challenges continues to decline. The vulnerability of international organizations, including the World Health Organization, has become prominent. Many governments are facing a serious crisis of confidence, and the international community has formed a cycle of mutual distrust.¹

At the same time, the COVID-19 crisis is accelerating the transformation process of the world pattern. "The United States' global leadership is under attack and its attention is turned to domestic development, the European Union is unable to cope with the crisis and its internal conflicts are deepening, and China actively carries out global diplomacy and its nationalism continues to rise". In the future, "the world will be dominated by two competing political and economic models: liberalism represented by the West and state capitalism represented by China and Russia. China and the United States will be at the center of two major coalitions in world politics, and their deepening conflicts will have a huge impact on the entire system of international relations and the political processes of each country."²

Igor Ivanov, former Russian Foreign Minister and chairman of the International Affairs Committee said: "COVID-19 has

rapidly changed the global security system, and security issues have extended from traditional military security to epidemic diseases, climate change, migration, and other fields... The COVID-19 crisis may become a watershed in international politics. In the face of the global challenge of the epidemic, on the one hand, many political forces have called for a worldwide moratorium on conflicts and concentrated efforts to fight against pneumonia. On the other hand, some countries try to gain a comparative advantage over their traditional competitors amid the crisis, entering into endless arguments about information warfare, responsibility for the spread of the epidemic, the ability of authoritarian and democratic countries to fight the virus, and their economic models. This fully demonstrates that mankind is facing a political struggle to establish a new world order. The outcome of this struggle will depend on whether politicians can put global security ahead of their political ambitions and whether they can put international interests ahead of traditional national interests."³

There are different views in the Russian strategic community on whether the world will form a bipolar structure similar to the Cold War after the pandemic.

One view is represented by Timofey Bordachev, project director of the Valdai Club and director of the Centre for Integrated European and International Studies at the Higher University of Economics. The central idea is that a new bipolar structure, with China and the US at its center, will be the biggest risk to international politics beyond 2020. "Compared with the bipolar structure of the Cold War, the new bipolar structure that is emerging may become the premise for a world war. If the Soviet Union had spurred the development of the United States and Europe, the rise of China would be a direct threat to the West. In the new bipolar competition, China is not strong enough to be the main factor in changing the pattern and needs other allies to support it. And the

¹ Кортунув А. Коронавирус: новый баг или фича мировой политики? (Kortunov A. Coronavirus: a new bug or a feature of world politics?) Режим доступа: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/koronavirus-novyy-bug-ili-ficha-mirovoy-politiki/>

² Тренин Д. Как России удержать равновесие в посткризисном биполярном мире (Trenin D. How can Russia keep the balance in the post-crisis bipolar world). Режим доступа: <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/81541>

³ Ivanov, Igor. Rethinking International Security for a Post-Pandemic World. Mode of access: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/rethinking-international-security-for-a-post-pandemic-world/>

United States will do the same to woo allies,” he added.⁴

Another point of view is represented by Alexei Gromyko, Director of the European Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He stressed that the current international situation is fundamentally different from that of the Cold War, and it is difficult to form a bipolar structure with China and the United States at its core: (1) The bipolar structure between the United States and the Soviet Union was not only a competition between two global power centers but also a joint effort to eliminate large-scale military confrontation and stabilize international relations. The confrontation between China and the United States will trigger many unstable factors, leading to chaos in international relations and even war. (2) Under the leadership of the United States and the Soviet Union during the cold war, the international community almost split into two independent parts. In contrast, at the present, although China and the United States cannot establish an interdependent relationship that fully conforms to the common interests of both sides, under the influence of globalization, the close ties between the two countries in various fields cannot be cut off, and it is difficult for them to become two poles of mutual isolation independently. (3) Behind the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union were two camps, capitalism, and socialism. However, nowadays, the traditional allies of the United States are trying to get rid of its control, and the so-called “West” no longer exists. Moreover, China has only Russia as a strategic partner, and because of the two countries’ fear of each other’s power and differences in geographical interests, an alliance between Russia and China against the US is highly unlikely. (4) Ideological confrontation is a thing of the past. Although the political systems and ideologies of China and the United States are fundamentally different, China does not rely on socialism and communism as the Soviet

Union did to demonstrate superiority, nor does it exhibit any form of messianism. Conflicts based solely on geopolitics are not enough to escalate into bloc-based bipolarity.⁵

Alexander Yakovenko, President of the Russian Foreign Affairs Institute, agrees with Gromyko that the Sino-American conflict will escalate, but that neither side has the potential to draw other countries into its rivalry. First is that China has no intention of establishing world hegemony and no desire to win over military allies. Although the relationship between Russia and China is close, they can’t ally. Second, multilateral diplomatic mechanisms will continue to exist. No country will reject the established traditional multilateral diplomatic mechanisms such as the United Nations and the G20, even if the United States may withdraw from them. Third, countries will pay more attention to their national interests, and the foundation of the new bipolar structure and its impact on global politics is very fragile.⁶

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has been a loser of the liberal world order centered on the “Washington consensus”. Its status as a superpower has ceased to exist, its international influence has declined rapidly, and its ability to participate in global governance is insufficient. All this has left Russia feeling resentful about the existing world order and hoping that it will accelerate its restructuring and even collapse. In contrast to other countries’ concerns, the Russian strategic community has shown overwhelming excitement about the changes brought about by COVID-19. “The nature of modern world politics remains the same: it is a struggle to create a new order to replace the one that is rapidly unraveling. The era of a unipolar world and five hundred years of Western domination is coming to an end,” says Sergei Karaganov,

⁴ Бордачев Т. Биполярное расстройство: Какие риски несет миру переход к новой биполярной системе (Bordachev T. Bipolar Disorder: What Risks the Transition to a New Bipolar System Poses to the World). Режим доступа: <https://profile.ru/columnist/bipolyarnoe-rasstrojstvo-271423/>

⁵ Громыко А. Об иллюзиях новой биполярности (Gromyko A. On the illusions of a new bipolarity). Режим доступа: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/ob-illyuziyakh-novoy-bipolyarnosti/>

⁶ Яковенко А. Новая биполярность: кто не с нами, тот против нас (Yakovenko A. New bipolarity: whoever is not with us is against us). Режим доступа: https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/comments/novaya-bipolyarnost-kto-ne-s-nami-tot-protiv-nas/?sphrase_id=47916484

honorary chairman of Russia's Foreign and Defence Policy Council.⁷

The Valdai Club published a research report, which demonstrated the profound changes in international relations from multiple aspects, such as the rise of international anarchy, the return of nationalism, and the collapse of liberal world order. The report notices how COVID-19 is tearing the international community apart and how multilateral cooperation is shrinking. The crisis in the international system has led to increased anarchy – each country will be left to its survival. The sovereign state remains the only mechanism that can be organized and act efficiently. When the economy has become truly global, politics is still on an inter-state basis and even the role of the state in the economic sphere is increasing... Stability against non-economic shocks, provided by the state rather than the market, is becoming the most important indicator of national capacity.⁸

