

Global Stasis as a Party System, or Welcome to World Civil War I

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“To a mankind that recognizes the equality of man everywhere, every war becomes a civil war.”

Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, 1938

Abstract

While agreeing with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri that the state of the modern world can be characterized as a “global civil war,” the author elaborates and expands this judgement. Using the ancient Greek notions of ‘stasis’ and ‘polemos,’ he shows that these two modes of war can merge and produce not only negative but also positive effects. Limited and controlled violence between “one’s own people” (stasis) proves to be less destructive than violence between “strangers” that is unlimited and uncontrolled

(polemos). The author argues that actors involved in stasis can justifiably be identified as political parties. Therefore, some known ways to moderate party disputes and gear them towards the common good can be used in a global stasis. The best-known way is to create a relatively stable party system. Stability and predictability are best achieved in isolating systems that fix the qualitatively unequal status of individual parties and isolate them from the processes of coalition-building and political decision-making. This strategy consolidates all other actors according to the “all against one” model. The author shows that this strategy is increasingly being applied to Russia as an object of isolation, where the necessary conditions—moral connotation of the claims and their sufficient but not excessive measure—are met successfully. The author sees no realistic scenarios either for ending the “global civil war” or for its participants to renounce the policy of isolation.

Keywords: civil war, global world, stasis, polemos, political parties, party systems, strategy of isolation.

CITIZENS AT WAR

The reasoning proposed herein is arranged as a series of successive implications, specifically, “if... then...” logical connectives. Each of them can and should be tested for soundness, criticized, elaborated, and refuted. However, *if* they are recognized as sound, *then* the final conclusion will have to be recognized as sound too. *If* it turns out to be not too pleasing, *then*... there is nothing we can do about it.

The starting point of reasoning is Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s thesis: “There are innumerable armed conflicts waged across the globe today, some brief and limited to a specific place, others long-lasting and expansive. These conflicts might be best conceived as instances not of war but rather *civil war*” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 3).

These authors challenged Giorgio Agamben’s statement that the expression ‘global civil war’ was used in the works of Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt “On Revolution” and “Theory of the Partisan,” respectively, published (by a fortuitous coincidence or otherwise) in 1963: “... the civil war was probably ‘world’ but not yet ‘global.’ Really, these authors were thinking of a civil war between the capitalist world and the socialist world, which first took the form of the Soviet Union

against the Western European countries (including the fascist ones), then later against the United States” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 359). However, the disagreement is quite putative. The words ‘global civil war’ can be found in the English translation of *Homo sacer. State of Exception* (Agamben, 2005, p. 3), but the Italian original, has “world civil war” (*guerra civile mondiale*) in this exact place (Agamben, 2003, p. 4), which is not the same. Arendt used the expression “a kind of civil war raging all over the earth” (1963, p. 17) to describe World War II only, which cannot be conceived as the struggle between capitalism and socialism, and she did not use the epithet ‘global’ at all. As for Schmitt, the English translation of *Theory of the Partisan* has the phrase ‘global civil war’ (Schmitt, 2007, p. 95) to denote the German ‘*Weltbürgerkrieges*,’ that actually means “world civil war” (Schmitt, 2007, p. 96); and Schmitt connected its start with the Russian revolution of 1917 (indeed with the “revolutionary class enmity” and only with it).

Thanks to this confusion, Hardt and Negri (2004) have clearly articulated the main difference between their constructs and earlier rough analogues. Both Schmitt and Arendt proceeded from the 20th century realities. In the 21st century, Hardt and Negri claim that a civil war is not just a separate conflict, albeit a large-scale one. They state that there is only one civil war; its fronts and battles are all modern conflicts without exception, regardless of their causes, substance, and temporal or spatial scale.

Moreover, the very distinction between the state of peace and the state of war becomes meaningless amid globalization as a result of asymmetric displacement (rather than uniform mixing): it is not so much that war becomes like peace, but that peace becomes like war. “Because the isolated space and time of war in the limited conflict between sovereign states has declined, war seems to have seeped back and flooded the entire social field” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 7). This is only natural as what we are dealing with is one of the aspects of a larger process: “What we are witnessing in the global age is not the end of politics but rather its migration elsewhere... Global politics has turned into global domestic politics” (Beck, 2005, p. 249). *If the general*

diagnosis is correct, *then* the result is also correct—like policy, like war, because war is the quintessence of the political.

However, the definition of civil war proposed by Hardt and Negri (not even proposed but presented as unquestionable) as “an armed conflict between sovereign and/or non-sovereign combatants within a single sovereign territory” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 3) is doubtful. In fact, cases like Roman civil wars or the Russian Civil War of 1917-1922 do not fit into this definition (although exactly those Roman wars prompted Marcus Annaeus Lucanus (39-65), the author of the epic poem *Bellum civile sive Pharsalia*, to coin the very formula of ‘civil war’). In the former case, this definition is not appropriate because the concept of sovereignty emerged only in the early Modern period and cannot be applied to earlier realities. In the latter case, not only sovereignty (or its recognized bearer) but also a “single sovereign territory” as a clearly delineated arena of hostilities was unthinkable amid almost complete degradation, destruction, and collapse of the former political unity (and in general how can a territory—a geographical notion—be sovereign?).

There are many competing definitions of civil war (see Mack, 2002; Sambanis, 2004; Kalyvas, 2007; Cederman and Vogt, 2017; Florea, 2017), but discussing this matter would be redundant for the purposes of our reasoning. So let ourselves use a definition that is economical, intuitive, literalistic, and therefore commonsensical (which is always useful). A *civil war* is a war waged (at least by one side and regardless of the overall number of sides involved) by *citizens*. Not slaves, subjects, families, tribes, clans, cliques, (or robbers, after all), but citizens.

The question of what, in fact, is *citizenship* and how it differs from other politically referential types of solidarity is even more confusing (because it is more profound) than the nature of civil war (even review works can only be listed selectively: Turner, 1993; *The Citizenship Debates*, 1998; Heater, 2004; Bellamy, 2008). So, let Occam’s razor work again. A citizen is the one who is associated with a certain political entity through bilateral relations of mutual responsibility, including some rights and some obligations. All other attributes vary within very wide limits. Such relations may be more or less symmetric; more

or less concretized in customs, morality, and legal norms; be more or less ascriptive or voluntarily accepted; and more or less interiorized or exteriorized. A political entity itself may or may not have the form or clearly delineated territory. It may exist here and now, or in the past (usually relatively recent), or in a desired future. Of fundamental importance is the bilateral nature of the relationship between the *human* and the *political* that makes citizens interact politically both among themselves and with the authorities (or to be more exact, the powers that be) and prods the latter to engage in political interaction with citizens. All these interactions manifest themselves in the redistribution of power resources (which are also varied) or in the prevention of such redistribution. The participants consider it their *right* and *duty* to get involved in such interactions, with their goals and intensity also varying widely from being both creative to destructive and from both non-violent to violent.

