



THE WORLD IN 2021: REASONS FOR DRAMATIC CHANGE

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Rapid changes in the geopolitical and economic landscapes and an accelerating transformation of the world as a whole, which is typical for any endgame, in this case the end of a 30-year post-Cold War period, complicate near-term forecasting. Nevertheless, it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a more dramatic effect on de-globalisation than any other factor, awakening the global elites and the general public to the importance of state sovereignty and secure national borders.

In a manner of speaking, we are seeing a return to the 1960s, when the world was guided by the common denominator of universal UN conventions, and the superpowers' multifaceted confrontation curbed the policy of ideological universalism, which rejects the idea of the world's cultural and civilisational diversity, even though at that time diversity was limited to two ideologies and development models based on various products of European political theory and practice.

International relations are gradually returning to the traditional norm adjusted for the accumulated negative experience and changes in the historical context. This could well describe the new stage in the world's development, but we cannot discount the attempts to carry on the no-change policy based on old instincts and prejudices, primarily by the Western elites. Evidence of this are a recent statement by German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer about talking with Russia from positions of strength, and remarks by UK Ambassador to the United States Karen Pierce, who said that China and Russia must not emerge as the winners from the coronavirus pandemic.

At this point, there are several safe reference points in international evolution forecasts for 2021, which will be "a time of testing," as the new US President aptly described it.



1. The world will have to deal with a fundamental crisis provoked by the pandemic and the uncertainty of its outcome, which will transform the economic landscape and the socioeconomic policies of governments at all levels. The historical West will suffer the greatest economic impact because of the structure of the western economies dominated by the service sector and specific features of the western way of life, and also due to a relative ineptness at making long-term political decisions, including in the field of strategic planning and mobilisation readiness. In both cases, societies such as China with its high level of social discipline will have the advantage, considering that China returned to the economic growth trajectory already in the third quarter of 2020 and its GDP is expected to become the world's largest by 2028, and bearing in mind that China outstripped the United States in terms of purchasing power parity back in 2016.

2. Therefore, the situation will objectively strengthen the multipolarity trend. At the same time, the United States will likely shrink back to its national borders after a period of its imperial post-war expansion which, judging by the recent developments, primarily Trump's conservative revolution and the upcoming liberal response to it, was an aberration anyway when it comes to the isolationist tradition of the fundamental American mentality. The very concept of American exceptionalism (Manifest Destiny) contradicts the idea of universalism: everything is clicking back into place, even if after a 75-year deviation, which only confirms the non-linear nature of historical processes, just as the significance of the factor of inevitability/fate or the historical mission of great powers which are assigned certain roles by history itself. Of course, it would be better if they were aware of the boundaries of their roles. For example, the bipolarity of the 20th century was predicted by Alexis de



Tocqueville in his *Democracy in America*, published in 1835. It is also obvious that after the Russian revolution history assigned the United States a balancing role in European affairs, which has run its course. It could be a coincidence, but the Soviet Union's lifespan lasted as long as the unofficial US empire. Overall, it will have to deal with the unbearable impact of global domination in modern conditions, which will conceivably discourage other countries from taking the same path.

3. As in the case of the Soviet Union in the latter half of the 1980s and in the 1990s, internal developments in the United States are becoming a major factor of global politics, including in light of destabilisation risks. The response of the liberal elites, just as any response to revolutionary processes, is fraught with an aggravation of the civil conflict, up to and including a Convention of States to propose constitutional amendments, which is stipulated in the US Constitution. The Democratic Party and its gerontocratic leadership are behaving like the Bourbons after the Restoration: "They have learned nothing and have forgotten nothing." Evidence of this is their striving to reduce American democracy to the apologia (justification) of Congress, the rejection of the voters' right to protest, which is denounced as sedition, and vindictiveness towards Donald Trump and his electorate, who are being attacked through the traditional media and the corporate censorship of the IT giants. All of this shows that Trump's supporters believe in massive and system-wide fraud during the election, when two-thirds of votes were cast by mail. The uncomfortable truth is that it is not facts but their interpretation that matter in politics. And lastly, the elite's problem is not Trump but his electorate, which is here to stay.



