

# World Order Z: The Irreversibility of Change and Prospects for Survival

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## **Abstract**

The article discusses the causes and likely global consequences of the military standoff between Russia and Ukraine, which constitutes the most acute phase of the geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the West. The Russian leadership's decision to launch a special military operation in Ukraine is analyzed using the conception of ontological security. The economic and financial consequences of this conflict may lead to a breakdown of the current model of globalization and facilitate a transition to a model of double global circulation between major centers of political and economic influence.

**Keywords:** world order transformation, ontological security, geopolitical confrontation, Russia, Ukraine, Donbass, double global circulation, global financial system.

If one qualifies political studies in terms of relevance for paradigmatic description of major historical eras, the most accurate picture of the Cold War era is found in an article entitled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” published in *Foreign Affairs* under the pen-name X (“X”, 1947). Mister X turned out to be U.S. diplomat George Kennan, who proposed a fundamental program for containing the Soviet Union.

Kennan lived long enough to see the success of his strategy. However, in his last years he warned his country—albeit in vain—against any actions that might cause the United States to waste the most important Cold War gains (Kennan, 1997).

In 2011, two U.S. Marine Corps military analysts, Wayne Porter and Mark “Puck” Mykleby, ventured to follow in Kennan’s footsteps. However, an article they published under the penname Y, entitled “A National Strategic Narrative” (Mr. Y, 2011), had a fleeting success and no significant impact on U.S. foreign and military policies. Russian international affairs specialists Fyodor Lukyanov and Timofei Bordachev reviewed the article to show quite convincingly that the opus was a banality. Its authors examined several important trends affecting the sustainability of U.S. leadership in the 21st century world but ignored a number of others. Also, they denied the conflict the status of a key instrument in ranking international actors (Bordachev and Lukyanov, 2011). The review’s headline “Waiting for Mr. Z” turned out to be prophetic. Lukyanov and Bordachev suggested that the political thinker, destined to achieve the benchmark Mr. X had set so high, was still honing his analytical skills.

It happened otherwise. Since February 24, 2022, the contours of a new world order have been drawn by the tracks of Russian tanks, with the mysterious white letter Z painted on their armor.

***World order Z began to be formed before sophisticated analysts could describe it. And it is being formed through an armed conflict in Europe, unparalleled in scale and intensity since World War II.***

## **UKRAINE AND ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY**

The special military operation remains far from completion. So, it is too early to speculate about its immediate results, which will determine the future of Donbass, Ukraine, and Russia. But it is already possible to consider some features of the military-political crisis that will affect both its outcome and global consequences.

Since 2014, the conflict between Russia and the West over Ukraine has been characterized by the fact that all significant changes in its development occurred when Russia upped the ante, for which the West was not fully prepared. The latter tried to maximize the costs of each such step for Moscow: the sanctions were tightened, but in a way that were not supposed to entail significant retaliatory damage, at least to the United States. Also, the U.S. and European mediators (France and Germany) adhered to a functional distribution of roles, while the Kiev regime proactively sought to offset the advantages that Moscow had previously gained with its drastic steps. The whole record of Minsk-2 negotiations is the clearest example of such tactics.

The military alert in the spring of 2021 and the brief de-escalation that followed the Russian-U.S. summit in Geneva contributed to the correction of the West's policy in response to Moscow's possible decision to raise the bid again. Washington revised its strategic guidelines: the containment of China was declared not only the main task of its foreign and military policy, but also the top priority one. It became clear that Russia could not be locked up in some kind of ghetto where it would be an idle spectator to U.S.-Chinese rivalry, avoiding resolute steps to protect its own interests. Preparations for a confrontation with "aggressive Russian authoritarianism" (with the "Chinese threat" also kept in mind) became the leitmotif of the West's political and ideological mobilization in the summer and fall of 2021. It would be wrong to say no alternatives to further aggravation of the confrontation were considered, including after Russia, on December 17, 2021, declared what some described as an ultimatum to NATO and even on the very eve of the special military operation. At the very least, *The Wall Street Journal's* report on the content of a conversation between German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Ukrainian President

Vladimir Zelensky on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on February 19, 2022, indicates that a political solution leaving a chance to avert a military crisis remained achievable until the very last minute (Gordon et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, the main efforts to bolster the Western camp's unity were focused on the complete and final blocking of opinions that might be characterized as *Russlandversteher*. Zelensky's unwillingness to compromise on Ukraine's admission to NATO was fueled in every possible way by those forces in the Western camp whose plot was to provoke Moscow into a military solution.

