

WORLD AND REGIONAL CENTERS OF POWER AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE SITUATION IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS

CENTRAL EURASIA: GLOBALIZATION AND GEOPOLITICAL EVOLUTION

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The profound changes going on in the geopolitical and geo-economic structures of the world community, as well as the transformation of sociopolitical systems are evidence that the world is entering a qualitatively new geopolitical era—the era of globalization.

A new planetary “polycivilization” is arising on the basis of an intrinsic combination of unity and indivisibility of the world community, on the one hand, and diversification and pluralism of centers, nations, and religious-cultural communities, on the other. The information and

telecommunication revolution in the industrially developed part of the world is gradually turning the post-industrial society into a high-tech information community. By making use of the latest achievements in science and technology, globalization is bringing countries and entire civilizations closer together in real time and is encouraging them to find a joint and adequate response to urgent global problems.

Globalization is not only changing the development and appearance of the world economy, but also its structure, since it is creating global

interdependence, whereby communities are integrating into a single whole.

But globalization is manifesting itself in different ways in each state and region—in some it is encompassing the economic sphere more, while in others, new technologies are being introduced faster. What is more, different countries and regions are ready and willing to become incorporated into the globalization processes at different

times. For certain historical reasons—political isolation or self-isolation, technological and economic potential, inbred traditions of autarchy—some countries remain on the periphery of globalization. Moreover, globalization today is accelerating at such a rate that the gap between the countries and regions spearheading this process and the rest of the world, that is, the biggest chunk, is widening with every passing year.

The West's Geohistorical Leap and the Appearance of the North-South Geopolitical Factor

From the geopolitical viewpoint, the rich North, the so-called Golden Billion, and the developing poor South have already taken shape on a global scale, whereby polarization along the geopolitical North-South line is becoming increasingly manifest. Here we are seeing the inevitable results of the gigantic geohistorical leap, when during the era of great geographic discoveries, the West, in the aftermath of the industrial revolution, took giant strides along the path of scientific and technological progress. At first, in the 17th-20th centuries, Spain and Portugal, followed by England, France, Germany, and Holland, acquired maritime power in the form of commercial and naval fleets, which allowed them to establish their hegemony in the World Ocean. And in the second half of the 20th century, the West, in the form of the U.S., also achieved substantial supremacy in the air and outer space. All of this made it possible for the West to exercise military and political control over almost the entire South and East for a long period of time. Only the ominous growls of the two world wars woke up the hopelessly lagging and largely colonized countries of the Third World. Beginning their independent development for the most part in the second half of the 20th century, these countries are also being incorporated into the globalization processes today. At the same time, until the mid-21st century, the East's numerical predominance over the West and the South's over the North will continue to grow, whereby in inverse correlation to their economic strength and wealth. This, as Russian scientist Yu.V. Iakovets believes, may be the root of the main inter-civilizational contradiction of the current century.¹

For these states, globalization has objective and subjective sides, both positive and negative. Whereas the first is a natural and historical consequence of the world's growing interdependence due to the increasing financial flows between countries and regions, the second is revealed in the concept of the geopolitics of globalism. Here the objective process of globalization acts as one of the main geostrategic mechanisms of the West's hegemony—primarily of the U.S.'s in cooperation with the European Union—over the rest of the world in order to establish a new one polar world order. Along with economic and military-political ways of putting pressure on disobedient outcasts, the West is attempting to impose its system of values on other civilizations of the South and East, which is largely alien to their deep-rooted cultural and historical traditions.

¹ See: Yu.V. Iakovets, *Globalizatsiia i vzaimodeistvie tsivilizatsiy*, Moscow, 2003, p. 31.

On the whole, in the present era, globalization according to the Western understanding means the formation of a homogeneous economic and sociopolitical environment on the planet controlled for all intents and purposes by several hundred transnational mega corporations.

The main driving forces of globalization²—transnational corporations (TNC) and nongovernmental organizations, which in fact are skillfully and unobtrusively controlled by corresponding government structures—are crossing state borders with unprecedented ease and interfering both in the economic and sociopolitical life of countries and societies, motivating this by claiming to be helping resolve the problems generated by the growing interdependence. Whereby, all the states, particularly those with a transitional economy, are obliged to unwaveringly observe the so-called Golden Corset rule drawn up by the West. The thing about this corset is that it comes in one size for all, which is giving rise to an equivocal reaction in several countries, particularly in those trying to find their own development path.³

It should be noted that the principles of a free world market and general democratic values are being applied selectively, depending on the West's geopolitical and geo-economic interests. Globalization in its current form is only intensifying the inequality between the rich North and the poor South. It is in no way resolving the problem of the current blatant global inequality between the dozen leading nations and the hundreds of the South and East only just beginning to modernize their economies and even then wallowing somewhere between the late feudalism and developed capitalism. These countries, which are frequently weak economically, are going through a torturous process, falling under the pressure of globalization like a patient undergoing surgery without anesthetics. What is more, national governments are sometimes compelled to and are beginning to divvy up power—political, socioeconomic, and even military—with big business circles concentrated in TNCs and in influential shadow, as well as entirely legal international organizations.