There is an increasingly widespread feeling that the whole world is essentially being engulfed in the same global civil war. But what generates this feeling? World citizenship, coveted by some for several centuries (Heater, 1996; Carter, 2001; Isin and Nyers, 2014; Reysen and Katzarska-Miller, 2018) as the supporting structure of a cosmopolitan *cosmopolis* has never materialized de facto, let alone de jure. There is no global civil society either; it is still rudimentary and lacks sufficient institutional capabilities and resources to compete with states in earnest (see Kaspé, 2021, p. 178). But something seems to have emerged, and that is *world civil spirit* (which is much more spirit than consciousness)—the interiorized component of citizenship, cogitated and rationalized to varying degrees, which is essentially a contingent conglomerate of perceptions, emotions, and considerations motivating political action.

That is why now any conflict, especially in the stage of armed violence, is considered by both its direct participants and stakeholders (the latter happen to grow in numbers, regardless of the geographical, historical or cultural distance from the place where the main events occur) as affecting—undermining, strengthening or changing—the world order as a whole and sometimes its very foundations, laws or

rules. Its every shudder reverberates across the world, coming back to those who caused it, often contrary to their expectations and intentions. (No one, not even North Korea, can ignore others completely, except, perhaps, the indigenous inhabitants of the Andaman Islands (and even they can do it insofar as permitted)). Any wars, both those that have been raging for a long time and those that are just starting, get woven into the context of the global civil war, because everyone, both elites and the general public, wants to have a finger in every pie. And this is a civil matter.

If so, then the distinction between “internal” and “external” wars, which has long been dubious becomes completely irrelevant (according to Patrick Regan, about two-thirds of the civil wars that took place between 1945 and 2000 were accompanied by external interference (Regan, 2000), and this figure subsequently kept growing).

But things do not come down to an unlimited (literally) increase in the size of the war chessboard or the number of pieces involved in the game (or the number of their colors). There is yet another, deeper, distinction that is being eroded—the modes of war itself, which was drawn by the ancient Greeks but recalled increasingly often in the last half century. This refers to the mismatched semantics of the notions of ‘polemos’ (πόλεμος) and ‘stasis’ (στάσις).¹ Both are usually translated as ‘war’ and considered equivalent, which is quite permissible in many contexts, but not where the internal/external dichotomy is used as an analytical tool in relation to wars. The Greeks did not think, speak, or write about “intrastate” and “interstate” conflicts if only because they had no idea of the state as a political form. Greeks did not live in states but in poleis.

¹ I addressed the topic of stasis for the first time in the article “Love in the Time of War: Contra Autonomy of the Political” (Kaspe, 2023a). When the work on global stasis presented here was almost finished, Vladimir Brodsky’s text entitled “War in the Time of Love: Reflection on the Paper by Svyatoslav Kaspe in the Light of the Distinction between Private and Public Enmity in the Teachings of Carl Schmitt” was published (Brodsky, 2023). This is a brilliant and multifaceted work, valuable all by itself. Its significance goes far beyond the reaction to my reasoning. Unfortunately, I could not duly support the discussion in time. (And does it need to be supported really?) Brodsky writes: “Reacting to Kaspe’s argument, the author tries to guess how one of the main (anti) heroes of *War in the Time of Love*, German thinker Carl Schmitt would have responded” (Ibid, p. 148). No objections; it is quite possible and even quite likely that this is exactly how Schmitt would have responded.

At first glance, everything is simple. *Stasis* means feud, strife, discord. It divides the citizens of a polis into hostile groups and causes them to clash with each other in a deadly fight. It is only natural that it is perceived and described in many sources as the worst of the evil that threatens the very existence of a united political community (Lintott, 1982; Finley, 1985). Yet there is a paradox:² in the same sources, the word ‘*stasis*’ often means political stability, standing, or balance, or at least a way to achieve and maintain them. There is an explanation for this paradox. Relying on Nicole Loraux’s book *La cité divisée* (1997) but, above all, on her little-known and difficult-to-find 1987 article, *La guerre dans la famille*, Agamben summarizes her thoughts about *stasis* as follows:

“1) In the first place, *stasis* calls into question the commonplace that conceives Greek politics as the definitive overcoming of the *oikos*³ in the *polis*.

2) In its essence, *stasis* or civil war is a “war within the family,” which comes from the *oikos* and not from outside. Precisely insofar as it is inherent to the family, the *stasis* acts as its revealer; it attests to its irreducible presence in the *polis*.

3) The *oikos* is essentially ambivalent: on the one hand, it is a factor of division and conflict; on the other, it is the paradigm that enables the reconciliation of what it has divided” (Agamben, 2015, pp. 10-11).

Agamben complicates matters further: “The *stasis*... takes place neither in the *oikos* nor in the *polis*, neither in the family nor in the city; rather, it constitutes a zone of indifference between the unpolitical space of the family and the political space of the city. In transgressing this threshold, the *oikos* is politicized; conversely, the *polis* is ‘economized,’ that is, it is reduced to an *oikos*. *This means that in the system of Greek politics civil war functions as a threshold of politicization and depoliticization, through which the house is exceeded in the city and the city is depoliticized in the family*” (Agamben, 2015, pp. 10-11). “The

² Not very paradoxical, though: confrontation also means standing your ground, that is, occupying and holding certain positions, with the latter logically preceding the former and being a condition for its occurrence.

³ The Ancient Greek word *οἶκος* referred to the concept of the family primarily as a household, that is, not only as a kinship but also as a socio-economic unit.

stasis functions as a reactant which reveals the political element in the extreme instance as a threshold of politicization that determines for itself the political or unpolitical character of a certain being” (Ibid, p. 17). Remarkably, the *stasis*’s stabilizing role and function become obscure here and recede into the background.⁴

Another explanation (not alternative, just different and more comprehensible, expressed in a language that is more customary for the social sciences) was proposed by Moshe Berent: “in a relatively egalitarian unstratified community characterized by the absence of coercive apparatuses, that is, by the fact that the application of violence is not monopolized by an agency or a ruling class, and the ability to use force is more-or-less evenly distributed among an armed or potentially armed population. The fear of *stasis* was directly related to the absence of public means to restrain a seditious party. Though denounced, *stasis* was not outlawed, because the only way to check a seditious party was by another one. Further, the absence of constitutional coercive apparatuses made *stasis* a semi-legal means for carrying out constitutional reform (*metabole politeias*)” (Berent, 1998, p. 333; see also Berent, 2000) and obviously for maintaining political stability in a more routine way.