As they opted for transition to hostilities, these forces—primarily part of the U.S. Democratic Party's elite and British conservatives—hoped that by crossing the Rubicon in Ukraine Moscow would get involved in a fatal confrontation.

What did they count on?

Apparently, on a number of things: the assumption that the Kremlin still has the delusion that the condition of Ukraine's society and army has not changed since 2014–2015; that the channels of information leading to the very pinnacle of Russian power are insufficient and filtered by those whose paramount concern is to retain proximity to the chief executive; that Russia's preparations for a decisive clash in a number of areas will be “reduced to nothing” by the incompetence and corruption of officials concerned; that the immeasurable superiority of the West in the IT and communication sphere will provide Ukraine with an extremely important competitive edge; and that Russia's stagnant vertical chain of command will inevitably break down under information, economic, social and military pressures unprecedented in strength, unable to cope with a myriad of new challenges. The architects of the Western policy on Russia and Ukraine had clearly expected to see confusion in Russian society, misunderstanding of the special operation's declared goals, the effects of a shock following the sudden loss of some everyday benefits of the consumerist civilization, and, ultimately, a powerful surge of anti-war and anti-government protests.

As a result, the West not only agreed with the prospect of bids going up to the penultimate level, but in fact pushed Moscow towards

such a choice. A decision was made to put up with the social and economic costs of the anti-Russian “hellish sanctions” for the West itself. Besides, their severity is distributed unevenly—from significant for the United States and Britain to critical for the main economies of the EU countries. For the masterminds of this policy, the costs are offset by a long-term geo-economic gain: the undermining of continental Europe’s global competitiveness, the latter’s reorientation to the supply of more expensive energy sources from the United States and the Middle East (at least until the declared green transition in the fourth and fifth decades of the 21st century) and the European Union’s loss of the vast market in most of the post-Soviet space.

The European elites’ desperately passionate readiness to destroy the basis of partnership with Russia is striking.

In this article, the author does not attempt to present an exhaustive reconstruction of the most important factors that paved the way for the military confrontation in Ukraine, which, in turn, is just a phase of a much longer confrontation on the global scale. But international crises such as the current one clearly show the motives forcing nations and their leaders to act in a way different from what simplified calculations of the balance of power, own advantages and vulnerabilities, as well as the advantages and vulnerabilities of the main counterparts suggest. These motives, embodied in individual and collective decisions, reflect something very significant for a large social organism: its representatives see themselves as parts of one whole, sharing common interests, aspirations, history, fears, and hopes. British sociologist Anthony Giddens focuses on individuals and uses the concept of ontological security as a reflection of the social actors’ confidence in the world around them and their certainty that there are no significant threats to their way of life, identity, or sustainability of their environment—natural, material, and spiritual (Giddens, 1984). But ontological security can also be applied to macropolitical communities, and in this case the bonds of collective identity come to the fore. Among these bonds historical narratives, symbolic practices, and friend-or-foe demarcation lines play an important role.

The collective identity of the current generations of residents of Russia, Ukraine and other countries in the post-Soviet space reflects, above all, the traumatic experience of the Soviet Union's collapse, the consolidation of new states, and painful socio-economic transformations. In other words, common to them was a stable situation of ontological insecurity. For Ukraine and other post-Soviet republics, the new statehood was central to the transformation of the identity of the macropolitical community. In Russia, in the early 1990s, there dominated the narrative of breaking with Soviet totalitarianism and the oppression of the imperial era, that is, with the old forms of statehood. But a strong impulse towards freedom and the assertion of democratic ideals, having passed through the purgatory of the transformation of property and power relations, caused an even deeper frustration. The first decade of reforms brought into being neo-patrimonial capitalism.

