

SOME PECULIARITIES OF THE “COLD WAR 2”

*Gagik Terterov**

After the downfall of the USSR only the laziest commentators did not say something along the lines that the cold war is over and soon an era of peace and prosperity will follow. Given the economic and social collapse in all post-Soviet countries, if such era ever happened, then only very few have experienced it. However, in the context of the Ukraine crisis the expression “cold war” is being actively circulated in the information space, this time suggesting its resumption. Perhaps, the reason for such perception of the mass retailed cliché “cold war” is the ideological overtone of the standoff, since the whole thing then was presented as a struggle between the “free world” and “totalitarianism”, led by the “good empire” and “evil empire”.

Meanwhile, as a manifestation of a “basic geopolitical instinct”, the standoff of the main “cold war” players has a several centuries-long history and this has been reflected in some masterpieces of the world literature (e.g. the brilliantly written *Kim* by Rudyard Kipling). The mentioned not so adequate perception of the geopolitical standoff was in part due to a pre-determined timeline point, as it was implied that everything started after the World War II. Currently some researchers cast a doubt on this thesis and suggest that the “Cold War 1” started immediately after 1917, when the western countries began a struggle against

* Expert.

Bolshevik Russia [1]. Evidently, the historical geopolitical standoff continued in the “post-revolution” period, but it followed the classical rules and did not have the information/ideological and economic characteristics inherent to the “Cold War 1” as it is more commonly termed.

It is also true that there was a long period of hiatus after the “Cold War 1”, during which a liberal Russia could only watch what is happening in the world after its utter defeat. Only in the beginning of 2000s, after the leadership change in Kremlin, a revival of Russia’s “civilizational/geopolitical code” commenced, or to put it simpler, a process of sovereignization was initiated in the country. The beginning of a new cycle of the standoff or in our wording the “Cold War 2” has to be attributed to this very period, and unlike the previous one, it progresses asymmetrically, under conditions of a multipolar world formation [2, 3]. In its initial phase the resistance of the defeated was passive, sometimes even formal, but the situation started to change thereafter.

In order to uncover the general trends of this process, the chronology of some significant events, their summarized outcomes and Russia’s reaction to these developments is presented below.

A Brief Chronicle of Events

NATO Operation Allied Force against Yugoslavia (March – June 1999), resulted in disintegration of the country, many casualties and recognition of Kosovo, the political leadership of which looks at least unsavory in criminal respect in the light of human organs trade allegations that emerged in mass media. Due to political and economic weakness, Russia’s moves were limited to purely symbolic military (accelerated march of a paratroopers’ battalion to Pristina) and diplomatic (U-turn of Primakov’s plane) actions, which produced no results, obviously. With that

and the “color revolution” in Serbia, at least in the mid-term Russia lost a partner/ally in Balkans, which is close in civilizational terms. Conversely, the USA gained ground in the region and established a large military base in Kosovo (Camp Bondsteel), the personnel of which is suspected in such operations, as drugs transit from Afghanistan, etc.

The Afghan War (Operation Enduring Freedom), launched in response to 9/11 attacks was initially perceived by Russia (and the rest of the world) as some possibility to join efforts in struggle against terrorism. Moreover, NATO was provided with logistic and other support. However, the previous scenario recurred in somewhat different version: it is planned that after the US troops withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014, the USA will keep military bases there with up to 20,000 military personnel. Destabilization of the whole Central Asia is expected in this respect, which directly affects Russia. The American invasion in Afghanistan did not prevent the spread of international terrorism. Instead, it resulted in increased drug trafficking: experts estimate that Russian losses from heroin exceed casualties of the Soviet Armed Forces during the whole Afghan military campaign.

Operation Iraqi Freedom was launched in 2003 as an operation to destroy Iraq’s non-existing weapons of mass destructions. Russia was only able veto the relevant UN Security Council resolution. In 2011 the war was formally declared to be over. The American military bases remained in Iraq and the devastated country turned into a territory, where against the backdrop of ethnic and sectarian strife terrorist attacks happen on daily basis.

South Ossetia conflict marked the period of the so-called *proxy wars*, which the USA started to carry out by someone else's hands. The conflict resulted in establishing an "image of enemy" for Russia in the Georgian society, whereas Georgia, as it was intended from the very beginning, became a barrier between Russia and Armenia that borders Turkey and Iran [4]. In this case, first time ever since the downfall of the USSR, Russia demonstrated political will, prevented imminent occupation of South Ossetia, possible aggression against Abkhazia and recognized both republics. With this Russia regained its status of a key regional geopolitical actor, not in words but in deeds.