More importantly, the temporary control measures taken by different countries in response to the outbreak have become an important basis for Russia to justify its authoritarian system. Most of the social controls once accused of being used in authoritarian states are now also popular in democracies, the report said. "Isolation reinforced by modern technology offers more possibilities for governments to develop tools to control society... Once again, the 'autocracy-democracy' dualism is false. The social organization model based on the combination of liberal democracy and market economy has not yet proved that it has absolute moral and ethical legitimacy and universality, and countries rely on their own social and cultural experiences to get out of the crisis. Every country makes policies based on its own

moral and ethical values. It is wrong to look at them on a 'right and wrong' scale. They are just different."⁹

Coincidentally, Sergei Karaganov also stressed: "No one can provide public goods except a sovereign state. The role of sovereignty is strengthened, states reject external domination, and the demand to freely choose their political, cultural, development and foreign policy orientations is increasingly urgent."¹⁰

It can be seen that this interpretation of international changes is in line with the political concepts advocated by Russia for many years, such as "sovereign democracy", "sovereignty over human rights" and "nationalism over internationalism". The Russian strategic community seems to have found important evidence for the correctness of the Russian view of national governance and international politics.

In terms of world order, the Valdai Club report asserts that "the era of liberal world order from the late 1980s to the mid-2010s is over," In the future, the international community faces two choices: either to preserve the existing most important organization (the United Nations) and build a new functional organization based on it; Or there could be another dichotomy, a battle between the two giants of The United States and China. Moreover, the US-China confrontation is an irreconcilable conflict between different types of players under completely different international conditions, and will not reproduce the stable pattern between the US and the Soviet Union in the second half of the 20th century. As a result, "far from returning to the happy and fairly stable cold war years, we are in the pre-World War I period of imperialist competition. Moreover, in terms of moral appeal, neither China nor the United States today can compare with the Soviet Union or the West during the Cold War, neither of which offers the world obvious alternatives."¹¹

⁷ Караганов С., Суслов Д. Россия в мире после коронавируса: новые идеи для внешней политики (Karaganov S., Suslov D. Russia in the world after the coronavirus: new ideas for foreign policy). Режим доступа: <https://www.globalaffairs.ru/articles/rossiya-mir-koronavirus-idei/>

⁸ Тимофеев И., Барабанов О., Бордачев Т., Лисоволик Я., Лукьянов Ф., Сушенцов А. Не одичать в «осыпающемся мире» (Timofeev I., Barabanov O., Bordachev T., Lisovolik Y., Lukyanov F., Sushentsov A. Do not run wild in the "crumbling world"). Режим доступа: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/files/33222/>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Караганов С., Суслов Д. Россия в мире после коронавируса: новые идеи для внешней политики (Karaganov S., Suslov D. Russia in the world after the coronavirus: new ideas for foreign policy). Режим доступа: <https://www.globalaffairs.ru/articles/rossiya-mir-koronavirus-idei/>

¹¹ Тимофеев И., Барабанов О., Бордачев Т., Лисоволик Я., Лукьянов Ф., Сушенцов А. Не одичать

From the statement of the Valdai Club report, we can see Russia's nostalgia and admiration for the "Cold War" between the United States and the Soviet Union, as if it was a good time to bring stability, peace, and happiness to mankind. However, Russia is full of anxiety, worry, and even disdain for the bipolar structure between China and the United States. While complaining that the two poles of China and the United States might bring World-War-I-like disasters to the world, the report also ridiculed that Today's China and the United States do not have the same "moral standards" as the United States and the Soviet Union. In another intriguing statement, the report says: "America's rethinking of its role in the world is accelerating its retreat into isolationism. China, on the other hand, is ambitious. They run in opposite directions and constitute a major threat to international security."¹²

For the development trend of the world after the epidemic, the Russian strategic community also made a corresponding prospect. Sergei Karaganov believes that under the combined effect of long-term accumulated conflicts in the international community and COVID-19, the development of the world will show the following trends: (1) The redistribution of international power will restore the traditional multi-centrality in the context of a new round of globalization. Most international mechanisms will lose their effectiveness and the importance of military power will be highlighted once again. (2) The global economic system created by the United States would collapse and the global economy would become fragmented, regional, and politicized; (3) Environmental pollution and climate change will be the focus of the international community, but related issues will be based on decision-making at the national or regional level, rather than through global cooperation; (4) The political subjectivity of small and medium-sized countries and the independence of their elites may be enhanced so that these countries refuse to blindly follow

the big powers but swing between China and the United States; (5) The international community appears to be ideology-oriented because, with an ideological vacuum, nationalism, discontent sentiment, and environmental activism are likely to spread; (6) The danger of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons increases, but a peaceful environment for a long time reduces the fear of war.¹³

Andrei Kolturov, executive director of the Russian Council of International Affairs, looks at the post-pandemic world order along the "North-South Axis" rather than from the traditional "East-West" perspective. In his view, the crisis slowed the transfer of power and resources from the North to the South, thus increasing the South's dependence on the North and leading to the growing instability in the South in the post-crisis era. This will be followed by an intensification of regional conflict situations, political, economic, and social crises in the countries of the South, and the exclusion of most of the countries of the South from the world technology chain and the new economic system. The widening gap in development, security, and governance between the North and the South will pose a huge challenge to the stability of the international system. To overcome this challenge, we must realize a new "grand bargain" between the North and the South, bridge the civilization gap between the north and the South, and enhance the level of global governance.¹⁴

It can be seen that the mainstream view in the Russian strategic circle has concluded that the pandemic has severely damaged the major power centers of the United States, China, and Europe. However, in the face of the pandemic, the international community has not only failed to work together but fall into more profound contradictions and conflicts. In particular, the emerging confrontation between China and the

в «осыпающемся мире» (Timofeev I., Barabanov O., Bordachev T., Lisovolik Y., Lukyanov F., Sushentsov A. Do not run wild in the "crumbling world"). Режим доступа: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/files/33222/>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Караганов С. Новые идеи для себя и мира (Karaganov S. New Ideas for Yourself and the World). Режим доступа: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/novye-idei-dlya-sebya-i-mira/>

¹⁴ Кортунов А. Кризис миропорядка и глобальный Юг (Kortunov A. The Crisis of the World Order and the Global South). Режим доступа: <https://russiancouncil.ru/activity/publications/krizis-miroporyadka-i-globalnyy-yug/>

United States will pose a serious threat to world security. But at the same time, there will not be a bipolar pattern of overall confrontation between the two camps during the Cold War between the United States and The Soviet Union, and Russia will not ally with China against the United States. In the context of the intensification of anarchy caused by the crisis of the international system, the role of the state has been further highlighted, which is undoubtedly a great benefit for Russia to pursue nationalism: On the one hand, the legitimacy of Russia's domestic system is further consolidated; Russia, on the other hand, can maneuver through a world of weakened international institutions.