The main feature of neopatrimonialism is the formation of a system of production and appropriation of the political rent based on the monopolization of state power and administrative resources by various groups of political entrepreneurs and/or bureaucracy (Fisun, 2012). Russia, Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries have demonstrated a variety of forms of neopatrimonialism. In Russia's case, the consolidation of the neo-patrimonial order was completed already in the 2000s. The new leader and the groups of elites on which he relied took steps that maintained years-long growth of the wellbeing of the great masses of population and formed the material basis of ontological security. The weak point was the ideational and symbolic aspects associated with determining the place of the new Russia in historical time and political space. Where the "national biography" was supposed to be built (Berenskoetter, 2014) there remained many blank spots and inconsistencies, and attempts to fill them continued for two decades with varying degrees of success.

As a result, a biography of the new Russia that should be written from scratch was replaced by an orientation towards the unity and integrity of the historical fabric of the Russian statehood and continuity of all eras of the past—from the invitation of Rurik to the Soviet Communist experiment. The victory in the Great Patriotic War of

1941-1945 was chosen as the key national symbol and sense-generating event. This choice was natural and virtually had no alternative against the backdrop of bankrupt liberal ideological constructs of the 1990s. But it also had important implications for determining the actual formula of ontological security and for implementing—on its basis—practical policy within the country and in the international scene.

Strictly speaking, adherence to notions of ontological security may mean limiting the acceptable options for action by the state actor as compared to balance of power-based calculations. One of the many dilemmas that Russia had to confront was this: Is it possible to be a worthy heir of the Great Victory and at the same time put up with the loss of almost all of its gains? This question is addressed to the authorities and society, but an attempt to answer it involves the activation of a certain coordinate system for assessing the international environment. More specifically, in this scheme of things the fundamental question to be answered is whether the most important actors in world politics perceive modern Russia as a direct heir of the Great Victory of 1945 and a completely equal partner, or whether this perception is determined by other considerations. The point at issue was clarification of Russia's true international status, which became possible within the framework of sustainable interaction with the main international counterparts.

Formally, the status of Russia as a country that inherited the Soviet Union's privileges of a victor in World War II was confirmed when Russia retained the seat of a UN Security Council permanent member. The permission to participate in the G7 summits in the capacity of a guest, and then—until 2014—in the G8 summits, although Russia was never allowed to consider economic topics on an equal footing, was a symbolic gesture of recognition (but nothing more than that) of Russia's tangible role in the post-bipolar world order. In fact, in all discussions of any significant issue of geopolitics and security with representatives of the United States and other Western countries Russian delegates were firmly shown their true place—that of hopeless losers in the Cold War. And although the real loser was the Soviet Union, it was Russia's plight to drink the bitter cup to the last drop, while the rest of the post-

Soviet states were offered flattering narratives of gaining freedom and independence from imperial diktat.

In line with this logic, Russia had no right to lay claim to geopolitical influence beyond its borders, while the bonus of filling the power vacuum went entirely to the victors in the Cold War.

Even in such conditions, Russia not only under Boris Yeltsin, but also under Vladimir Putin (almost until the end of his second presidential term), remained ready to get integrated into the system of U.S. domination, its sole ambition being the recognition of its high status within this system and the right to its own interests in the post-Soviet space. This readiness was ignored. In fact, the West replied: “In the liberal world order you will take the place that we will point at. Forget about anything else.”

Vladimir Putin’s 2007 Munich speech heralded a transition to defining the ontological security of Russian society and the state in a coordinate system that is confrontational in relation to the U.S.-centric world order, but more familiar and even comfortable for the macropolitical community. In fact, it was a U-turn to the good old friend-or-foe demarcation system, to the well-familiar enemy (significant Other) as a necessary tool of self-identification (Mitzen, 2006) in the new historical conditions. Having failed to obtain the recognition of Russia’s desired international status, Putin actually declared that he had the willpower to assert it through the creation of multipolarity as an alternative to U.S. hegemony. Russia embarked on the path of the most risky confrontation, but it was precisely in this way—by lowering the threshold of its physical security—that Russia chose in favor of continued existence as *an independent Self*, and on this basis, of self-assertion as an agent in its own right with a potential for redefining autonomously (or in cooperation with other centers of power) the principles and norms of behavior in the international arena. This choice was reinforced by the mobilization of historical memory, and by filling in—in a way that was often far from ideal—the existing narrative gaps. In their political rhetoric Russia’s top officials launched the process of intensive discourse historicization, which peaked with President Putin’s address on February 21, 2022.