"Arab Spring" (2011) was another manifestation of strategy using proxy methods, along with an extensive use of NGOs and information/psychological means of influence, i.e. "soft power". However, the rules of this political genre were not always followed: only a NATO military operation enabled seizing the power in Libya. Also, the applied strategy showed signs of failure: in Egypt the local military "struck back", while the war unleashed against Syria turned into a multipolar one [5]. Syria and its ally Iran were supported both by Russia and China. Russian initiatives on destruction of Syria's chemical weapons changed the situation not only around Syria and Iran, but also in the region as a whole. Policies of Russia in this conflict allowed showing the country's worth as a global geopolitical player [6].

At the same time the initiation of "Arab Spring" led to destabilization and humanitarian catastrophe; according to the most conservative estimates one million people were killed and the number of refugees exceeded 6 million. This qualifies the actions in the Middle East as war crime accompanied by (proxy) genocide in full accordance with its UN definition.

Also, the developments in the region, especially in Syria, consolidated the disparate structures of ultra-radical Islamists and turned them into a military force even in terms of regular wars [7]. This force may then show up in Caucasus, and not only North Caucasus, where Wahhabi groups are traditionally active, but also in South Caucasus, given the active Turkish and Azerbaijani elements among the gangs active in Syria.

NATO expansion. An important addition to the above chronicle of events is the methodical and consistent expansion of NATO. In 1999 Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic joined the organization, in 2004 Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia followed the suit, and in 2009 Albania and Croatia also joined NATO.

However, in the period of the above mentioned processes the previously established format of the collaboration between the USA, EU and Russia, as well as the appropriate diplomatic ritual and information decency were maintained. It can be argued that in its initial stage the “Cold War 2” progressed in a somewhat sluggish, to an extent a “latent” mode. The situation changed fundamentally when the crisis erupted in Ukraine.

Ukraine: “full contact” combat

It is obvious, that the Ukraine crisis did not break out overnight and there were more than enough objective and subjective national, historical, socio-economic, administrative and other reasons for it. However, all of this protest potential was used for a violent and bloody coup, implemented exclusively to “tear away” this country from Russia and form an openly anti-Russian political elite with some attributes of Eastern European radi-

cal nationalism. Various sources cite quite sizable financial (US\$5-40 billion as reported by various sources) and organizational (a large number of information/societal projects were implemented) resources spent for “revolution”. There are also all signs that in parallel to these activities some special operations of different nature were carried out¹.

It cannot be said that Russia did nothing about Ukraine (e.g. support of Yanukovych, who was probably picked as the “lesser evil”). However, the focus was placed on traditional “measures”, which is characteristic to the politics of Russia and other post-Soviet countries. Yet these methods are clearly obsolete and less effective than those used by the opponents.

The evolved circumstances actually forced the Russian leadership to resort to tough actions, such as massive military exercises (including paratroopers landing in Arctic) and quickly organizing a referendum in Crimea for joining Russia, the results of which were neatly formalized legislatively. Rhetoric of Russian leaders addressed to opponents was sharp and unyielding, while the information policies were a lot more effective than those, for example, employed during the Georgia-Ossetia conflict. The US and EU sanctions followed in response, to which Russia not only attempts to react symmetrically, but also undertakes strategic maneuvers like “turning to the East”, such as the decision to sell S-400 SAM systems to China and so on. Dramatic events in eastern Ukraine just add fuel to the flames.

As a result, the political correctness and other decorum instantly disappeared, giving way to manners in the worst “cold war” traditions. The conflict has transformed, so to speak, into a “full contact” standoff with almost no rules.

¹ See, for example: «Руководители спецслужбы и контрразведки Украины завербованы США – экс-глава СБУ». <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1790904.html>.

However, the current phase of the “Cold War 2” has some characteristics that fundamentally differentiate it from the previous one.

Some peculiarities

Geopolitics and economy. Admittedly, in geopolitical realities Russia did not fare well, even considering the return of Crimea with Sevastopol and possible federalization of Ukraine. Loss of Ukraine as a whole is a strategic defeat, which creates a number of intra-civilizational, economic and real military problems.