In the current century, it appears entirely futile to hope that the poles of wealth and poverty in the world as a whole, never mind in individual countries and regions, will draw closer together, since this gap is only becoming wider. And the prospects for the coming decades give little reason to hope that the poor countries will come closer to the level of the rich states. What is more, in some countries, several negative phenomena are observed: de-industrialization of the economy and mass unemployment, loss of economic independence and dollarization of the financial system, a brain and capital drain, degradation of national cultures, a breakdown in the moral foundations of society, mass starvation, and so on.

Under conditions when the world has entered a qualitatively new stage in its evolutionary development—the globalization era—traditional geopolitical processes have acquired entirely new forms. Along with the multi-century traditional and severe military-political confrontation between the telurocratic East and the talassocratic West, a new geopolitical factor—North-South—has appeared, whereby it has no clearly marked boundaries.

Central Eurasia as an Entity of the West-East Geopolitical Confrontation

The Central Eurasian mega region, which includes the Black Sea, Caucasian, Caspian, and Central Asian regions, is one of the main theaters of operation in this confrontation. There are three differ-

² A.I. Utkin, *Globalizatsiia: protsess i osmyslenie*, Logos Publishers, Moscow, 2002, p. 56.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

ent racial-civilizational and religious areas with common geohistorical destinies in this geopolitical space: the Christian Orthodox Slavic, the Islamic Turkic, and the Arian Iranian (partially Judaism and Buddhism).

The geopolitical center of this mega region is the Caspian Region (*Heart of Central Eurasia*) located at the crossroads between Europe and Asia on the boundary between two mega civilizations—Christian and Islamic—which for dozens of centuries have played an important role in the military-political and socioeconomic processes going on in the vast Central Eurasian geopolitical space. In so doing, this region, which includes Southern Russia, the Caucasus, the western part of Central Asia, and Northern Iran, synthesizes four different physical-geographical elements: mountain (the Caucasus), sea (the Caspian), steppe (Southern Russia), and desert (Central Asia). What is more, the Caspian states have common continental features of national history, statehood traditions, and economic interests which differ dramatically from the Western, Atlantic civilization.

For dozens of centuries, an essentially ongoing process of expansion and retraction of this gigantic monolith has been going on throughout the Central Eurasian geopolitical space. The fight of the West's and East's geopolitical forces went on with varying degrees of success. World history has already seen the experience of the West's military-civilizational encroachment into this mega region. In the last centuries of the first millennium B.C., the talassocratic West tried to break the ethnic and religious insularity of the tellurocratic East by means of its Hellenization. But the czars and people of Asia joined together against the mighty and arrogant West (T. Mommsen), and as a result Hellenization was "digested" by the East. In the Middle Ages, particularly in the 13th-16th centuries, during the peak of the Mongol and then Ottoman Empire, the East managed to break through to the borders of Europe, thus threatening the very existence of West European civilization. Later, during the Crimean (1853-1856), First (1914-1918), and Second (1939-1945) World Wars, and the Cold War (1946-1991), the West's geopolitical attack was pulled up short at the gates of Central Eurasia—in the Caucasus.

The zone of combat on the borders of the continents between the Caspian and Black seas—the Caucasus⁴—still plays an important geostrategic role, since control over it opens the way to penetration into the depths of the Middle and Near East, access to the Persian Gulf and the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as to the flat expanses of Southern Russia in the south.

What is more, as a geopolitical key to Central Eurasia, the Caucasus, due to the extremely mottled ethnic and confessional composition of its population, was and continues to be one of the most conflict-prone hot spots on the planet. In turn, the same picture can also be seen in the desert expanses of Central Asia bordering on the Caspian, where ethnic and drug trafficking problems are still extremely urgent. At the same time, as a Russian expert in geopolitics A. Dugin points out, control over the entire Caspian-Black Sea expanse—the Caucasus—which opens up access to the warm seas is a strategic task of the global confrontation between Atlanticism and Eurasianism.⁵

As for the Caspian region, during the past three centuries it has been a target of acute geopolitical rivalry between the great and regional powers striving to establish their control over this geostrategically important region of Central Eurasia. But whereas this region was not considered one of the main areas of geopolitical upheaval at that time (these were Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Near and Middle East), in the 20th century, particularly at the turn of the past and present centuries, it has become one of the most important geostrategic factors capable of changing the entire traditional configuration of Central Eurasia's geopolitical landscape.