It is impossible to forecast how Democrats will govern the country, including in light of the midterm congressional elections due in two years, contrary to the will of Trump's electorate comprised of native-born white Americans, who have been hit the hardest by the mindless globalisation and seem to have nothing to lose. Therefore, the Democratic Party's majority in both houses of Congress is in fact overkill and a curse in disguise. Continued reliance on fringe groups, ethnic minorities, women and young people could only compound the problems of the Biden administration, just as bringing the colour revolution blueprint to the United States in the form of BLM violence, which Trump's supporters take as a reason to speak about the authorities' double standards. Twitter and Facebook bans have encouraged Americans to flock to Telegram, just as the American youth, dissatisfied with Trump's policies, had moved their online conversations to China's TikTok networking service. It appears that foreign presence in this sphere is a residual consequence of globalisation in American politics, which the people will be using to defend their freedom of expression.

4. At any rate, the Biden administration will likely attempt to consolidate the Western alliance, or more precisely Western elites, which will be perceived appropriately by Trump's supporters, defining yet another dimension of internationalising the US internal affairs. It cannot be ruled out that in return, Trumpists will try to strengthen ties with anti-systemic movements and forces in the allied countries, as Trump's former adviser Steve Bannon is already doing.

On the global level, the policy of "normalising" trans-Atlantic relations could take the form of tougher anti-Russia sanctions and rhetoric and increasing military and political tensions in Russia-West relations and hence in Europe. It is difficult to forecast a place or form of Democrats'



“liberal” interventions at the level of opportunistic military gambles after the pause taken by Trump. But it is most likely that pressure will be increased on Russia along the perimeter of its borders, especially considering Biden’s personal involvement in Ukraine during his term as Obama’s vice-president. At the same time, there are reasons to believe that Germany will remain a target of the US containment policy, including over the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project. Robert Gates, former defence secretary to Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, said recently that “Germany must be held to account.”

However, a desire to dispel the image of the United States as the “sick man” of the Western community and Biden’s attempts to look as an anti-Trump who will “make America normal again” and “the leading force in the world” could lead to practical actions, such as the preservation of the Russian-US arms control system and the easing of tensions around Iran, if not a return to the Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Other possible actions can include an end to the war in Yemen being waged by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the revival of the Madrid Quartet’s consolidated stand on a Palestinian-Israeli settlement, and the normalisation of the four Arab countries’ relations with Qatar (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt have formally endorsed this at the annual Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit in early January 2021). Washington will continue to pressure China for internal economic reasons, but this pressure will be relatively moderate and will take into account the interests of US allies, which have been seriously affected by US-China confrontation. In particular, the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment is ready for signing. It is expected to protect the allies from the effects of hostile US actions against



China. The agreement on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), signed between the US regional allies and China in late 2020, is seen as an element of stability in Asia Pacific within the foreseeable future. Consequently, it is unlikely that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which Trump has abandoned, will be revived given the new regional situation. But then, anything is possible.

The United States will likely revitalise diplomatic efforts at multilateral organisations, including at UN bodies such as the WHO and the Paris Climate Agreement. This work will compel Washington to practice moderation in global affairs. The idea of “a global summit of democracies,” if implemented, will be an abridged form of the Community of Democracies, which was created during the Clinton administration but never materialised, for understandable reasons but primarily because it could lead to the replacement/dissolution of the UN. Or it may become a strategic initiative that can divide the world for years to come.

5. One of the main goals of international interaction at the current stage will be effective joint efforts against the pandemic, including the creation and production of vaccines, while preventing any attempts to exploit the humankind’s current problems for self-serving purposes, let alone through illegal sanctions. But this is an ideal situation. On the other hand, we can redouble efforts to promote constructive interaction in this sphere on multilateral platforms within the framework of the EAEU and BRICS.

6. The potential for moderation can be discerned in Biden’s description of the fundamentally new global situation regarding policy towards Russia, where conditions are ripe for a reappraisal of values. Indicative of this are



the recent statements made by Fiona Hill, an expert on Russian affairs at the Brookings Institution (a Democratic Party think tank) and Senior Director for Russian and European affairs at Trump's National Security Council in 2017-2019, and by General Mark Milley, the current chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Milley said in an interview with The Wall Street Journal that "Russia is a great power" (Obama considered Russia a regional power) and expressed appreciation for the potential of the Russian Armed Forces, thereby closing the door on the new administration's military ventures fraught with a military conflict with Moscow. You cannot step into the same river twice, even though die-hard Russophobes may be encouraging this. It will be easier for Democrats to put an end to the anti-Russia hysterics after winning the election. In a manner of speaking, they have taken the place of Republicans, whom the Soviet Union found easier to deal with, which means that there is a flicker of hope for Russian-US relations.