It is known that NATO is sending additional troops to Eastern Europe and there are eight joint military exercises planned to conduct on the territory of Ukraine during 2014¹. No doubt, the USA will be actively pushing Ukraine into NATO. However, just as in case when the issue of accepting Georgia in NATO was discussed, a lot is going to depend on the stance of the continental European countries. With regard to the Ukrainian problem they combine a vocal anti-Russian rhetoric with moderate actual political and economic actions, i.e. their behavior is somewhat ambiguous. Moreover, the emphasized points of the EU and NATO officials (who somehow have no charisma at all) on several matters are different from those of the leaders of the Western European countries, who perceive the actualities more realistically. Former leaders of the “Old World”, such as Václav Klaus and Gerhard Schröder, talk even franker and quite sharply criticize EU policies toward Ukraine². It appears many European politicians (not to mention analysts) have a clear understanding of the fact that Ukrainian events are directed not only against Russia, but also against the EU.

¹ Маневры против концентрации: Североатлантический альянс определился с мерами воздействия на Россию. <http://lenta.ru/articles/2014/04/03/nato/>.

² Interestingly, some former leaders in the “New World”, for example Bill Clinton and Robert Gates, former head of Pentagon, also expressed thoughts almost along the same lines.

This not just about the tactics and intercepted phone conversation of V. Nuland, US Assistant Secretary of State, during which among other things she also used foul language in relation to the EU. The European Union, already overburdened by financial problems (Greece, Spain, etc.), also has to pay an “economic fine” in form of an almost compulsory aid to Ukraine (as if “in exchange” for slowing down trade cooperation with Russia, currently \$500 billion worth). In the strategic dimension it is clear that implementation of the “Ukrainian project” will halt the attractive idea of building a “Greater Europe” from Lisbon to Vladivostok, at least in the mid-term¹. In such situation Washington will spare no effort to unify the European countries around the US to create a “Western front” as it used to be in the bipolar epoch. However, against the background of objective trends of diminishing US influence and “autonomy” aspirations of the EU countries, that seems a somewhat unlikely scenario. It appears the absence of harmony between the Old and New Worlds is one of the traits by which “Cold War 2” differs from the “Cold War 1”. Yet it is not the only one.

At that time, given the factor of China, the USSR had to struggle on two fronts. Currently the circumstances are different. With its energy needs and the complex military/political situation in Asia Pacific, China adopted a lot more flexible stance, which sometimes largely concurs with that of Russia on many issues. Based on statements of the both countries’ leaders, as well as tangible steps taken in the economic area² and overtones in the Chinese press, the approaches of both parties

¹ See, for example: *Гагик Арутюнян*, Возврата к прежнему статусу Крыма уже не будет, <http://golosarmenii.am/my-i-mir/intervyu/vozvrata-k-prezhnemu-statusu-kryma-uzhe-ne-budet.html>, *Финиан Каннингем*, Американский план войны между ЕС и Россией, <http://www.warandpeace.ru/ru/commentaries/view/89477/>.

² «Рогозин поблагодарил Китай за поддержку России», <http://itar-tass.com/politika/1130427>. *Zachary Keck*, Russia Accelerates Asia Pivot, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/04/russia-accelerates-asia-pivot/>.

to the Ukrainian crisis are close to a certain extent. Hence, the Chinese factor for Russia has shifted from negative to positive (though other future development scenarios for the relations between Beijing and Moscow should not be discarded). Interestingly, some American analysts suggest that currently it is the USA that “fights” on two fronts¹.

The situation has also changed with the possible political “isolation of Russia” from the global community. In the March 27, 2014 voting for the UN a resolution calling not to recognize Crimea’s entry into Russia only 11 countries voted against and 100 countries voted for it. Nevertheless, 58 countries abstained (China, India, Argentine, Brazil, Egypt among them), while representatives of 24 countries, including Iran and Israel, did not vote, so in fact, total 93 countries supported Russia one way or another.

The matters are most critical in economy, as Russia’s GDP is eight times smaller than that of the USA, i.e. the proportion is about the same as in Soviet times. Presently, the American economy also experiences serious financial difficulties caused by debts and deficit. However, the Russian economy’s quality is lower than the Soviet one, because the share of high-technology and science-based output is significantly smaller in it. Obviously, lagging behind in terms of technology is Russia’s Achilles heel, which also negatively affects the defense area as a whole. Possible expansion of the West’s economic sanctions will undoubtedly have a negative effect on Russian economy. Nonetheless, as the example of Iran has shown, in the era of globalized economy such actions are no longer as effective as they used to be. Also, Russia’s immunity against sanctions increases by the fact that issues of offshore

¹ *Ted Galen Carpenter*, Washington's Biggest Strategic Mistake, The National Interest <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/washingtons-biggest-strategic-mistake-10274>

capital, foreign accounts and property of the officials have been recently gaining momentum in Russia, while the West's sanctions prompted establishment of a national electronic banking system, i.e. sovereignization takes place and not only in economy.