However, there is one more paradox in *stasis*, which attracts the attention of researchers much less often. This notion was—not always but often—applied by the Greeks not only to *intrapolis* but also to *interpolis* conflicts. This approach was detailed and expressed particularly clearly by Plato: “...just as two different names are used, war and faction, so two things also exist, and the names apply to differences in these two. The two things I mean are, on the one hand, what is one’s own and akin, and what is alien, and foreign, on the other. Now the name faction is applied to the hatred of one’s own, war to the hatred of the alien... I assert that the Greek stock is with respect to itself its own and akin, with respect to the barbaric, foreign and alien <...> when

⁴ It also gets little attention in Artur Tretyak’s brilliant article (2023), which was one of the most important sources of inspiration for this essay. Tretyak writes about the same subject but looks at it from a different angle and with a different focus, which is why his reasoning leads to a different point. It is quite indicative that the problems of *stasis* have recently come to the fore in political studies.

Greeks fight with barbarians and barbarians with Greeks, we'll assert they are at war and are enemies by nature, and this hatred must be called war; while when Greeks do any such thing to Greeks, we'll say that they are by nature friends, but in this case Greece is sick and factious, and this kind of hatred must be called faction" (Πολιτεία, 470b, 470c).

Moreover, slightly above and slightly below, Plato describes the serious limitations that apply due to the above to inter-polis stasis: "they not themselves possess a Greek as slave, and give the same advice to the other Greeks <...> they must, therefore, leave off stripping corpses and preventing their recovery <...> well be afraid it would be a defilement to bring such things from our kin to a temple <...> they'll correct their opponents in a kindly way, not punishing them with a view to slavery or destruction <...> they won't ravage Greece or burn houses, nor will they agree that in any city all are their enemies—men, women, and children—but that there are always a few enemies who are to blame for the differences <...> they'll keep up the quarrel until those to blame are compelled to pay the penalty by the blameless ones who are suffering" (Ibid, 469c, 471a, 471b).

"Our citizens must have been this way towards their opponents; and towards the barbarians they must behave as the Greeks do now towards one another" (Ibid, 471b). Naturally, Plato characteristically describes here not the observed but the ideal situation, and "our citizens" are citizens of an imaginary, ideal city that is very different from the real Greeks of flesh and blood. He is fully aware of this gap between what should be and what actually is. But it is difficult to imagine that his project was purely and completely theoretical, and that it had no basis in Greek social and political praxis (it is noteworthy that Plato visualizes an ideal city as purely Hellenic and only Hellenic, rather than composed of some abstract human beings without kith or kin). In this projective representation, just like in others, Plato constructs the ideal from whatever is at hand, disputing things existent and proceeding from them, but by no means ignoring them (some proof that the Platonic image of inter-polis stasis was neither completely groundless nor completely sterile, that it was extracted from real practices and got some feedback from them (see Buis, 2018, p. 172).

Thus, the fire of stasis flared up not only directly in poleis (of which historians have counted about 1,500 during the entire existence of the Greek world), but also throughout Hellas not as a community, or the whole, let alone unity, but as a heterogeneous multitude riddled with tensions, ambitions, claims, and conflicts—“an open and expansive network in which all differences can be expressed freely and equally” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 3). But what was the political component of the non-rigid connection that made the existence of that network even possible? The factors of language, religion, culture, and trade are obvious, but they do not provide an exhaustive explanation of inter-polis stasis as a political condition.

Naturally, it is the civil spirit—not the relationship between a particular person and a specific polis, but the kind of relationship that is characteristic of all Hellenes and Hellenic poleis, which is unknown and off limits to barbarians (both wild tribes and developed despotisms). It implies, as already mentioned above, mutual responsibility of a person and a political entity, a certain set of rights and obligations of both parties, and therefore a certain degree of freedom of the former in relation to the latter. Greeks are free, barbarians are slaves.⁵ This opposition is so often cited in various sources that there is no need to give here illustrative examples.

Polemos, that is, a war *stricto sensu*, where cruelty knows no limitations or norms and where no holds barred if they lead to victory, is, ideally, a war of (one or allied) Hellenic poleis only with barbarians, with strangers, with Others, a war of citizens with non-citizens, of free people with non-free ones. Actually, it is Polemos,⁶ according to the 29th (53rd in the Diels-Krantz numbering system) fragment of Heraclitus, that “makes some people slaves and some people free.”

However, one should not exaggerate the rigidity of the “stasis-polemos” opposition. For example, in some texts, particularly in the early Platonic dialogue *Menexenus*, one can come across the term

⁵ More precisely, according to Euripides, in the despotisms “all are slaves except one” (Ελένη, 276).

⁶ With a capital letter here since Polemos in Greek myths and literature is the name of one of the gods, or rather demons of war, the most merciless one. It is noteworthy that he was known but never worshipped.

‘οἰκεῖος πόλεμος’ (Μενέξενος 243ε), literally meaning “family war” or “home war.” In translations into modern languages, we find simply “civil war” in this place, without any nuances and explanations. However, Agamben believes that Plato spoke “ironically” here (Agamben, 2015, p. 6), which looks quite plausible in the context of dialogue as a whole.⁷ The Greeks, including Plato, did not antithesize but rather juxtaposed polemos and stasis, while drawing a distinction between them and considering both the greatest misfortune. In *The Laws*, Plato says this quite plainly: “The highest good, however, is neither war nor civil strife—which things we should pray rather to be saved from—but peace one with another and friendly feeling” (Νόμοι, 628c).

The analogy between ancient Greece and the current situation seems convincing except that there are no absolutely alien and Other barbarians any more. Even the most irreconcilable enemies of the existing world order, such as Islamist terrorist networks, act not from outside but from within it, wishing to completely abolish and replace it with a world caliphate in the most distant future, while trying to partition out their own autonomous areas in it (without much success, though). Polemos in its pure form is possible (if we again discount indigenous inhabitants of the Andaman Islands) only between earthlings *in toto* and aliens or self-aware Skynet. This analogy can be further reinforced, for example, by comparing Loraux and Agamben’s hypothesis about the stasis’ origin as coming from the family (or from an indistinguishable zone between the family and the city) with the “family of civilized nations” discourse, which was quite popular not so long ago but condemned in recent years as colonialist and therefore disappearing⁸ (Kleinschmidt, 2016; Schabas, 2023).

But why would we need this analogy, and how can it be useful? Is it so important that there are no more internal and external wars, and that stasis and polemos have become mixed up?

⁷ It has been suggested more than once that Plato’s political thought devoid of the deadly seriousness ascribed to it for centuries by his followers and interpreters, and that there was quite a large share of irony in it. This is more than likely for a disciple of Socrates.

⁸ But the “bad taste lingers,” primarily among those who were never accepted as fully recognized members of this wonderful family, or, at best, only as poor adoptees.