World Economy, Globalization and Regional Integration

COVID-19 has hit the world economy hard and could cause a depression similar to the one at the turn of the 1920's and 1930's. The world economic downturn will undoubtedly worsen the external economic environment of Russia, but it will be less impacted because the Russian economy has always been self-sufficient and participation in world economic integration is limited. In the Russian worldview, international politics has always been a zero-sum game in which what others lose is what Russia gains. As a result, Russian strategists are hopeful: "A global recession will trigger a deep adjustment in the world economic system. In the crisis, the essence of the national competition is not to control the most important technology sector and the most promising companies in the short term in the global production chain, but to achieve relative self-sufficiency in production and technology to ensure national priorities."¹⁵

Concerning the impact of the pandemic on the world economy and the process of globalization, the Valdai Club report stressed that, unlike previous crises, the pandemic has cut off the communication and economic and trade links between countries and regions, and

brought the entire world economic system to a sudden collapse. The global and regional value chains have also changed, which has caused a severe shock to the multilateral mechanism and international cooperation. Behind these appearances, the globalized world is changing from a "society of unlimited opportunity" to a "society of unlimited risk." "Whether in terms of behavioral practice or moral standards, large-scale cross-border mobility in the era of globalization may become a thing of the past, and the pursuit of sustainable development and quality of life will become an unattainable luxury."¹⁶

With the global economy in recession, some Russian experts believe the world economic system will have five main features: (1) The global economic system collapses, deglobalization accelerates, and future globalization will be very slow. (2) The global energy market management system has collapsed due to the pandemic, and its stable structure will not be restored in the short term. (3) People's living standard is generally reduced, and different social development models are facing severe challenges. (4) The crisis of "post-industrial society" without a foundation of real economy emerges; (5) The regionalization of financial investment activities counters the global financial hegemony of the United States.¹⁷

Andrei Kortunov disagreed with the view that globalization could be reversed or significantly slowed in the foreseeable future, stressing that the wave of globalization was deeply intertwined with the future world order and would remain fundamentally unbalanced, excluding failed states and even failed regions within successful states. The greatest divergence in the future world order will be between the

¹⁵ Евстафьев Д. Мир после коронавируса: будущее постсоветской Евразии (Evstafiev D. The world after coronavirus: the future of post-Soviet Eurasia). Режим доступа: <https://eurasia.expert/mir-posle-koronavirusa-budushchee-postsovetsskoy-evrazii/>

¹⁶ Тимофеев И., Барабанов О., Бордачев Т., Лисоволик Я., Лукьянов Ф., Сушенцов А. Не одичать в «осыпающемся мире» (Timofeev I., Barabanov O., Bordachev T., Lisovolik Y., Lukyanov F., Sushentsov A. Do not run wild in the "crumbling world"). Режим доступа: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/files/33222/>

¹⁷ Евстафьев Д. Мир после коронавируса: будущее постсоветской Евразии (Evstafiev D. The world after coronavirus: the future of post-Soviet Eurasia). Режим доступа: <https://eurasia.expert/mir-posle-koronavirusa-budushchee-postsovetsskoy-evrazii/>

winners and losers of the globalization process, with the world order continuing to wobble during the transition to a new global governance system.¹⁸

Anatoly Torkunov, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences and President of the Moscow Institute of International Relations, has outlined four possible scenarios for post-pandemic globalization: (1) China and the United States achieve a balance based on common economic interests and the main body of globalization changes from the expansion of multinational companies to the extensive cooperation of states, a high degree of cooperation based on abundant resources. (2) The relationship between China and the United States is in crisis accompanying the low level of cooperation among countries and the stagnant world economy. And the spreading of nationalism seriously impacts the traditional integration structure. (3) Elites focused on domestic politics, refraining from aggressive foreign policy, and maintaining a high degree of inter-state cooperation. (4) The global economy recovered relatively quickly, but international competition continued to intensify. China and the United States realized that "globalization had collapsed" and a new multicentric architecture emerged."¹⁹

At the same time as globalization suffers a severe blow, COVID-19 is having a serious impact on the Russian-led process of Eurasian integration and the social, economic, and political development of the former Soviet Union countries. The mainstream view in the Russian strategic circles is that the COVID-19 has caused Europe to suffer another blow, the European integration model may be smashed into pieces, the further eastward expansion of the EU is far from being possible, and the EU Eastern Partnership plan is dead. Under these circumstances, the integration of Ukraine and

other former Soviet states into Europe is out of reach. Although the integration of Europe and Asia is also difficult, Russia is still able to stabilize the situation.

Alexander Vorobiov, a scholar at the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Oriental Studies, takes a relatively pessimistic view. He believes the outbreak could bankrupt a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) members, placing the economic burden on the country, but not all member states have sufficient resources and a desire to take supportive measures, which could increase social discontent. Meanwhile, Russia and Kazakhstan, the locomotives of the Eurasian Economic Union, have been hit by a double whammy of recession and plunging oil prices, with large fiscal deficits. A drop in Russian imports would directly reduce the export of the former Soviet Union countries and the number of foreign remittances they received from Russia, which would inevitably increase their social tensions. To be sure, "in the short to medium term, the EU's influence over its members will diminish, and the growth of the EEU itself will slow. After the outbreak, member states may have adapted to a temporary state of no union, making it difficult to fully return to the status quo."²⁰

Fyodor Lukyanov, editor of *Russia in Global Politics*, stressed that COVID-19 will intensify the conflicts between Europe and the US, intensify the internal division of the EU and exert an important influence on the distribution of power in world politics and inter-state relations, which will weaken the attraction of the EU to the former Soviet Union and relieve the external pressure on the Russia-led integration process in Europe and Asia. He argues that the absence of a single currency, a central bank, and structural funds corresponding to the EU's funds in EEU would contribute to avoiding the problems that the EU's free flow of money could cause. He

¹⁸ Kortunov, Andrey. We Need to Create a More Inclusive System of Global Governance. Mode of access: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/we-need-to-create-a-more-inclusive-system-of-global-governance/>

¹⁹ Kever, Olga. The Illusion of Control: Russia's Media Ecosystem and COVID-19 Propaganda Narratives. Mode of access: <https://visegradinsight.eu/the-illusion-of-control-russian-propaganda-covid19/>

²⁰ Воробьев А. ЕАЭС ставят на карантин: Пандемия коронавируса может задвинуть интеграцию на второй план (Vorobiev A. The EAEU is being quarantined: The coronavirus pandemic may push integration into the background). Режим доступа: https://www.ng.ru/dipkurer/2020-03-29/11_7829_eeu.html

called on members of the Eurasian Economic Union to lower their expectations for direct assistance, avoid shifting the blame to others due to pressure from public opinion, and better respond to the outbreak through coordination. In particular, he warned That “China’s relatively successful response to COVID-19 and the difficulties in Europe and the United States may create both opportunities and risks for China’s Eurasian neighbors: On the one hand, many of the infrastructure projects in which China is interested covering the Eurasian continent will benefit everyone, and the Eurasian countries in economic crisis are willing to interact closely with the powerful economy of China. On the other hand, the hidden competition between China and the US will be exposed and the heated struggle for potential partners and the escalating geopolitical struggle will bring risks. Therefore, Eurasian countries must strengthen joint action to prepare for intensified competition between China and the United States.”²¹

To sum up, despite the impact of COVID-19 on Russia’s economy, Russia believes that major economies such as the United States, China, Japan, and Europe have suffered more. A deglobalized world means more opportunities for Russia. In this case, Russia will strengthen the Eurasian integration, and further restore the strategic influence in the “Post-Soviet Space”.