⁴ K. Haushofer, *O geopolitike*, Mysl Publishers, Moscow, 2001, p. 128.

⁵ A.G. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki. Geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii. Myslit' prostranstvom*, ARKTOGEIA Publishers, Moscow, 1999, p. 349.

Central Eurasia in the New Big Geopolitical Game

The Caspian Region was and continues to be the most convenient springboard for a geopolitical leap from the north through Central Asia to the Indian Ocean. Geostrategically linked to the Mediterranean Sea (the Turkish factor), the Black Sea (the Azerbaijani-Georgian factor), the Indian Ocean (the Iranian factor), and Europe (the Russian factor), the Caspian Region is one of the epicenters of the geopolitical contradictions of the contemporary world and a confrontation between Atlanticism and Eurasianism, which is still latent in nature. The significant increase in the number of countries which have geopolitical and geo-economic interests here is an important external factor with a strong influence on the region.

On the whole, this region is a geopolitical space in which not only the national economic interests of the South Caucasian and Central Asian states meet, but also those of several leading Western and Eastern nations. The geostrategic imperatives of the only superpower of the contemporary world—the U.S. (and NATO as a whole)—are also designated here. Along with the traditional geopolitical players—Russia, the U.S., Great Britain, Turkey, and Iran—France, Germany, China, Japan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and several other countries are carrying out increasingly greater economic activity in the Caspian, which in turn is creating a kind of geopolitical puzzle and significantly complicating the geopolitical situation in this region.

With respect to participation in developing the Caspian's oil and gas resources and in their transportation to the world markets, the problem of delimiting the sea is attracting special attention and causing both latent and open competition not only among the coastal countries, but also among the leading nations, as well as among several regional states for control over these energy resources. Oil, which is the "blood of war" in wartime and without which development of the economy is inconceivable in peacetime, became the most important geostrategic factor in world policy as early as the First and Second World Wars. The Cold War was followed by the era of "oil diplomacy," which under the conditions of nascent globalization and the formation of a new world order will long remain a powerful tool of influence on international relations. The existing and planned oil-and-gas-pipeline and supply configurations (the Baku-Supsa, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Novorossiisk, Tengiz-Novorossiisk, West Kazakhstan-West China oil pipelines, the Trans-Caspian Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran pipeline, the Baku-Erzurum, Turkmenistan-Iran gas pipelines, the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline, as well as TRACECA, the North-South transport system, and so on) traced out by competing geopolitical forces, as well as the foreign military bases in several South Caucasian and Central Asian states, are significant geostrategic factors which can help the region's countries to gain a firmer foothold.

A continuous link is observed between the Caspian oil factor and the geopolitical processes going on in the current century in the main oil-producing region of the Eastern hemisphere—the Greater Middle East. At the same time, the intense interest in the Caspian Region is related not only, and at times not so much, to the presence of large hydrocarbon reserves (a mere 4-7% of the world reserves), as to its key position in the geopolitical breakdown of world forces competing for control over Central Eurasia.

Located in the center of the geopolitical split in the post-Soviet expanse, the Caspian region became an integral part in the 1990s of the new Big Game in world politics being played according to the classical rules of geopolitics. This was when Atlanticism began putting pressure on the Caspian Region, applying it from three main directions: from the west—from the Mediterranean Sea (via Turkey), from the south—from Arabia (via Iraq), and from the east—from Pakistan (via Afghanistan and Central Asia).

According to A.S. Panarin, the Caspian has currently become the epicenter of pirate games. From the geopolitical viewpoint, “the discovery of deposits of oil there is attracting forces which have never before been able to penetrate so far into interior of the Continent. The idea of an oil route from the Caspian to the West and to the East and joining two oceans—the Atlantic and the Pacific—is nothing more than an attempt by the Sea Powers to lop off an unprecedented large chunk of the Continent. There is already no helping those who do not understand that we are talking about the unprecedented aggression of the Sea, which intends to chop the Continent up into pieces. The initiators of this project want not simply to draw a new communication line between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and in so doing reinforce the achievements of Westernization. They want to prevent the possibility of a new consolidation of the Continent along the Indo-European vertical, since the Caspian project is directly aimed at cutting through this vertical, intercepting it.”⁶

Under contemporary conditions, when ideology finally gave way to the geopolitical imperatives of the leading Western and Eastern nations in the system of international relations which developed at the beginning of the 21st century, their real geopolitical presence in Central Eurasia can only be ensured by establishing control over this region. In order to resolve this geostrategic task, various competing geopolitical forces are taking advantage of the forces of separatism and international terrorism gaining strength today.