It *is* important because this mixture is usually noted for its negative effects as stasis and polemos exchange their worst properties. A relatively moderate (due to its family or quasi-family ties with the enemy) stasis acquires the features of polemos, unbridled in its dehumanizing cruelty and conducted beyond morality, without mercy and honor. Polemos, instead of remaining within the cool, inhuman, and horrible cost-benefit calculus, when human lives are just one of the accountable and available commodities, acquires the special passion of stasis that is characteristic of the strife between people of the same kind (and especially between those who used to be one but are now breaking the bonds of “family” co-dependence). It is all true, but there is more to it.

The contamination of the two modes of war does not have to be necessarily considered detrimental. In fact, a membrane can be permeable both ways. Western political tradition kept developing (since ancient Greece) and finally developed certain ways to limit and control stasis and even—with some luck and only ultimately—gear it towards the common good. *If so, then* can these methods be applied to the global stasis?

In order to describe one of these ways, we need to go slightly back. Who are the subjects and actors of, and parties to stasis? Who fights whom in it? Oh, it is parties!

PARTIES AT WAR

The fact that almost all political scientists view political parties, the very phenomenon of partyness, and party divisions as belonging exclusively to the modern era should not confuse anyone. This view can be called into question even disciplinarily. Seeking to adapt the various definitions of parties as much as possible to the needs of comparative analysis, Kenneth Janda ranked them from narrow to broad and eventually proposed his own version: a party is “an organization that pursues a goal of placing its avowed representations in government positions” (Janda, 1993, p. 166). But the word ‘organization’ unambiguously refers to Weber’s ideal type of rational bureaucracy, even though parties organized in this way are quite rare.

Institutionalization of a party is a process with a variable result that is not guaranteed and is often rather poor (see Panebianco, 1988).

If so, if we replace the word ‘organization,’ for example, with the word ‘team’ (Downs, 1957, p. 25), then the Athenian democrats and aristocrats, the Roman populares and optimates, the Italian Guelphs and Ghibellines, the French Leaguists and the Huguenots, the French Frondeurs and Mazarinists, the English Cavaliers and Roundheads (with their own units), the English Tories and the Whigs (with no one having any doubts about the latter), etc. should also be recognized as parties. And this is exactly what historians do when they describe pre-modern realities, using, unabashedly and without any reservation, the word ‘party’ (or ‘faction’ used for centuries and often nowadays as almost invariably synonymous). Stasis researchers such as Loraux, Agamben, Berent and others do the same.

Another narrowing of the definition, which cannot be found in Janda’s works, is more important: parties stand in stark contrast to all kinds of palace and near-palace cliques (presidents, premiers, and dictators also live in palaces), which plot intrigues, conspiracies, and coups d’état, while in reality seeking to reshuffle the ruling elite in a more or less decisive way and redistribute resources—land, wealth, titles, posts, and other objects of desire—which always accompanies such moves. The same applies to purely dynastic squabbles like the War of the Scarlet and White Roses, because “it is the usual misconception of modern sociology to consider a party an organization that expresses some interests. Any party is part not only of the political world in the narrow sense of the word but also of society. In this sense, it is primary to any interest which it is suspected of advocating” (Salmin, 2009, p. 255).

Let me repeat: the parties are precisely and literally *parts of society*, not all though but those that for various reasons hold and defend their views on power and about power by “placing its avowed representatives in government positions.”⁹ This is exactly what allows them to be “one

⁹ It is worth noting that such parts of society can be formalized in the absence of a formally legal institution of citizenship. A prerequisite here is the civil spirit that arises prior to the (unguaranteed and eventual) institutionalization of citizenship.

of the forms of vertical organization of society and, in particular, one of the channels of vertical mobility” (Ibid, p. 256), which undoubtedly applies to all of the above and many other cases.¹⁰

Both the very existence of parties as actors of stasis and the threat posed by them to a political entity were perceived for centuries as evil, including at the beginning of the modern era. Thomas Hobbes wrote: “The leagues of subjects... are in a Commonwealth... for the most part unnecessary, and savor of unlawful design; and are for that cause unlawful, and go commonly by the name of factions, or conspiracies” (Hobbes, 1651, pp. 121-122). David Hume spoke of party weeds that “subvert government, render laws impotent, and beget the fiercest animosities among men of the same nation”, “seldom end but by the total dissolution of that government, in which they are sown” (Hume, 1904, p. 55). Henri Bolingbroke (one of the few scholars who saw any difference—only quantitative and quite small—between a “party” and a “faction”) stated: “Faction is to party what the superlative is to the positive. Party is a political evil, and faction is the worst of all parties” (Bolingbroke, 1754, p. 83). In No. 10 letter of *The Federalist Papers* (1961, p. 78) James Madison wrote: “By a faction, I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adversed to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community”; hence “a factious spirit [that] has tainted our public administrations.” In his farewell address to the nation in 1796 (a document that should be quoted page after page, but we have to limit ourselves to the most outstanding passages), George Washington said: “...all combinations and associations under whatever plausible character with the real design to direct, control, counteract, or awe the regular deliberation and action of the constituted authorities, are destructive... They serve to organize faction; to give it an artificial and extraordinary force; to put in the place of the delegated will of the nation the will of a party... The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by

¹⁰ This view on the nature of parties and the phenomenon of partytyness itself is detailed and substantiated in: Kaspe, 2007, pp. 187-202; Kaspe, 2012, pp. 84-97; Kaspe, 2016, pp. 155-159.

the spirit of revenge natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism. But this leads at length to a more formal and permanent despotism. The disorders and miseries which result gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual; and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation on the ruins of public liberty” (Washington, 1796, pp. 14-17). Alexis de Tocqueville: “Parties are a necessary evil in free governments... Society is convulsed by great parties, by minor ones it is agitated; it is torn by the former, by the latter it is degraded” (Tocqueville, 1839, pp. 170-171).

The conclusion is clear: parties are actors of stasis. Party infighting is stasis. This is how it worked for centuries. Over time, party politics, as befits stasis, has by no means been harshly dissociated from political violence, including its armed and downright deadly forms.¹¹

Before taking the next step, the reasoning requires one more statement to be added. As has been noted above, in ancient Greece, not only interactions within poleis but also between them could turn into an arena of stasis. Accordingly, the parties as actors of stasis were both intra- and inter-polity (it would be better to use hereinafter the term ‘polity’ instead of the term ‘polis’ as it is broader, part of the modern political language and therefore can apply to present-day realities, not just ancient ones). Democratic and aristocratic (eventually becoming rather oligarchic) parties operated throughout Hellas, usually associated with pro-Athenian or pro-Spartan orientations. Pro-Theban, pro-Persian and anti-Persian, pro-Macedonian and anti-Macedonian, pro-Roman and anti-Roman parties were likewise inter-polity in nature—an external referent representing a particular political project may serve as the basis for party divisions. The narrative of Polybius sounds quite up to date:

¹¹ I cannot help quoting Athós from Alexandre Dumas’ “Twenty Years After”: “I am now obliged to return to the dangerous and wandering life of party faction. Tomorrow I plunge into an adventurous affair in which I may be killed.” The novel is set in 1648, but Dumas wrote it in 1854, and his pen did not flinch.