The Relationship between Major Powers and the Triangle between Russia, China, and America

After the Crimea crisis in 2014, Russia was subjected to strong western sanctions, and the international environment deteriorated significantly. Therefore, it is an important task of Russian diplomacy to seek a turnaround of relations with the West, especially with the United States, and to reduce the strategic pressure on Russia. The trade war between China and the United States, especially the changes in major-country relations since COVID-19, has provided Russia with important strategic opportunities.

Mainstream views in the Russian strategic

community have highlighted that China and the United States have not only failed to effectively manage their differences, share responsibilities and respond to the epidemic but have instead blamed each other and become increasingly hostile to each other. China-US relations have entered a downward spiral and may slide into a “sub-cold war” out of control. Under the new conditions, the confrontation between the US and Russia is not the core of the world order while it is China and the US that will reshape the world order. China has become the primary adversary and potential enemy of the US, and a further deterioration of China-US relations will provide Russia with great strategic space.

The Russian strategic community has different assessments of the nature and development trends of China-US relations.

Vasily Kashin, a researcher at MGIMO and the Higher School of Economics, said: “Tensions in traditional hotspots such as Taiwan and the South China Sea have been rising since the trade war broke out between China and the US. Covid-19 has become a catalyst for increased competition between China and the US, which is likely to soon become even worse than the relationship between Russia and the US. The two parties in the US have reached a consensus on containing China, and the relationship between China and the US has changed irreversibly and will evolve into a second Cold War.”²²

Gleb Evashenkov, deputy head of Russia’s International Affairs Council, said: “There is a profound difference between the US-China confrontation today and the US-Soviet confrontation during the Cold War. The confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union involved not only two superpowers but also two systems. Unlike the US and the Soviet Union, China has no intention of being the architect of the world order... China is not interested in breaking the current system or building a new one; it simply intends to reform

²¹ Лукьянов Ф. Евразия после пандемии (Lukyanov F. Eurasia after the pandemic). Режим доступа: <https://rg.ru/2020/04/15/lukyanov-v-ekonomicheskoy-sfere-vzaimnaia-izoliatsiia-nevoz> Режим доступа: mozhnai.html

²² Кашин В. Пандемия показала, что к холодной войне Китай готов лучше, чем США (Kashin V. The pandemic has shown that China is better prepared for the Cold War than the United States). Режим доступа: <https://profile.ru/abroad/pandemiya-pokazala-cto-k-xolodnoj-vojne-kitaj-gotov-luchshe-chem-ssha-323992/>

the existing system in a way that gives it a slice of the pie and a bigger market. China is ready to enter the US and Western economic systems at any time provided it brings sufficient benefits. So there is no possibility of polarization between China and the United States.”²³

The confrontation between China and the United States will undoubtedly have a profound impact on Russia. What should Russia do in this situation? Fyodor Lukyanov believes that, at the diplomatic level, Russia cannot support a confrontation between China and the United States, but neither can it remain completely neutral. Given that China is an important neighbor of Russia and the United States has imposed sanctions on Russia, the correct attitude should be to pursue common interests with China and rationally view Russia-China relations. In domestic affairs, Russia oscillates between its desire for “Europeanness” and its rejection of Europe, and its search for identity is cyclical... The Cold War rivalry between America and China has stirred enthusiasm for the old question of how Russia chooses between Europe and Asia. Eastern backwardness and Western superiority are no longer the criteria of judgment. The intimacy with European culture and the heterogeneity of Asian culture, the hostility of the West, and the tolerance of the East are the new rationale for Russia’s choice. Russia should not rely on “civilized choice” as its political basis but should develop in a culturally and ideologically heterogeneous environment by creating opportunities to participate in the international agenda through enhanced national strength and greater flexibility in external relations.”²⁴

Alexei Arbatov said that the civilized connection between Russia and the United

States should be used to create an atmosphere for overcoming the contradictions in reality. He believed that the friendship between Putin and Trump could not solve the deep contradictions between Russia and the US, and there was little possibility of major changes in Russian-American relations in the future, but Russia and the US had deep cultural ties – Russia was an integral part of European culture, and the US was also inseparable from European culture. He stressed: “This connection is particularly unique and important because it is not the economy or national policies that determine the ultimate shape of civilization, but the culture that has been passed down from one generation to the next over countless generations.” Under the new situation, cooperation between Russia and the United States in technical fields such as new drug development and microbiology is very necessary.²⁵

The deterioration of Sino-US relations will undoubtedly have broad implications in the field of international relations. Of particular interest to the Russian strategic community is the revitalization of the Russia-China-US triangle, in which Russia occupies a dominant position.

Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, sees the possibility that Russia and the United States are “using common threats to improve relations and seek cooperation based on common interests” in the context of COVID-19. He stressed that for Mr. Trump, China, not Russia, is America’s number one adversary. Recently, the United States stepped up dialogue with Russia and Putin quickly responded with frequent high-level political contacts between Russia and the United States. Russia wants to make use of the major crisis to contact the White House to get through the crisis with Russia-US cooperation. However, considering that the outbreak cannot facilitate a rapid restart of Russia-US relations, Russia’s priority is to maintain a balance in relations with China and the US, reduce the threat to European countries and strengthen cooperation with EU countries with a more open attitude.²⁶

²³ Ивашенцов Г. Китай, в отличие от СССР, не способен выступить инноватором переустройства мира (Ivashentsov G. China, unlike the USSR, is not able to act as an innovator in the reorganization of the world). Режим доступа: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/kitay-v-otliche-ot-sssr-ne-sposoben-vystupit-innovatorom-pereustroystva-mira/>

²⁴ Лукьянов Ф. Холодная война США и Китая грозит отвлечь Россию от ее внутренних проблем (Lukyanov F. The Cold War between the United States and China threatens to distract Russia from its internal problems). Режим доступа: <https://profile.ru/columnist/dialektika-grablej-315753/>

²⁵ Арбатов А. Великодержавие с обеих сторон (Arbatov A. Great power on both sides). Режим доступа: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/comments/velikoderzhavie-s-obeikh-storon/>

²⁶ Trenin, Dmitri. Russia–U.S.: No Reset, Just

Trenin is also well aware that “although the rise of China has offset the United States’ focus on Russia, US-Russian rivalry is systemic and will not lead to a fundamental improvement in relations”. Therefore, he stressed, “In the face of this situation, Russia should discourage attempts to influence the domestic politics of the United States from outside, avoid conflicts that could lead to armed conflict, and create interactive opportunities for the realization of the common interests of the two countries.” At the same time, he also put forward: “to alleviate the pressure from the United States, Russia is trying to work with China to break the Western-centered world order and China has become Russia’s most important partner. Nevertheless, there is no desire on either side to form a military and political alliance considering national interests and security. Faced with the asymmetry of economic and development opportunities, although Russia has unwittingly followed China’s rules of the game in economic, technological, and financial fields, it has always adhered to the strategy of balancing China’s power and refused to join the China-centered political bloc. Under such circumstances, Russia will approach its relations with China and the United States more carefully, acting as an advocate for trilateral dialogue to strengthen strategic stability.”²⁷