The past decades are characterized by significant activation of militant separatism and international terrorism, which are extremely dangerous for the whole of mankind. It is the sovereign state that is a victim of priority of the principle of national self-determination. Several countries of Central Eurasia, particularly the South Caucasian states which have recently gained their independence, i.e. Azerbaijan and Georgia, have already fully experienced all the “delights” of forced implementation of the principle of “self-determination of national minorities.” The increase in number of new marginal state formations caused by the fragmentation of sovereign states could in the near future lead to even more chaos in the world community.

On the whole, religious fundamentalism, unbridled nationalism and racism, ethnic intolerance, the formation of centers of international terrorism and organized crime, economic inequality, the demographic explosion, uncontrollable migration processes, environmental collisions, and the exhaustion of natural resources could lead to world chaos. Whereby there is no guarantee that even supposedly prosperous regions of the world which uphold globalization will escape outbursts of conflict situations in their various modifications. It is enough to recall the dramatic events of recent years in the U.S., Great Britain, France, Spain, Russia, and other countries relating to international terrorist attacks and outbreaks of ethnic and inter-confessional conflicts.

The contemporary political map of the world is becoming increasingly reminiscent of an extremely colorful mosaic, where global and regional nations are living next to small states also affected to one extent or another by globalization and inter-civilizational problems. They are being manifested under qualitatively new geopolitical conditions, when after the collapse of the world socialist system and its main support structure, the Soviet Union, the U.S. made its claim to a monocentrist world by declaring almost the entire world a zone of its strategic interests.

This is particularly obvious in the expansive Central Eurasian geopolitical space, which is rich in natural resources. Here the West has already designated several states which it plans to turn and in fact has already turned into its geostrategic outposts for further penetration into and fragmentation of the entire Greater Eurasian geopolitical space. This trend was given a new and powerful boost in terms of concentrating the West’s geopolitical strength in the form of the U.S. and NATO after the tragic and, as it turned out, fatal events for several countries of 11 September, 2001 in the United States. The

⁶ A.S. Panarin, *Global'noe politicheskoe prognozirovanie*, Algorithm Publishers, Moscow, 2000, p. 275.

wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, along with the U.S.'s and NATO's real military presence in several countries of Central Eurasia, are helping to slowly but surely enclose this mega region geopolitically from the west, south, and east. Iran is the last link, control over which could close the "Anaconda coil" around Central Eurasia.

As an alternative to a one-polar world, the conception of a global geosystem of a multipolar world is being put forward, that is, a re-partition of spheres of influence on the planet between the newly forming geopolitical centers, one of which might be Central Eurasia. At the same time, not a single country or geopolitical center is currently capable of independently fully defining and resolving its geostrategic and geo-economic problems on the international arena without taking into account the diversity and specifics of the largest civilizational communities. In the end, all of this might lead to the formation of civilizational unions, and in the most diverse and unexpected combinations, for not a single of the currently existing large civilizations, be it Slavic-Orthodox, Islamic, Confucian, Hindu, or another, can independently counteract the onslaught of all-out Westernization based on the principle of "*The West and the Rest*."

We should also take account of the important fact that if peaceful ways to raise the standard of living in the non-Western "rest" of the world do not yield the anticipated results, mass disillusionment may soon take place, not only in globalization, but in the existing world order as a whole, which is still largely supported by the U.N. This disillusionment could escalate into bitterness, thus stimulating an increase in militarization right down to poor countries acquiring weapons of mass destruction. If those who have nothing to lose decide to use violence, this could pose the greatest threat to the whole of mankind and not only to its prosperous Golden Billion. This is even more important in light of the all-out onslaught of the forces of international terrorism, which is increasingly acquiring the beastly features of an entirely new sociopolitical phenomenon of global dimensions—geoterrorism, the brain-child of geopolitics of the 21st century.

In Lieu of a Summary

It is possible that if the geopolitical processes in Central Eurasia evolve according to a negative scenario, the split between the civilizations, that is, the line of future fronts during the imminent clashes of civilizations, according to Samuel Huntington's conception, which are equally dangerous for the West and for the East, will occur precisely in this region.⁷ After saying farewell to the Era of the Beast in the past 20th century, currently globalizing mankind could meet with an even more sinister era, the Era of the Devil.

Only harmonious diversity of a multipolar world in which each civilizational community is an integral part of the whole global expanse can ensure all-embracing international security and an adequate response to the real threats to the world community posed by international terrorism and by possible imminent inter-civilizational clashes.

⁷ S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster Ltd, New York, 1996.