Ideology and information. Legislation adopted in Russia regarding foreign NGOs, regulation of dual citizenship and a number of similar measures show that a new political course is formed to minimize negative consequences of the 1991 revolution. The display of political will with respect to the Ukrainian question should be viewed in the context of this course and it has been hailed enthusiastically both by the political class and the society. It seems that the main reason for a national upswing is the perception that the country and its leadership are doing the right thing. Such social environment is different in many ways from the one that existed in the epoch of the "Cold War 1".

As it was already mentioned, in that war the West played the role of a "good empire" which struggled against the "evil empire". If one casts aside the dramatized propagandistic articulations and abandons comparisons or interpretations of socialism-liberalism, totalitarianism-democracy or atheism-Christianity, it must be acknowledged that in many cases in the past "the truth" was on the West's side. This circumstance was quite acutely sensed by the intellectual elites in both the Socialist bloc and then-monolithic West. It was not surprising, because it was the Soviets that established regimes of "people's democracy" in Europe and then crushed revolts in East Berlin (1953), Budapest (1956 with some 2,600 casualties), and Prague (1968). It was the Soviets that sent a "limited contingent of troops" to Afghanistan in 1979 and did everything to suppress Solidarność movement in 1981. In these "foreign

affairs” some now tend to see the “plots of the foe’s intelligence services”, but these kinds of plots always existed and were mutual.

On any account, no external intervention was involved when the USSR shot the workers in Novochoerkassk, while the Mordovia camps were methodically filled with dissidents, or simply people who displayed slightest freethinking. It was common to say about “non-returners” that they chose the freedom, and there was a lot of truth in that. The list of the “system’s” sins even in the post-Stalin period was indeed a long one. However, it appears many things have changed since then, and today the sides sort of reversed their roles, as far as the humanitarian and moral aspects are concerned.

The Brief Chronicle of Events above shows that when implementing their geopolitical plans the USA and its allies acted in no better manner, and sometimes even worse and more inhumane than the Soviets. This concerns not only Yugoslavia and Middle East, but also specifically to Ukraine events, where people of this country suffered first of all and no wonder “Right Sector” combatants call themselves “Christian Taliban”. All of this is related to the systemic problems in the Western societies.

In wording of the English sociologist Colin Crouch, in the modern West democracy is transforming into “post-democracy”, i.e. the business and political classes merge, in result of which the interests of the society are ignored¹, while democratic institutions turn into formal attributes and lose their meaningful and real significance [8]. Such situation not only causes outrage among the intellectuals, but also leads to emergence of various mass protest movements, such as *Occupy Wall Street*, etc. [9].

¹ *Martin Gilens*, Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens. <http://www.princeton.edu/~mgilens/Gilens%20homepage%20materials/Gilens%20and%20Page/Gilens%20and%20Page%202014-Testing%20Theories%203-7-14.pdf>

Establishment of the “financial totalitarianism” would have been impossible without totalitarianism in information. The Orwellian Big Brother methodically manipulates the consciousness of the society using advancements in socio-psychology and information technologies, or as some non-politically-correct commentators say, brainwashes large strata of population. In parallel, messages and telephone conversations of not only ordinary users, but also leaders of some seemingly allied nations are wiretapped and controlled.

Unsurprisingly, the new breed of “dissidents”, who stand up against information totalitarianism, “choose freedom” in Russia¹ or try to escape from the “free world” as far away as possible, somewhere to Latin America (like J. Assange). All these phenomena along with the anti-Christian enthusiasm regarding same-sex marriages cause skepticism even towards such ideological tenets of liberalism as the human rights.

Thus, the situation with information and ideology substantially differs from the one during the bipolar standoff. Moreover, we are getting an impression that in the epoch of the “Cold War 2” the “evil” and “good” empires seem to have reversed their roles.

In the liberal societies the problems caused by the governance system naturally affect the quality of both tactical decision-making and strategic planning [5, 10], which is something the USSR experienced at the time. In this context changing the global world order is becoming a hot discussion topic², but this is a subject for a different analysis.

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¹Quite symbolically E. Snowden recently was awarded the Ridenhour Prize named after the man who exposed to the world the tragedy of the Vietnamese village Songmy, where in 1967 the American soldiers massacred the whole population of 500.

²See for example, *Robert W. Merry*, *The Slow Death of the Old Global Order*, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/the-slow-death-the-old-global-order-10247?page=show>.

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