“There were... two parties at present in all democratic states, one of which maintained that the written requests of the Romans should be executed, and that neither laws, inscribed agreements, nor anything else should take precedence of the wishes of Rome, while the other appealed to laws, sworn treaties, and inscriptions, and implored the people not to violate these lightly” (Ιστορία XXIV, 8, 2-4). Papal and imperial parties, called the Guelphs and Ghibellines in Italy, operated throughout the Holy Roman Empire. Then, as consolidation gained momentum during “the *territorialization of space as a precondition of contemporary politics*” (Balibar, 2004, p. 3) of the modern state, which “almost neurotically watches its borders” (Habermas, 1996, p. 291), the functioning of inter-polity parties became extremely difficult. And then they came back as all kinds of Internationals, the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party, and transnational parties in the European Parliament. In most cases, not only vertically integrated (from elites to the general public) political groups geared up in a certain way, united by certain values, and promoting certain projects had become structural elements of inter-polity parties but also the polities over which they had managed to gain power and control. Such alliances were also vertically integrated and hierarchically organized to varying degrees, with those who guide and those guided.

Now let me make clearer where the reasoning is heading. The abovementioned methods of “limiting and controlling stasis and even... gearing it towards the common good” were developed precisely on “party material.” They were designed to quell party strife and limit its disastrous effects, as well as tame, securitize, and “civilize” parties. Moreover, this was done not only by non-partisan and supra-party forces but also by the parties themselves—most likely for the purpose of self-preservation—at the cost of giving up their most extreme ambitions and the methods of their fulfilment. “War of all against all” proved too risky for almost everyone. As a result, the political entity benefited because its parts—the actors of stasis—acting according to the metonymic *pars pro toto* formula and seeking to usurp *pars* power over the *toto*, were forced to mutual restraint. So, a clash of individual vices was put to the service of the common good.

The first signs that parties were perceived less negatively became noticeable already in the 19th century. In the same document, Washington suddenly remarks: “There is an opinion that parties in free countries are useful checks upon the administration of the government and serve to keep alive the spirit of liberty. This within certain limits is probably true...But in... [governments] of the popular character, in governments purely elective, it is a spirit not to be encouraged. From their natural tendency, it is certain there will always be enough of that spirit for every salutary purpose. And there being constant danger of excess, the effort ought to be by force of public opinion to mitigate and assuage it. A fire not to be quenched, it demands a uniform vigilance to prevent its bursting into a flame, lest instead of warming it should consume” (Washington, 2000, p. 18). In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville admits that “the great parties... sometimes save it [society] by a salutary perturbation” (Tocqueville, 1839, p. 171). In 1925, Harold Laski, after making all the standard complaints about parties and agreeing with them, writes: “Yet, when the last criticism of party has been made, the services they render to a democratic State are inestimable. They prevent popular vagaries from driving their way to the statute-book.¹² They are the most solid obstacle we have against the danger of Caesarism” (Laski, 1925, p. 313). He then goes on listing the advantages of partisanship, but it is extremely important that it begins with reference to the second dimension of party stasis—its ability to be a resource and a guarantee of the stability of the political order, already democratic.

This function gradually emerges from the shadows, and shortly after World War II, Maurice Duverger finally records the change: “liberty and the party system¹³ coincide;” “the rise of parties... has alone made possible any real and active cooperation by the whole people in political affairs;”... “if it were true that democracy is incompatible with them, this would no doubt mean that democracy is incompatible with the

¹² It turns out they don't, contrary to what was thought before.

¹³ The English translation is inaccurate. In the French original, it is “le régime des partis.” A regime and a system are not the same. However, as it will soon be discovered, this substitution is not accidental and is quite meaningful.

conditions of the present day” (Duverger, 1954, pp. 424). Then the belief in the salutary nature of parties (and, equivalently, properly restricted party stasis) turned into a generally accepted standard and was identified with political freedom per se to such an extent that even many socialist countries allowed a somewhat decorative multiparty system, and the demand for a multiparty system became one of the main slogans of the liberation movement in the socialist camp (which actually did away with it) at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.

The emergence of the party system is soundly considered to be the most important safety net against the threat coming from the “factious spirit” *within* a particular polity (practically all of which have been states for some time now). This refers to a consistent set of relatively stable, predictable, but mainly informal patterns that determine relations and scenarios of interaction between parties (including parties on the periphery of the system and those outside it), as well as with the state, its various institutions, non-political elites, churches, civil bodies, etc. The number of studies dedicated to party systems is immense, and going over them here would be completely unnecessary. Yet there are two things that need to be mentioned here.

Firstly, many factors have been identified that affect the format of a particular party system. However, none of them is crucial, and even the electoral system (see famous Duverger’s law: “...the simple-majority single ballot encourages the two-party system; on the contrary both the simple-majority system with second ballot and proportional representation favor multi-partism” (Duverger, 1954, p. 239) cannot be viewed as such, as Duverger himself clearly stated in the same work (see also Colomer, 2005; Benoit, 2007). This means that it is extremely difficult (or, rather, impossible) to design party systems with preset parameters as designers simply have no tools to guarantee a particular desired result. Even the use of very similar electoral systems produces very heterogeneous effects. In fact, even British and American bipartisan systems function differently (the former can be considered bipartisan but not without some reservations).

This is because a party system is ultimately formed (or never formed) by the parties themselves as a result of the self-willed forces’

play leading (or not leading) to a relative dynamic balance. “Parties make for a ‘system’, then, only when they are parts (in the plural); and a party system is... the system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition. That is, the system in question bears on the relatedness of parties to each other, on how each party is a function (in the mathematical sense) of the other parties and reacts, competitively or otherwise, to the other parties” (Sartori, 1976, p. 44). Moreover, this balance constantly wobbles and is temporary, or at least its duration cannot be predicted. Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan stated the “freezing” of most Western party systems in the 1910s and 1920s, noting that even those that had gone through severe trials in the second quarter of the century had recovered in a form very close to the original one (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, p. 50). However, in 1985, Lipset allowed the possibility of “de-freezing” and reshaping even these systems under the influence of new social upheaval (Lipset, 1985, p. 115), which soon happened, except for the United States and partly the UK.