In Russia's current interpretation of ontological security, the problem of Ukraine inevitably had to come to the fore. On one occasion, Boris Yeltsin, being in a cheerful state of mind at a CIS summit, disclosed one must of the Russian president's daily routine: "As soon as you wake up in the morning, think about what you have done for Ukraine." His successor followed this rule very strictly, although the further the more against the aspirations of a majority of the Ukrainian intellectual and political elites. The latter rushed to define Ukraine's identity as "non-Russia" and virtually in no time after the first Maidan reconfigured the entire Ukrainian national ideology and statehood in accordance with "anti-Russia" templates. The presidency of Victor Yanukovich and his fiasco merely confirmed that all hopes for "our man in Kiev" were built on sand. What happened to Ukraine after the second *Maidan*, from the perspective of Russia's ontological security, meant the following:

- confrontation with the West, hitherto a certain general and geographically distributed modality of Russian political life, is rapidly focusing on one point—Ukraine;
- since Kiev was the center of the Eastern Slavs' first statehood and the cradle of their culture and their religious identity, the confrontation affects fundamental historical narratives and key symbols;
- the perception of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians as a triune people means that the emergence of anti-Russia within the area populated by this people is akin to an existential catastrophe.

Thus, the clash with the West in Ukraine becomes something of an East Slavic Armageddon. The stakes are so high that reaching any compromise—whatever its possible content—becomes an ontological problem. And at the level of personalities everything is crystal clear. What Joe Biden said about the tenure of the Russian president while speaking in the courtyard of the royal castle in Warsaw, should be considered not as an elderly gentleman's slip of the tongue, but blabbing out what was on his mind. If only the West has a real chance to implement such a plan, it will spring to action in a bid to dismantle Russian statehood as such.

The Russian leadership is aware that there is no chance of getting back to the situation that existed before February 24, 2022. The most acute stage of the struggle for dismantling the U.S.-centric world order has begun. Russia has taken upon itself the heaviest burden of confrontation. But if the issue of the day is global political transformation, and not just the Ukrainian stage, Russia will be unable to complete this struggle alone.

### **DOUBLE CIRCULATION AS THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD ECONOMY**

The fighting on the battlefields in Donbass and Ukraine is about what power will be the world's leader in the 21st century. There are two contenders, and Russia is not among them. This is a decisive moment for the United States' omnipotence. And it is just as decisive for Beijing.

*World order Z—if the success of Russia's special military operation paves the way for it—will be Sinocentric.*

At all events, the trajectory of China's ascent to economic and geopolitical leadership depends on how accurate the Chinese leadership's decisions will be and how far they will extend into the future.

By the beginning of the special military operation, relations between Russia and China had reached an unprecedentedly high level. Apparently, on the eve of the Beijing Winter Olympics a common understanding was reached between the top leaders of the two countries regarding the scenarios for the upcoming military-political crisis. Beijing had exhaustive information to be able to gauge the risks and effects of a conflict over Ukraine. The Kremlin had done enough to ensure that Zhongnanhai would be able to chart the best course as the crisis escalates.

What did the U.S. and the West do on this key track? As follows from the available information, there is no reason to believe that Washington was ready to offer Beijing a set of compelling positive incentives to persuade it to criticize Moscow's actions. In fact, the West's proposal to China concerning the military operation in Ukraine not only looked unattractive, but also demonstrated its internal uncertainty. While commenting on the March 18 teleconference between Joe Biden

and Xi Jinping, Liu Xin, a well-known host on China's global television network CGTN, aptly summarized the essence of the proposal as such: "Can you help me fight your friend so that I can focus on fighting you later?" It might seem that the main argument is economic: why should China choose to support Russia, a country with which the volume of trade does not exceed \$150 billion when its more than \$1.5-trillion trade with the West is at stake?

But long-term strategic interests outweighed. Russia's open challenge to the West in Ukraine may trigger a critical blow to U.S. global hegemony (*The War in Ukraine, 2022*). Moreover, right now there is an opportunity to establish an alternative world order. While Russia is paving the way for this order by the force of arms, China is doing the same with its economic strength.