Unlike some Chinese scholars who hoped to form an alliance with Russia when the conflict between China and the United States intensified, Russian strategic circles held a negative attitude to the Russia-China alliance to counterbalance the United States. Not only that, but they also put forward the idea of further counterbalancing China. “China is very interested in developing friendly relations with Russia, especially in the context of the current conflict with the United States, but China is trying to take the initiative in the bilateral relationship with Russia,” Said Gleb Ivashenkov. “Maintaining a polycentric international balance is vital for Russia. To this

end, Russia’s immediate priority is to launch a new non-aligned movement, rather than mediate a Sino-American dispute. The main players in this non-aligned movement are likely to be India, ASEAN countries, or other regional powers. For Russia, the initiative to bring its relations with India to the level of its relations with China to ensure the promotion of a greater Eurasian partnership is of strategic importance. But ultimately, Russia’s priority is to develop an independent and effective innovative economy. Only on this basis can Russia maintain its independence and play an important role in its relations with the West and China.”²⁸

Andrei Korturov, reviewing the history of China’s diplomatic philosophy during the Soviet-American confrontation, argues that Moscow’s role is gradually being transformed into that of a “clever monkey” in the face of the new reality of the growing Sino-American confrontation. But the difference, he says, is that Russia will not be able to just watch and balance the rivalry between the U.S. and China, and will be forced to engage directly or indirectly in the conflict. On the one hand, the United States sees China as a strategic competitor challenging its leadership and believes that Russia will seize every opportunity to harm the interests of the United States, so the United States will seize the opportunity to weaken Russia to focus on the confrontation against China. On the other hand, at a time when countries are increasingly interconnected, isolationism will cost too much.²⁹

In addition to the trilateral relations between Russia, China, and the United States, the Russian strategic community is also concerned about the impact of the deterioration

Guardrails. Mode of access: <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/81680>

²⁷ Тренин Д. Как России удержать равновесие в посткризисном биполярном мире (Trenin D. How can Russia keep the balance in the post-crisis bipolar world). Режим доступа: <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/81541>

²⁸ Ивашенцов Г. Китай, в отличие от СССР, не способен выступить инноватором переустройства мира (Ivashentsov G. China, unlike the USSR, is not able to act as an innovator in the reorganization of the world). Режим доступа: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/kitay-v-otlichie-ot-sssr-ne-sposoben-vystupit-innovatorom-pereustroystva-mira/>

²⁹ Kortunov, Andrey. About the Wise Monkey Who Came Down from the Mountain. Mode of access: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/about-the-wise-monkey-who-came-down-from-the-mountain/>

of Sino-U.S. relations on other international actors. Timofey Bordachev believes that the confrontation between China and the US based on the new world order will not be the traditional Cold War with distinct bases, and Europe will make different choices in the confrontation according to the specific circumstances. In particular, he said: "Russia will be on the same side as Europe in this matter."³⁰

Russian scholars also elaborated on the bilateral relations between Russia and China in the context of the pandemic. Ivan Zuyenko, the researcher at the Center for Asia-Pacific Studies of the Far East Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, notes that at the beginning of the novel Coronavirus epidemic, Russia quickly closed its border with China, but its response to the European epidemic was so slow that it finally set off a novel Coronavirus avalanche in Russia. He commented that it reflected "the inherent Western-centric worldview of most people in Russian society, including the elite, has not changed and that the announcement 'turn east' by Moscow in 2014 has not passed the test in terms of consciousness." However, he also believes that the pandemic will not affect Russia-China relations, which remain stable. This is due to: First, anti-China rhetoric in Washington, falling oil prices, and Russia's growing dependence on Chinese energy consumption have brought the two countries closer together. Second, in the face of the pandemic, leaders of the two countries have exchanged views very quickly. Third, nor is there xenophobia on the Russian-Chinese border.³¹

Alexander Lukin, director of the Department of International Relations at the Russian Higher University of Economics, said: "Since the 2000s, China's 'confidence'

has increased, and the change in its foreign policy style may damage the level of mutual trust between Russia and China and exacerbate the imbalance in bilateral relations between the two countries, which has left Moscow deeply ambivalent towards Beijing, fearing that China's military and economic prowess will further widen the gap between the two countries." "The peak of Russia-China relations has passed," he stressed. "Neither country needs to develop bilateral ties into a political alliance. Moscow will not build closer ties with Beijing, and both countries will show more pragmatic orientation."³²

Based on the discussions of Russian strategists, they believe that the further complexity of major-country relations under the COVID-19 situation, especially the deterioration of China-US relations, is an important strategic opportunity for Russia. Although relations between Russia and the US will not improve quickly, a rise in tensions between the US and China, or even a move towards open conflict, would undoubtedly greatly reduce western pressure on Russia in the wake of the Ukraine crisis. Russia will make full use of this opportunity to improve the international environment and pursue strategic interests.

Russia's Strategic Choice

The COVID-19 pandemic and the drastic changes in international relations caused by it had a profound and significant impact on Russia's internal, economic and diplomatic affairs. While considering these implications comprehensively, the Russian strategic community has stepped up efforts to provide strategic advice for Russia in the post-pandemic era.

Andrei Kortunov believes that the opportunities presented by COVID-19 for Russia are tactical and situational, while the challenges are strategic and systemic. The opportunities are mainly shown in: (1) the covid-19 pandemic confirms the

³⁰ Бордачев Т. Как стоит вести себя Европе на фоне холодной войны Америки и Китая (Bordachev T. How should Europe behave against the background of the Cold War of America and China). Режим доступа: <https://profile.ru/abroad/kak-stoit-vesti-sebya-evrope-na-fone-xolodnoj-vojny-> Режим доступа: [ameriki-i-kitaya-326845](https://profile.ru/abroad/kak-stoit-vesti-sebya-evrope-na-fone-xolodnoj-vojny-ameriki-i-kitaya-326845)

³¹ Зуенко И. Вирусная граница. Как вспышки эпидемии в пограничье повлияют на отношения России и Китая (Zuenko I. Viral border. How border outbreaks will affect relations between Russia and China). Режим доступа: <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/81765>

³² Лукин А. Пик миновал? Российская стратегия в отношении Китая в новую эпоху (Lukin A. The Peak Passed? -Russian Strategy towards China in the New Era). Режим доступа: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/pik-minoval/>

“Westphalia” international relations picture depicted by the Russian leader and highlights the helplessness of international organizations. It emphasizes the priority and importance of the sovereignty of nation-states, thus strongly supporting Russia’s world view and arousing strong doubts about western unity and stability and western multilateral diplomacy, which is conducive to Russia’s domestic and foreign propaganda and Russia’s participation in the reconstruction of the post-crisis world order. (2) COVID-19 forced the West to adjust its international priorities and change its perception of Russia as a major threat, thus avoiding further escalation of the confrontation between Russia and the West. (3) The COVID-19 will reduce economic assistance programs and military and political commitments to developing countries around the world, and the resulting “power vacuum” will create more opportunities for Russian foreign policy. The main challenges are as follows: (1) Russia’s position in the global economic system will further decline after experiencing the double blow of the pandemic and the oil price collapse; (2) The epidemic will reduce the Russian public’s already low willingness to provide foreign aid, and contribute to the rise of Russian isolationism; (3) Confrontation between China and the United States weakens the effectiveness of existing international mechanisms and exposes the world to systemic risks. The growing asymmetry in relations between China and Russia is hampering Russia’s cooperation with China’s potential rivals – India, Vietnam, and even Japan.³³

In the face of opportunities and challenges, the Russian strategic community declared that it is vital to put forward new foreign policy ideas.