7. Next year will be a period of turbulence for the European Union. The EU's ambitions to consolidate its status as a global power centre with potential comparable to that of the superpowers are unlikely to materialise. European political leaders failed to offer a realistic programme for solving the current problems, whereas internal differences can provoke a crisis of political leadership in this part of Europe. Both sides are yet to assess the consequences of Brexit, which have been moderated only slightly by the agreements reached between London and Brussels. The activities of the pan-European platforms – the OSCE and the Council of Europe – will become increasingly politicised, and the same is true for the European Court of Human Rights.



8. Most experts agree that transformation is underway in the post-Soviet space. It was for a reason that the Western capitals sharply reacted to Moscow's mediation in the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement and the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in the conflict area, which has strengthened Russia's historical role as a stabilising regional factor. The role of the EAEU, the CIS, the SCO and the CSTO is growing thanks to the consolidation of the member countries' efforts to deal with existing problems. The Greater Eurasian Partnership will enter a new phase of its movement towards the practical implementation of this major idea. The EAEU will continue to increase the number of its partners, including observer countries and the signatories of free trade zone agreements.

9. Instability in the Middle East will be exacerbated by the regional countries' failure to resolve socioeconomic problems, the persistent threat of terrorism and attempts to militarise the region. As a result of Trump's policy, several Arab countries will improve their ties with Israel and even open their diplomatic offices there in 2021.

10. Latin America will continue developing on the basis of the principle of unique commonality and multivariate development. However, the region's main problem – the development crisis – is unlikely to be settled with old methods, either left-wing or neoliberal ones.

11. Africa will continue developing as an important pillar of the multipolar world, and African countries will be making an increasingly active contribution to the formulation of international decisions. In 2021, active preparations will continue for the Second Russia-Africa Summit.

12. The Arctic will remain a vital area of international dialogue. Russia will launch the implementation of its Arctic Council chairmanship programme in 2021-2023.



13. One of the priority goals in 2021 will be to overcome the negative consequences of the pandemic on the global economy, which slumped by 4.5 percent in 2020, according to the OECD. Expert forecasts, as well as economic development projections by international organisations (IMF/WB, OECD and rating agencies) greatly vary because of the situation's changeability. Fundamental uncertainty regarding the pandemic and its cyclical dynamics is the main factor hindering reliable risk assessment both for 2021 and for a longer term. However, a rapid return to pre-pandemic indicators is obviously impossible, because some of the main industries in the global economy were put on ice last year, global value chains were broken, commodity and financial markets became excessively volatile, capital was fleeing the developing countries, more restrictive measures were taken and protectionist/isolationist policies gathered momentum. On the other hand, digital transformation, investment in the key technologies and online trade services, which gained traction last year, are extremely important for accelerating the global economic revival.

14. In light of these basic demands, we hope that it will be possible to focus more on sustainable development, green economy and climate change in 2021. Of great importance in this connection will be the Food Systems Summit, which is scheduled to take place in New York in September 2021. Russia will be energetically promoting a green agenda in agriculture.

An informed digitalisation of international relations, if implemented effectively, will promote new communications. In particular, FAO plans to launch an International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture in 2021, and the World Economic Forum will be moved from Davos to Singapore, which is more digitally advanced. Overall, professional organisers of



international platforms and forums believe that in 2021 some 46 percent of specialised events will be held in a hybrid format (a combination of actual experience at an event venue with a virtual element), 27 percent will be held online, and the rest will be held in the traditional in-person format, which so far inspires more confidence, especially when it comes to international negotiations.

15. Taking into account the new global reality, cultural diplomacy as a method of soft power used to promote national culture, national identity and cultural diversity will remain especially relevant, creating additional opportunities for boosting international cooperation. Of major importance for the advancement of the Russian cultural context in 2021 will be the 200th anniversary of the birth of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the 60th anniversary of Yuri Gagarin's space flight and the 75th anniversary of UNESCO. These are truly landmark dates.

Overall, the development of a multipolar world in 2021 and in the longer term will be closely associated with geopolitical competition, including in the context of addressing energy, economic, military, humanitarian, information, cultural and epidemiological challenges. When dealing with this situation, it is extremely important for the diplomatic practice to make the fullest possible use of the powerful nascent movement towards a world order without winners or losers, which will benefit the entire humanity. If the First World War had ended, as planned, with the establishment of this world order, humankind would have avoided the subsequent destructive catastrophes of the 20th century. A century later, we must find the wisdom and political will to abandon obsolete geopolitics with its big games and major strategies, which only imitate old and even ancient patterns (such as the Thucydides Trap).