Moscow's example shows Beijing what economic, political and informational pressures it may experience if and when it decides to restore its sovereignty over Taiwan by force. So, China will finally formulate its actual attitude towards Western sanctions exactly from the standpoint of solving this historic task. However, as in Russia's case, the stranglehold of sanctions around China's neck will get ever tighter even if Beijing keeps restraint on the Taiwan issue. Nobody has any illusions. Even if it may suddenly give up friendly neutrality towards Russia, Beijing's chances to see Washington's lasting gratitude will remain slim.

Strictly speaking, the awareness that a decisive economic and political confrontation with the U.S. was unavoidable prompted the Chinese leadership in 2020 to start a fundamental turn in its economic and technological policies away from comprehensive involvement in globalization and economic symbiosis with the United States (Chimerica) towards what some described as double circulation, implying that prosperity will be based on domestic demand and technological independence (internal circulation), while foreign trade and investment abroad (external circulation) will help balance supply and demand at a higher level (Lomanov, 2021). So, the internal circulation should become the foundation of China's economic power, ensuring its high resilience to pressure from the main geopolitical

opponent. The idea of external circulation indicates that China is determined to retain as many benefits of integration in the global economy as possible.

However, for now, the transition to double circulation is far from complete. China, although it boasts the most powerful export potential and the world's largest gold and foreign exchange reserves, has not yet rid itself of critical vulnerabilities. The U.S. gold and foreign exchange reserves and debt portfolio remain the most important peg to the U.S. financial system. A sufficient level of import substitution will take several years to achieve. It is the ability to escape Western sanctions pressure on the technological track and to create technologies in no way inferior to the Western ones and, in the long term, superior to them, that will determine the outcome of the competition.

Importantly, China's approach to these problems arises from security considerations and not commercial efficiency.

This autumn will see the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of China—the most important event in China's domestic political life. The main expected decision is to extend the powers of President Xi Jinping for at least another five years. In fact, the Congress will chart guidelines for the country's development at least until the middle of the century. While preparing for the Congress, the Chinese leadership will be keen to avoid direct involvement in any military-political conflicts and maximize the favorable internal and external effect of the Beijing Winter Olympics, as well as of achievements in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. But this does not mean that the priority of ensuring the success of the CPC Congress will force the Chinese leadership to ignore the historic opportunities that present themselves in connection with Russia's operation in Ukraine.

The main opportunity opened when geopolitical upheavals boosted the restructuring of the world economy, which will bring to life two autonomous zones for the circulation of resources, technologies, and capital. In the center of one we will see China, and in the center of the other, the United States. By analogy with the Chinese strategy, this new model of the world economic order can be called global double circulation.

That Operation Z and the West's economic war against Russia have made the prospects of such a hypothetical transformation quite real was acknowledged by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, whom very few had considered a visionary before. According to Borrell, "one of the bad consequences of what is happening is that we can push Russia to China, and we can create a division between the global southeast and the global northwest" (Gopi, 2022). Although there are obvious inconsistencies as far as physical geography is concerned (Russia for some reason is placed into the global Southeast; Australia, and New Zealand, into the global Northwest, and so on), in fact, the regrouping will create tensions that will be very difficult to withstand not only for the EU, but also for all other institutions of the world order that took shape on the ruins of the Soviet Union.

What implications will the transition of the international economy to double circulation have? Let us look at the financial sector. First of all, the freezing of most of Russia's gold and foreign exchange reserves, as well as the assets of Russian oligarchs highlights the need to hedge dollar risks (more precisely, risks associated with operations and savings denominated in any Western currency). From now on, this will be critical to any state ambitious to go independent from Washington's and Brussels' policies. But even individuals—multibillionaires from China or the Arabian monarchies—are confronted with an unpleasant reality: there is no personal "safe haven" for them in the West. More precisely, there is one for as long as these countries' interests do not clench with the geopolitical interests of the West. However, the freedom to use the assets at one's discretion includes the understanding that the Western financial institutions keep them on a short leash.

Fundamental changes, which Credit Suisse analyst Zoltan Pozsar (2022) called Bretton Woods III, will cause the dollar and other fiat currencies of the West to be ousted by currencies from the East, as they will be backed by real resources and commodity stocks. Vladimir Putin's decision to start selling gas to unfriendly countries for rubles can be seen as the first salvo in this invisible battle.