Sergei Karaganov stresses, in particular, that there is an ideological vacuum in the world today, and that a fierce struggle is underway to fill it. Up to now, multi-polarization is still the

core of Russia’s diplomatic discourse system. For most of the world, however, multipolarity has lost its appeal. The ideology of Russia’s foreign policy has fallen behind the trend of global development and the needs of Russian society. Therefore, it is of vital importance for Russia to propose new ideas for its development and the development of the world. He stressed that Russian diplomacy must remain pragmatic and be based on the following three ideas: (1) To uphold international peace; (2) To support the free choice of development models by all countries, safeguard the sovereignty and diversity of all countries, resist any ideological and political hegemony, and position Russia as the defender of the “New Non-Aligned Movement”; (3) To strengthen cooperation in environmental protection, combat new global challenges including COVID-19, advocate a new development concept based on caring for the human environment, and attach importance to people’s physical and mental health instead of endless consumption growth.³⁴

Because of the current failure of the global governance system, the Russian strategic circles also put forward corresponding ideas, of course, the fundamental starting point is to maintain and enhance Russia’s position and influence in it.

Igor Ivanov said that in the face of a profound change in international relations, “the permanent members of the UN Security Council might launch joint initiatives to negotiate a global adjustment of the system of international relations. This kind of global initiative will not only bring the human community together in a common response to the pandemic but also give the international community confidence in the post-pandemic world.”³⁵

Andrei Kortunov argues that a more inclusive global governance system is needed for the continued turbulence in the world order during the transition to a new global governance

³³ Кортунув А. Российская внешняя политика и коронавирус: возможность и угрозы (Kortunov A. Russian Foreign Policy and Coronavirus: Opportunity and Threats). Режим доступа: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/covid-19-presents-both-opportunities-and-threats-to-russia-s-foreign-policy/>

³⁴ Караганов С. Новые идеи для себя и мира (Karaganov S. New Ideas for Yourself and the World). Режим доступа: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/novye-idei-dlya-sebya-i-mira/>

³⁵ Иванов И. Мир будет другим (Ivanov I. The world will be different). Режим доступа: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/mir-budet-drugim/>

system: (1) The risk of direct military confrontation between major powers will not disappear. Miscalculation of competitors or unintended escalation of political crises, as well as internal or proxy conflicts in countries associated with major powers, may lead to a direct military confrontation between major powers. Therefore, the risk of war between major powers needs to be managed. (2) The scale and number of common security challenges are increasing, which will become recognized foreign policy priorities of major powers and undermine traditional foreign policy agendas. As a result, major powers will need to address common security challenges and follow parallel foreign policy tracks inherited from the 20th and early 21st centuries. (3) Regional conflicts are supposed to be under control as regional crises and conflicts will continue to exist along the boundary between the global core and the global periphery, exacerbated by global issues such as the rise of international extremism, climate change, and competition among major powers. (4) To give full play to the role of international and regional organizations, it is difficult to replace the United Nations in the short term, but it is also difficult for the UN to bridge the division and expand its functions. The role of the United Nations in arms control, non-proliferation and regional crises will be restricted successively, and it will be difficult to implement UN Charter effectively. The United Nations could play a more active role in setting a new international agenda, including rules of engagement to address new challenges and threats. Ideally, the global security role of the United Nations should be complemented at the regional level by appropriate collective-security organizations and regional collective-security systems should be established by managing existing differences.³⁶

For Russia, the most acceptable reconstruction is to reinvigorate the UN Security Council's role as a "world government" on the most important issues of peace and war for

the survival of the nation, and in particular to consolidate the special responsibility of the permanent members of the Security Council to the world, who have enjoyed special privileges since the founding of the United Nations. The Valdai Club report emphasizes that the United Nations, as the world organization coordinating international relations, plays an irreplaceable and important role in the international community despite the inevitable flaws in its activities and work, for which it has also paid a price. The choice now before the international community is therefore simple: either to consolidate the United Nations system or to retreat into a fierce struggle dominated not by reason but by instinct.³⁷

Criticizing the deadlock of international organizations in maintaining international day-to-day affairs over the past decade, Yaroslav Lisovolick, project Director of the Valdai Club and director of the Sberbank's Market Analysis Department, said the world urgently needed to establish a new architecture of international mechanisms and to achieve developing-centered priorities. (1) The United Nations must play a role in the establishment of new international organizations and the restructuring of international institutions to promote enhanced international cooperation. The interlinkages between the United Nations and regional agencies should be strengthened and functional stratification should be developed to reduce risks in the areas of health, cybersecurity, and the environment through measures at different functional levels. (2) Reform the UN Security Council and expand its participation base. One way is to participate in the work of the UN Security Council in the form of regional organizations. Another solution is to divide the council by continent and major regions of the world. (3) The UN Security Council is not only obsolete in structure, but also dominated by military force. The COVID-19 crisis illustrates the growing importance of non-nuclear and

³⁶ Kortunov, Andrey. We Need to Create a More Inclusive System of Global Governance. Mode of access: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/we-need-to-create-a-more-inclusive-system-of-global-governance/>

³⁷ Тимофеев И., Барабанов О., Бордачев Т., Лисоволик Я., Лукьянов Ф., Сушенцов А. Не одичать в «осыпающемся мире» (Timofeev I., Barabanov O., Bordachev T., Lisovolik Y., Lukyanov F., Sushentsov A. Do not run wild in the "crumbling world"). Режим доступа: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/files/33222/>

non-military security issues on the international stage. The old core of the Council will therefore gradually be replaced by more open interactions between regions and continents that will address broader international security issues.³⁸