Secondly, this is precisely why all party systems are unique. Their only internally connected, clearly justified, and convincing typology is extremely primitive as it is built on one and only one criterion—the number of parties included in the system for various reasons. The number of actors determines, to some (not full) extent, the structure of interactions within the system and the behavior of the system as a whole. It is just like bicycles: there are many varieties, but the driving skills and the driver’s expected behavior in the traffic flow basically differ only for two- and three-wheel bicycles (there is still a degenerate case of a unicycle, but it can be found only in the circus). Similarly, there are one-party systems (degenerate case), dominant-party systems, quasi-multiparty, two-party, three-party, four-party systems and so on... And then the row ends: “Over and above four parties classification is no longer possible” (Duverger, 1954, p. 237).

Now it is time to bring all of the implications successively mentioned above to the penultimate one. *If* the global world is in a state of global civil war, that is, stasis; *if* the distinction between internal and external wars becomes irrelevant, and stasis and polemos exchange their worst features; *if* the actors of stasis can reasonably be called

parties; *if* both stasis itself and its actors are able to have an interpolity character; *if* the emergence of the party system signifies that party stasis turns into a controlled and predictable regime and becomes a means of ensuring political stability, *then...* is it possible, just as a mental experiment, to apply the language used in science to describe partyness and party systems to the global political dynamics of the last century?

It would be reasonable to take the Interbellum (1918-1939) as the starting point. World War I, or the Great War, was still genuine *polemos*—furious, unrestrained, inhuman (as borne out by the use of toxic gases alone), tearing off the thin covers of civility from all its participants, although all of them tried to portray themselves as the defenders of *civilization*. Attempts to rule out a recurrence of the nightmare experienced by civilization (League of Nations, Kellogg–Briand Pact) failed miserably not least because the call, made by Vladimir Lenin in the fall of 1914, for “transforming the modern imperialist war into a civil war” (Lenin, 1969, p. 22) was being implemented all that time. He referred to an international war to be waged “against the bourgeoisie both of its ‘own’ and ‘foreign’ countries” (Ibid, p. 17) by the finally united world proletariat. Things did not come down to just class struggle as the constellations of conflicting forces, state and non-state, turned out to be much more complicated. But the flame of the “international civil war” (*internationalen Bürgerkrieg*), as Schmitt, who carefully read Lenin, put it in 1938 (Schmitt, 1938, pp. 42-58),¹⁴—Ernst Nolte (Nolte, 1997) called it “European Civil War”—was steadily growing.

World War II was undoubtedly *polemos*, too, but already showing the features of stasis as a war waged by people against their own kind. A fratricidal war is appalling, there is no and can be no alleviation; but by definition it can only occur between brothers who know about their

¹⁴ I am grateful to Alexander F. Filippov and Vladimir Bashkov for explaining to me what Schmitt was thinking in those years and, which is more important, what he was not thinking about. However, in the same year 1938, Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy saw more and looked deeper and further than Schmitt, fitting a lot into one phrase that serves as the epigraph to this article (Rosenstock-Huussy, 1993, p. 20). Unfortunately, because of his absolutely unconventional way of thinking and manner of speaking this extraordinary author was not noticed in his time and is largely ignored nowadays.

own kinship and recognize it. Therefore, it occurs in a special way, and in the swirling vortex of ruthlessness, an attentive observer sees the areas... of something different.

The main factor that reveals not only polemos but also stasis in World War II is that the Soviet Union was a member of the anti-Hitler coalition and made a decisive contribution to the Allies' victory. Accordingly, deeply rooted and hitherto popular images of the savage and bloodthirsty Bolsheviks (formerly Cossacks) instantly disappeared from the public space in the "free world" in 1941. The "civilization against barbarians" discourse was practiced only by Nazi Germany, which was committed to racial theory (as well as Italy and Japan but in less radical forms and with certain adjustments) and which applied it solely to its enemies in the East (Slavs, "Asians," etc.), not in the West.

In his famous speech titled "Their Finest Hour" (delivered in 1940, immediately after the Dunkirk disaster), Winston Churchill spoke of a new dark age which he said would inevitably come if Britain fell. But he did not describe it as a victory of barbaric archaic forces; on the contrary, he warned that it would be ever "more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted [Nazi] science." The threat does not come from outside but from within civilization. However, such a fruit of "perverted science" as chemical weapons did not unexpectedly find any massive use either on the battlefields or in rear areas. To a comparable extent, the civilized "brothers" chose to exterminate each other in other ways.¹⁵

The first serious attempt to shift the whole world from an immoderate polemos to a moderate stasis by creating something similar to a party system was the establishment of the UN, or more precisely, the UN Security Council, a closed cartel of veto players, in relation to which all other "united nations" are a step below and to which they are subordinated (see Bosco, 2009). Its gradual transformation into the only legitimate "nuclear club" was not originally planned, but it

¹⁵ The gas chambers in the death camps, like the Holocaust as a whole, are a separate story about the fight against the "ultimate Alien," alternatively civilized, which makes it, from a Nazi point of view, a mortal danger to the Aryan race subject to total annihilation. Invented by Philipp Lenard and Johannes Stark, "Jewish physics" (*jüdische Physik*) is a completely functional analogue of Churchillian "perverted science."

consolidated the privileged status of its five permanent members. It is difficult to say whether anyone in the summer of 1945 believed that the relationships within this cartel would be equal and harmonious. Maybe only true dreamers did. Having failed to live up to the high-minded principles, it transformed into a bipolar, i.e. bipartisan system—the Soviet Union, on the one hand, the United States, Britain, and France (and, until 1971, the Republic of China), on the other.

Both poles surrounded themselves with client states (the party equivalent is “junior coalition partners” who have no full voting status), and both competed in recruiting more by dragging them from one camp to the other. The quantitative advantage of one pole did not matter because no number of veto players was stronger than one. After all, that is what veto is. For the same reason, the transfer of a Security Council seat from the Taiwanese government to mainland China made little difference; in addition, the Chinese communists had by that time soured relations with their Soviet comrades and taken the *tertius gaudens* (the third rejoicing) position in the bipolar system. Maybe they rejoiced, but this did not have any noticeable impact on the course of the global (already global) Great Game.

Nevertheless, the UN began to fulfill its main mission, and not without success. The Korean War (1950-1953) was a real stasis as evidenced not only by the intra-Korean dimension but also by the limited involvement of the United States (under the UN flag), the Soviet Union, and China. This was most clearly borne out by President Harry Truman’s flat rejection of Douglas MacArthur’s persistent calls for nuclear strikes (not even on North Korea, but directly on China) and the harsh dismissal of the legendary commander for his initiative that could have plunged the country back into polemos.