Of course, this is not a return to Bretton Woods I, that is, to the gold standard based on fixing the price of the troy ounce in the base currency, although the role of gold in ensuring the stability of the new basket of currencies will be significant. Other metals, hydrocarbons, uranium, electricity, possibly food reserves, and water—everything that is in demand in the real economy and becoming increasingly scarce amid the growing imbalances of the previous model of globalization and disrupted logistic chains—will begin to be used as assets ensuring the stability of the “asset-backed” currencies. One should expect digital currencies to be used widely in hedging euro-dollar risks.

Accordingly, inflation will continue to gain steam in Western countries (in addition to that caused by the disruption of supply chains that started during the COVID-19 pandemic). Whether there is a real asset behind the euro/dollar and Western fiat currency-denominated debt obligations will be basically questioned, which will cause a spiral of new social, political and geopolitical conflicts. There is a high risk of lasting shortages of some critically important commodities in the West.

According to Zoltan Pozsar, during the transition to Bretton Woods III the Chinese monetary authorities will be the only actor capable of controlling the situation. But for China, the change will not come easily, either—both because of the structure of its gold and foreign exchange reserves and the accumulated U.S. treasuries, and because of the likely stresses for the entire foreign trade. Therefore, in all likelihood, China’s goal will not be a landslide transition to a new model of global finance, but a controlled one. Beijing is interested in stimulating gradual transition to the renminbi in trade in energy and other commodities and, if possible, in avoiding shock effects. However, it remains to be seen if the People’s Bank of China will cope with this in the face of growing geopolitical and geo-economic turbulence. If steps are taken to dismantle the hegemony of the dollar and increase U.S. debt yields (universal U.S. lending at low debt yields was the basis of Bretton Woods II), one cannot be sure that at some point it will be possible to prevent panic amid many players who have suddenly realized that the entire global monetary order is changing.

Why Russia pins hopes on Chinese economic power and President Xi's strategic vision is easy to understand. By not joining the Western sanctions against Russia and Belarus and withstanding the mounting pressure from the West, Beijing will at least help neutralize some of the restrictions on commodity supplies and preserve part of Russia's yuan-denominated gold and foreign exchange reserves for solving urgent economic problems. China's role in the trade in Russian commodities will increase significantly. It will almost indisputably win control of the markets of Russia, Belarus, and the partially recognized republics of Donbass and—with a high degree of probability—that part of Ukraine that will be under the Russian army's control (it should be remembered that in aggregate this is the main part of the economic potential of the former superpower—the Soviet Union).

The terms of competition in the markets of other EAEU countries will also be advantageous for China, and not for the West. Beyond the post-Soviet space, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Myanmar, some African countries, and Latin American states of the Bolivarian Alternative may at first enter the Sinocentric zone of global economic circulation. Within a decade, this circulation zone will see the emergence of an autonomous techno-economic platform based on Chinese and, in some respects, Russian technologies. Sanctions imposed by the previous U.S. administrations, which limit the transfer of many modern technologies to China and Russia, have set this process in motion. We will also see a segmentation of the digital space due to the establishment of different technical standards, privacy standards, mechanisms for controlling programs' access to the network, protection tools and basic principles for regulating the Internet (Walt, 2022). In fact, all these changes will mark the collapse of the globalization model that took hold in the 1990s; moreover, in each of the zones of global economic circulation there will emerge specific “ecological niches” for different types of political regimes (Owen, 2021), although, most likely, there will be some exceptions, making the picture more diverse and much broader than a highly ideologized and primitive global standoff between capitalist autocracies and liberal democracies.

Between these two zones of global economic circulation there will appear links or interconnectors, such as regions with a special status, as well as public and corporate actors interested in deriving maximum profit from the flow of resources, technologies and capital they will be mediating between the two zones. Moreover, at first even China itself will try to act as an interconnector, since a significant part of its corporations and banks will try to stay focused on doing business with the U.S., the EU, Australia, and Japan. At the same time, another part of its business structures will switch to operations in the renminbi, the ruble, and other “asset-backed” currencies, thus strengthening the zone of global economic circulation, alternative to the Western one. Other interconnector countries (probably India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, South Africa, large countries in Southeast Asia and Latin America) will try to assume this role in addition to using the new economic opportunities and will try to capitalize their economic role politically by strengthening sovereignty and diversified approach in relations with the main centers of power. Perhaps the Non-Aligned Movement will also get a second wind.