On June 19, 2020, President Putin published a 10,000-word article in the US "National Interest" magazine, reviewing the outstanding contributions of the Soviet Union in the world anti-Fascist War, complaining about the unfair treatment of Russia by the West after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and finally focusing on how to maintain the world order in the post-pandemic era. He noted that the United Nations still performed its primary functions, even though it sometimes did not work as well as expected. The United Nations Security Council is a unique mechanism for preventing major wars or global conflicts. He expressed concern about the frequent U.S. calls in recent years to remove the veto and strip the Security Council of permanent seats, saying it would lead the United Nations to go the way of the League of Nations and lose influence over world processes. He reiterated Russia's initiative to convene a summit of the five permanent members of the Security Council, the main agenda of which should include: To discuss steps towards the development of collective principles in world affairs; To discuss the maintenance of world peace, the strengthening of global and regional security, strategic arms control and joint efforts to combat terrorism, extremism and other major challenges and threats; To explore the global economic situation and ways to overcome the economic crisis and oppose turning the economy into an instrument of pressure and confrontation; To discuss issues such as environmental protection and combating climate change and ensuring the security of the global information space.³⁹

³⁸ Лисоволик Я. Глобальная перестройка ценностей: как изменить институциональную структуру? (Lisovolik Ya. Global restructuring of values: how to change the institutional structure?). Режим доступа: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/globalnaya-perestroyka-tsennostey/>

³⁹ Путин В. 75 лет Великой Победы: общая ответственность перед историей и будущим (75 Years of the Great Victory: Shared Responsibility to History and the Future). Режим доступа: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63527>

From what Vladimir Putin and Russia's relevant experts expressed about the United Nations, you can see Russia attaches great importance to the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, which has kept the Soviet Union on a par with the United States since World War II and allowed Russia to play a key role in international affairs, which also shows their strong concern that Russia may lose its permanent membership of the Security Council as some countries show strong dissatisfaction with the degraded functioning of the United Nations and demand deep reforms. But they do not reflect on the factors that have led to the deterioration of the functioning of the United Nations and the decline of the Security Council's credibility in the maintenance of international peace and security.

In addition to the UN, Russian experts continue to pin their hopes on the BRICS mechanism. Timofey Bordachev and others believe that with the decline of the ability of the US and Europe to maintain world order and the intensification of international conflicts by COVID-19, regional powers are playing an increasingly prominent role in global governance, and it is urgent to promote the transformation of BRICS countries into a global governance mechanism. For Russia, BRICS further emphasizes its non-Western identity, offering an opportunity to resist more openly the rules of Western-centrism and to re-establish the world order. At the same time, the BRICS countries are also important economic partners of Russia, which is important for it to reduce the impact of Western sanctions. In addition, Russia can use the BRICS platform to conduct security dialogue with Western countries. Bordachev and others called for the BRICS countries to first step up internal peace dialogue and fill the global governance vacuum through multilateral negotiations in the face of increasing conflicts worldwide and the declining role of numerous international organizations and forums. Second, it is necessary to accelerate the establishment of a new financial system with local currency settlement in bilateral trade and reduce the dominant role of the US dollar in the international financial system. Third, relations with other partners should be developed within the framework of BRICS Plus,

and sustained dialogue should be conducted with countries that play an important role in addressing specific global and regional issues. Finally, non-traditional security issues such as climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and pandemics should be addressed and incentives created to develop humanitarian connections.⁴⁰

Alexander Lukin, on the other hand, went on to preach the idea of "Greater Eurasia". He believes that from the perspective of global trends, the "greater Eurasia" process is irreversible and more importantly offers Russia many advantages: (1) Becoming an independent pole in world politics is in line with Russia's historical role; (2) "Greater Eurasia" is very close to the economic system of Russia, requiring the state to play an active role in the economy; (3) "Greater Eurasia" could develop Russia's Siberia and far East; (4) In terms of security interests, "Greater Eurasia", to some extent, can fill the vacuum created after the collapse of the Soviet Union, respond to the demand for a multipolar world, and establish a friendly external environment for peaceful political and economic development.⁴¹

Dmitry Yevstafiev, a professor at the Russian Higher School of Economics, sees the challenges COVID-19 poses to the political and economic models of countries in the Eurasian region, and proposes five strategic proposals for the future development of Eurasian integration: (1) The current crisis has created a mix of political, economic and social risks, and the integration of states in the economic field alone is not feasible. Urgent measures are needed to coordinate societies and to bring cooperation in the field of security into the Euro-Asian integration system; (2) The post-Soviet model of maintaining social stability by resources development and redistribution is no longer feasible, and reindustrialization is the

most promising model of development that can generate synergies among multiple countries; (3) It is not realistic for individual countries to develop fuel and energy complexes, which will also harm economic sustainability. It is necessary to accelerate the formulation of a common Eurasian energy policy and transport policy; (4) The Eurasian countries must improve the security and management and coordination of their financial systems, investment, and settlement systems; (5) Eurasian countries need to form a digital management and public information system to prevent information manipulation.⁴²

Referring to the trilateral relationship between Russia and the United States, Dmitry Trenin stressed that for the foreseeable future, Russia's main geopolitical problem was not confrontation with the United States but a balance with China. To avoid becoming part of a China-centric power bloc and maintain international balance, Moscow must improve relations with major European countries to reduce its dependence on China. Balancing must become a key principle of Russia's foreign policy in the coming decades. Russia needs to promote "balanced diplomacy" from two aspects: On the one hand, Russia needs to manage its equal relationship with a more powerful partner, China. He acknowledged that close cooperation with China strengthened Russia's geopolitical and geo-economic position at a time when Russia was at a loggerhead with the West and that it was in Moscow's interest to work closely with China. But he also stressed that, even so, Moscow should not go out of its way to accommodate all of Beijing's wishes. Beijing has not joined Washington in imposing sanctions on Moscow, but it has always put its interests first in conducting economic cooperation with Russia. China's economic power is far greater than Russia's, and Russia should work with China without relying too much on it. Russia absolutely cannot accept it as part of China's sphere of influence. On the other hand, to maintain

⁴⁰ Бордачев Т. и др. БРИКС и пандемия соперничества (Bordachev T. et al., BRICS and the rivalry pandemic). Режим доступа: <https://www.globalaffairs.ru/articles/briks-i-pandemiya-sopernichestva/>

⁴¹ Lukin, Alexander. Sino-Russian Cooperation as the Basis for Greater Eurasia. Mode of access: <https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/humaff/30/2/article-pl174.xml>

⁴² Евстафьев Д. Мир после коронавируса: будущее постсоветской Евразии (Evstafiev D. The world after coronavirus: the future of post-Soviet Eurasia). Режим доступа: <https://eurasia.expert/mir-posle-koronavirusa-budushchee-postsovetskoy-evrazii/>

international balance in the new bipolar system, Russia should seek global balance and develop its relations with Europe, India, Japan, and other regions and countries. In terms of Russia-EU relations, it is necessary to give up the idea of undermining the EU and NATO from within, actively conduct dialogue with Germany, France, Italy, and other countries, change the propaganda policy towards the EU, to reverse the attitude of European elites towards Russia, and gradually restore Europe to become the main external source of Russia's economic modernization. Japan and India are as important as Europe, and Moscow should seek to cooperate with Tokyo and New Delhi in developing maritime areas adjacent to the Eurasian continent instead of seeing it as an American appendage. Russia's geopolitical thought has always been focused on the mainland, so it should take into account the ocean factors. Closer ties with these countries would help Russia maintain the geopolitical balance in Eurasia.⁴³ Although Trenin's argument does not mention "Indo-Pacific", it can be seen that its core idea is similar to the "Indo-Pacific strategy" proposed by the United States.