In the subsequent years, things happened in much the same way. Sometimes the warring parties approached the very edge of the abyss of “mutual assured destruction” but did not fall into it as they shared and recognized (either tacitly or openly) their common responsibility for the fate of human civilization. Immanuel Wallerstein idealized the situation quite a bit as he once stated that “the Cold War was not a game to be won but rather a minuet to be danced” (Wallerstein, 1995,

p. 191). No, that war looked not so much a dance as boxing—in fact, a lot of blood had been shed. And yet, it was boxing in gloves by certain rules, not only written ones. And so was party stasis.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, bipolarity ended. The global two-party system broke up due to the degradation and self-dissolution of one of its constituent elements. The world became unipolar for a while. Yet it was not a one-party system, but a one-and-a-half party, or quasi-multiparty, or dominant-party system, or a system with a hegemonic party, or a natural governing party—the studies of partyhood offered many definitions of such regimes, diverging in nuances but agreeing on the main point. There can be as many parties in such a system as you like, and they are not weak-willed puppets, unlike the non-communist parties that existed in some socialist countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, the GDR, Poland, Czechoslovakia) and exist in modern China today. However, only one party, which acts as the core of any coalitions (when their formation is necessary at all), determines the political course and reaffirms its leadership over and over again. How it is ensured and whether the methods used for that are noble is another question. Usually this is done in different ways. In the 20th century, such systems functioned for decades in Austria, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, Finland, and Sweden (the best known examples outside Europe are India, Mexico, and Japan). The degree and quality of political freedoms in these countries varied greatly, but none of them was completely unfree.

Naturally, the United States enthusiastically accepted the gift of fate that fell upon it and was so in tune with its old and already fading idea of Manifest Destiny, that is, America's obvious claim to world superiority achieved through the dissemination of certain values and principles of political organization (see Merk, 1995; Stephanson, 1995). It all looked as if the spirit of Senator Albert Beveridge had come back to life a century after his speech "In Support of American Empire," delivered in 1900, in which the Constitution itself was interpreted as a direct call for the "growth, expansion of empire, if you will, unlimited by geography or climate or by anything but the vitality and possibilities of the American people" (Beveridge, 1900, p 708).

It was precisely a gift: the Soviet Union and its entire *camp* collapsed all by themselves, under the pressure of internal shortages and strains rather than external shocks.¹⁶ The American political class had not expected such a turn and was not prepared for it. The United States (and the West as a whole) acted spontaneously and situationally to fill the vacated places to the thunderous applause of the vast majority of people living there, including Russia. The “empire by invitation” formula (Lundestad, 1986) proposed by Geir Lundestad in relation to the period between 1946 and 1952 had gained new relevance (Lundestad, 2003).

The United States’ undisturbed dominance did not last long. The 9/11 attacks and their impact on relations with the global Islamic Ummah, the persistent rise of China, Russia’s “rising from knees” driven by deep resentment, the surge of anti-American sentiment in Latin America and Europe (more often among the Left, but sometimes among the Right as well), and even the doubts that quickly grew among the Americans themselves as to whether assuming such a heavy burden alone served national interests (see Nye, 2002)... all these and other challenges have not yet crushed American hegemony (maybe they never will), but, getting no adequate answers, they pile up and undermine it more and more. The global quasi-multiparty system is in crisis.

Most often, its opponents write the word ‘multipolarity’ on their banners. It is possible that some of them actually imply a return to the good old bipolar times (in the same or different configuration), but they do not dare say this directly so as not to lose their allies. Their logic is elementary and attractive: since it is not a one-party system (the adherents of multipolarity do not draw a distinction between one-party and quasi-multiparty systems), then it is a multiparty one. Similarly, as mentioned above, a multiparty system was the main slogan of the liberation movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s. *What kind of multiparty system was meant* did not seem important at that time. Any.

¹⁶ This also happens to dominant parties operating in a multiparty environment. The Italian Christian Democratic Party, which had no competitors on the political scene for half a century, eventually rotted from the inside and self-dissolved in 1994.

So, paraphrasing Russian philosopher and poet Vladimir Solovyov, I want to say: “Polycentrism! The word’s barbaric, / Yet still falls sweetly on my ear, / As if it were a mighty portent / Of God’s great destiny for man” (“Pan-Mongolism”, 1894).

However, a slogan is not yet a program. Exactly how many centers/poles are expected there to be in the new world order? If it is going to be more than four, what should we then do with Duverger’s warning that no classification will be possible in this case, meaning the unpredictability of future interactions within such a fragmented system and their consequences? And will it be possible to call the desired state a system? Which forces (states, alliances) will become centers/poles, and what will be the criteria for their selection and recognition? What is there to indicate that their relations will necessarily be mutually respectful? Why and how will this alleviate, let alone resolve, the numerous current conflicts between such obvious and invariable candidates for the centers/poles as the United States, Europe, whose complete separation from the U.S. is more than doubtful, Russia, China, India, Japan, and the Islamic Ummah (polycentric itself and torn apart by contradictions, with no prospect of complete consolidation)?

Will a multipolar world not turn into an arena of war if not of all against all, then of many against many, a global war, which, like the current confrontation between Israel and Hamas, will be fought again not as stasis but as polemos to dehumanize and exterminate the enemy, while being portrayed, at least by one of the warring parties, as a battle of civilization with barbarians? Is it possible to institutionalize a multipolar construct and formalize it at least in some legal and binding way? Why would such institutionalization be more effective than the original idealistic intent of the UN and its Security Council? And what will happen to the UN, which has been reformed purely theoretically and only in specific aspects but not fundamentally, as long as the Security Council permanent members have the right to veto and have not the slightest intention to give it up now or any time in the future? The main mystery is not even what the answers to these questions will be like, but who will be able to give them.

ISOLATION AT WAR

If the entire previous chain of implications is viable, *then* it would be useful to recall another feature of at least some of the known party systems. It so happens that the stability of a system and the predictability of events within it are achieved beyond the Duvergerian threshold simply by fixing the qualitatively unequal status of individual parties as disproportionate to their quantitative weight. Such systems may be referred to as *isolating*. Stability and predictability within them are ensured by the “all against one” approach when the overwhelming majority of actors, both major and minor, do their best to prevent one of them from making decisions, at least those that affect the entire polity.