### **LET THE STORM STRIKE HARDER?**

World order Z is a new condition and a point of no return, above all, for Russia, even if the special military operation ends in its undeniable victory. This does not mean that there will be no rollback in certain areas of economic cooperation. One can imagine the Western actors unblocking SWIFT for the Russian banking system, partially or completely. But, if by that time Russian-Indian and Russian-Chinese systems of payment will be up and running, there will be every reason to keep using them as the main ones, while SWIFT will have to stay on the sidelines as a standby option. Having suffered the most serious financial and economic losses from the disruption of ties with the Western economy, Russia will hardly agree to say goodbye to the forced freedom for which it will have to pay too high a price. In addition, isolation and self-isolation from the financial and economic system of the West will serve as an additional insurance against the most severe excesses of the crisis that will accompany the transition to the global



double circulation model. Antagonism with the United States and its reverse side—comprehensive cooperation with China and other non-Western players—will be more than just foreign policy constants. They will form the essence of the ontological security of Russian citizens and residents of countries and territories associated with it throughout the lifetime of at least one generation.

***There will be no turning back either for China, or for the West, or for other actors in global politics.***

Even the first economic consequences of the special military operation and “hellish sanctions” will produce a situation in which the political forces and leaders currently at the helm of power in the Western countries will suffer severe electoral defeats in the next couple of years. The political forces that will take over will hardly be conciliatory towards Russia, but in any case they will not be the hostages of decisions the Western governments made during the first weeks of Operation Z. If the world economy begins to be reformatted in accordance with the double-circulation pattern, deep structural changes will inevitably cause a more severe decline than the Great Recession of 2008. The food crisis is already evident, and it makes sense for the BRICS member states to hurry with devising a set of measures to prevent famine and socio-political destabilization in the critically important countries of the global South. However, it will be impossible to steer clear of food inflation shocks and a real decline in crop and livestock production. In these circumstances, it would be expedient for China and Russia to agree on common approaches that would make it possible to force the United States and other Western countries to be the first to pay for the consequences of the food crisis.

The formation of a new world order will be accompanied by a clash for the global South. Washington has very few positive incentives left to oblige “the Rest” (in the sense that Farid Zakaria uses this term (Zakaria, 2009)) to continue to follow in its wake. Mainly economic and political coercion is being used. Against this background, Russia should emphasize the anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic thrust of its policy. It is more important, however, that the possibility of long-term positive changes for many countries of the global South will be associated

precisely with the transition to double circulation, new logistic and value chains, and the opportunity for changing the position of the country in question within the system of world economic relations.

In terms of global confrontation, the success (or failure) of the special military operation, as well as Russia's ability (or inability) to withstand the pressure of sanctions and other types of proxy war on the part of the collective West, will mean that now a strong blow can (or cannot) change the geopolitical reality. This experience will be extremely important for countries seeking international agency and ability to protect their interests at the regional or global levels. But, however significant the comeback of *hard power* in the 21st century can be, the launch of temporary chaotization processes and subsequent restructuring of the geo-economic order will be more important. It looks like Russia has already entered a phase of struggle against Western dominance where it is too late to think about the consequences, while the approaching shock from geo-economic transformation becomes a welcome prospect.

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Somewhat belatedly, a majority of Russian citizens begin to realize that the very existence of their country as an integral, independent and sovereign state is at stake. They are getting aware that there is a long struggle ahead, and a great deal will have to be sacrificed for success. In this sense, the external forces' expectations to see Russia's internal destabilization still look illusive. However, the Russian leadership must realize that it will have to face increasingly growing public demands. It is very unlikely that the "deep people" will demand pluralistic democracy and liberalization of the political regime; rather they will demand social justice, rejection of the elites that have discredited themselves, the unblocking of social mobility elevators for those willing and able to become useful in the situation of the most acute confrontation with the West, and, on the contrary, the purging of the public administration system of incompetent and corrupt functionaries. These are the basic things constituting an emergency social contract that will have to be concluded in some form in order to save Russia during the transition to world order Z.

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