Echoing Trenin, Andrei Kortunov proposed three principles for Russia to deal with the confrontation between China and the United States: (1) Russia should not only avoid provoking China and the United States but also prevent China and the United States from provoking each other. If China-US relations continue to deteriorate, Russia will face risks in international stability, regional crisis, nuclear non-proliferation, world economy, technological development, and other aspects. (2) The Relationship between Russia and China should be viewed rationally. The interests of Russia and China are both consistent and different. Strengthening the cooperation between the two countries does not mean the establishment of a formal military and political alliance. (3) Facing the trend of the new bipolar pattern, Russia should actively cooperate with the European Union to offset the power of

polarization.⁴⁴ "Russia cannot copy the Chinese model because of differences in population and cultural background," he says. "It's only option is to co-operate with the culturally similar West. Russia's future leaders will build closer ties with the West only if they aim to modernize their society and economy."⁴⁵

Artem Lukin, Deputy Dean of the Institute of International and Regional Studies at far Eastern Federal University, gave his views on the future of China-Russia relations. In his view, there are several possibilities for Russia-China strategic relations in the next few years: (1) Russia-China strategic partnership will sustain, and the strength of the Axis between Russia and China will remain unchanged or even strengthen. The rivalry between Russia-China and the US may become more acute because of ideological differences. (2) Russian-US reconciliation. Although relations between Russia and the US are at their lowest ebb and are unlikely to recover quickly shortly, normalization is not impossible in the long term. As China continues to "rise", the US will come under increasing structural pressure, which is by far the biggest threat to its standing in the international system. As a result, the United States may be forced to seek cooperation with Russia to meet the great challenge posed by China. (3) The political systems of Russia and China diverge. After Mr. Putin's departure, Russia is likely to transition from a liberal autocracy to a liberal democracy more compatible with Western values, weakening political ties between China and Russia. (4) The economic and technological imbalance between Russia and China may endanger political equality. The latter scenario is the most dangerous for Russia because it involves Russia's status, honor, national dignity, and, above all, identity.

⁴³ Тренин Д. Как России удержать равновесие в посткризисном биполярном мире (Trenin D. How can Russia keep the balance in the post-crisis bipolar world). Режим доступа: <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/81541>

⁴⁴ Kortunov, Andrey. About the Wise Monkey Who Came Down from the Mountain. Mode of access: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/about-the-wise-monkey-who-came-down-from-the-mountain/>

⁴⁵ Kortunov, Andrey. Cooperation with the West Will Only Happen When Russia Modernises. Mode of access: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/interview/andrey-kortunov-cooperation-with-the-west-will-only-happen-when-russia-modernises/>

(5) Friendly relations between Russia and China may or may not last for a long time, but neither country is sure to want to fall into an antagonistic relationship, as history has shown that confrontation can be costly.⁴⁶

Conclusion

It can be seen that the Russian strategic community has given deep consideration to the full impact of COVID-19 and drawn some important conclusions.

At the international level, the comprehensive strength of the US and Europe will be severely hit by COVID-19. The transatlantic alliance may be increasingly loosened, which will undoubtedly relieve the long-term strategic pressure faced by Russia. Faced with multiple challenges such as restructuring of global industrial chains, shrinking external markets, and deteriorating relations with the West, China may face an inflection point after years of rapid development. The relative easing of the east-west strategic pressure will greatly improve Russia's international environment. The world order is accelerating from being led by the United States to being out of order. It is full of internal contradictions within the international mechanism, weakened capacity for behavior, and an uncertain future of development, which provide great possibilities for Russia to achieve its own strategic goals. For Russia, a more "fragmented" world would make it a better great power and better able to maneuver around the world. In addition, the western liberal values that once dominated the center of international thought are being eroded, and the conservative ideology in Russia has gained unprecedented space for expansion.

At the level of globalization, after the trade war between China and the United States highlighted the differences in globalization, the globalization process that has already been blocked will come to a sudden halt again due to coVID-19. Global supply chains, industrial chains, and value chains that have been operating for many years will gradually break up and be reorganized, and the localization

and regionalization of production will be strengthened accordingly. Russia is a loser in the post-Cold War tide of globalization. It has always been aloof and even resentful of globalization. The COVID-19 outbreak has further strengthened Russia's self-perception as a "fortress under siege", and the thought of the demise of globalism will continue to spread in Russia. For Russia, the weakening or even interruption of globalization can better highlight its advantages.

Based on the above judgment, the Russian strategic community has proposed new ideas to use the coVID-19 effect to change the unfavorable international environment and layout for the "post-COVID-19 era". Returning to the route of keeping a low profile after the Crimean War in 1856, enriching the ideological content of the great power; Propagating the west's weak response to the epidemic, predicting the imminent collapse of the liberal order, and winning more space for thought and public opinion for Russian conservatism; Preserving the central role of the UN in the global governance system and maintain Russia's permanent membership in the Security Council. At the same time, Russia will continue to deepen the Eurasian integration process, take advantage of the multiple pressures faced by Eurasian countries, take urgent measures to coordinate anti-epidemic actions, and introduce security cooperation into the Eurasian integration process. And it will cleverly plan the triangular relationship between Russia, China, and the United States, maintain an independent, balance, and multi-faceted relationship, and watch tiger fighting, which will prevent it from becoming a vassal of China and to establish a balanced relationship with it. In time, Russia will gradually reduce and eventually end the confrontation with the United States, strengthen its ties between traditional civilizations, seek new cooperation fulcrum, and jointly deal with new global threats.

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МИРОВОЙ ПОРЯДОК В «ПОСТПАНДЕМИЧЕСКОМ МИРЕ» И СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИЙ ВЫБОР РОССИИ

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<p>Информация о статье:</p> <p><i>Поступила в редакцию:</i></p> <p>24 октября 2020</p> <p><i>Принята к печати:</i></p> <p>3 июня 2021</p>	<p>Аннотация: Распространение COVID-19 обострило существующие глобальные конфликты и глубоко изменило глобальный политический, экономический ландшафт и ландшафт безопасности, развивавшийся после окончания холодной войны. В последнее время российские лидеры и эксперты аналитических центров много рассуждали о международном ландшафте, мировом порядке, процессе глобализации и отношениях между крупными странами в «постпандемическую эпоху». По мере ускорения процесса изменения мирового порядка Россия сталкивается с новыми стратегическими возможностями, впервые после окончания холодной войны. Со стратегической точки зрения в новых обстоятельствах России необходимо изменить свое внешнеполитическое мышление, укрепить свою позицию в Совете Безопасности, углубить евразийское интеграционное сотрудничество, умело управлять трехсторонними отношениями между Россией, Китаем и США, уравновесить отношения с Китаем и стремиться к улучшению российско-американских отношений.</p>
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<p>Ключевые слова: постпандемический мир; международные отношения; мировой порядок; Россия; стратегический выбор</p>	

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