This was done in the past to the communist parties in Italy and France, which scored “one-fourth, and even as much as one-third of the total vote but whose governmental coalition potential has been, for the past 25 years, virtually zero” (Sartori, 1976, p. 123). This has long been done to Alternative für Deutschland and Die Linke in Germany, and to Front National¹⁷ in France. This was graphically illustrated by the notorious presidential elections in France in 2002, when Jacques Chirac went toe-to-toe with Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round. Chirac received 82% of the vote vs. 20% in the first round, compared to Le Pen’s 18% and 17%, respectively. In between the first round and the runoff, Chirac’s campaigners urged the voters with such emphatic calls as “*Voter avec des gants*” (Vote in gloves) and “*Votez escroc, pas facho*” (Vote for the thief, not for the fascist.) The 2017 elections were also quite indicative: Le Pen (already Marine) received 34% in the runoff against 21% in the first round, and Emmanuel Macron won 66% against 24%. The same scenario could be observed literally live just recently in the Netherlands when Geert Wilders, the leader of Partij voor de Vrijheid, which beat all other parties in the 2023 parliamentary elections, tried to form a capable government. The attempt has failed—and Wilders has successfully been isolated.

There are several very instructive aspects here.

¹⁷ Called Rassemblement national since 2018, but the renaming has neither deceived anyone nor stuck.

Firstly, a strategy (or instinct) of isolation can be successful under two conditions: a) claims against the actor being isolated have not only a political *stricto sensu* but also a meta-political, moral nature; b) the actor being isolated should be weighty enough for his isolation to have a sufficient consolidating effect on the rest of the participants in the political process so as to outweigh their own disagreements, but at the same time it should not be too weighty so that the process could go on without him.

Secondly, isolation differs from an official ban on extremist, primarily neo-Nazi, parties and from the newfangled cancel culture (see Kasje, 2023b). The actor being isolated is by no means disenfranchised, nor is he surrounded by a wall of silence, disregard, and invisibility. He has and enjoys the same or almost the same legal and legitimate possibilities to express and advance his position as others; he is quite noticed; the public gets informed about his statements and actions; and he is polemicized (*sic!*) with. It is just that, as children would say it, others do not want to be friends with him and accept him into their company. He can get some share of power and influence at the local, municipal or regional level. He is completely free to criticize the mistakes made and expose the injustices being done (not only towards himself). But real supreme power is off limits to him. Period.

Thirdly, the usual reaction of the actor being isolated is similar to a kid's reaction—annoyed offense: “What for? How dare you? A party like ours is not just an organization but a significant and sizeable part of society¹⁸ and cannot be isolated!” The obvious response—“Why not? We have already done it. We want to isolate you and we will”—goes unanswered because there is nothing to be said.

Fourthly, there are no precedents for an isolated actor getting out of his predicament *unharméd* either because other actors have voluntarily ended their boycott or because he has overcome it all by himself. There are none, perhaps for now, but everything is possible.

This interesting strategy has already been tested on a global scale. The first candidate for the role of the one against whom all or almost all others united (without ceasing to be in stasis but thereby making it

¹⁸ Which is absolutely correct.

moderate, limited, and regulated) was “international terrorism” in the early 2000s. This produced some positive results: the U.S. built a massive anti-terrorist coalition, and even Russia voluntarily joined it, not for a show and not empty-handed. So, the Taliban regime was demolished almost instantly, and Russia’s relations with the West improved markedly. Russia got other benefits from that situation as well by having managed to prove the wide presence of international terrorists, including al-Qaeda itself, in the rebellious Republic of Ichkeria and thus dramatically reduced the degree of criticism condemning its “second Chechen campaign.” But it became clear quite soon that the solution would not work in the long term. This is so because unlike in the 1960s and the 1970s, “international terrorism” in the 21st century, frankly speaking, is 99 percent Islamic. It turned out to be impossible to separate Islamic radicals from the global Ummah, and all attempts to rally forces against the Islamic State or Hamas failed (and this is exactly why the Taliban have regained power in Afghanistan). The Ummah as a whole is too large to become an object of isolation.

Many, especially in America, would be delighted to see China isolated. But this is obviously impossible as China is too weighty, its economy is integrated too closely with most other economies in the world, and it uses an extremely sophisticated and therefore effective strategy for establishing relations with other actors, which does not imply, in particular, any political or humanitarian preconditions.

Recently, the role and function of the object of isolation has been increasingly applied to Russia. Both conditions for the success of this strategy—the moral connotation of the claims and sufficient but not excessive weight of the isolated actor—are met in the case of Russia. Voices warning against trusting “those Russians” and doing “business as usual” with them have been heard for quite a long time. Russia’s actions in Ukraine and its categorical and explicit refusal to accept the rules-based international order (which is simply another name for a limited and controlled stasis) have dramatically spurred the process, giving it an avalanche-like character. The situation is aggravated by the fact that calls are made in many places to stop viewing the Russia-Ukraine armed conflict as stasis, as “a strife of

Slavs among themselves” (Alexander Pushkin, “To the Slanderers of Russia,” 1831, in relation to the Polish uprising), turn it into a genuine and uncompromising polemos, both in terms of warfare methods and goals, and get Western countries, currently fighting there by proxy, involved directly.

Meanwhile, Russia’s isolation is progressing slowly but steadily. The ways used to bypass sanctions get blocked one after another. Most Western economies have learned or continue to learn to make do without the Russian markets and resources. The consolidating effect is obvious: Finland and Sweden’s abandonment of neutrality, unthinkable until recently, and their accession to NATO have become a reality; unthinkable as it is, Armenia is drifting away from Russia and so is even Kazakhstan (although much more cautiously).

True, many actors (both national and subnational), including individual members of NATO and the European Union, oppose attempts to isolate Russia, but they act extremely carefully and do not hide that they pursue solely their own interests trying to bargain for better conditions for joining the mainstream or—following the Chinese example—hoping to form their own one. Needless to say, nuclear capabilities and permanent membership in the UN Security Council make Russia’s complete isolation impossible; but these are the only obstacles. The isolation strategy is achieving its main goals anyway. It is so convenient and effective that there is no reason to expect it to be dropped even if the intensity of the Russia-Ukraine armed conflict somehow decreases in the near future.

Why break what has recently got going and works well? Logically, there can only be two scenarios implying such a turn. The first one would envisage the emergence of a new object of isolation, whose isolation will require the rehabilitation and involvement of Russia itself. What kind of actor it can be, what kind of shock and how it should cause it cannot be imagined a priori. And it is scary, too. The second scenario would require the invention of a new method to bring together the fragmented global system, a method that would surpass the isolation strategy in terms of costs and benefits. Making guesses beforehand is again useless.

The global stasis can only be stopped by a dramatic change in human nature or complete deglobalization of the world. The former is unthinkable, at least in rational consciousness. The latter is hypothetically possible, but without a change in human nature it will guarantee a return to polemos. There is nothing comforting to say right now to those in Russia or outside it, who do not like the isolation and who do not want to try to find out what real polemos tastes like. Except perhaps one thing: nothing is forever, and even what seems to be forever will end one day. In James Cameron's *Terminator 2*, the main idea that goes through the entire film is that "the future is not set." I tried to wind up my reasoning differently, but it did not work out that way.

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