

A MULTIPOLAR COLD WAR

Gagik Harutyunyan

The present article draws parallels between existing political realities and the ones that occurred during the Cold War in the second half of the 20th century. Similar to the previous one, the new Cold War is consistent with the logic of «the policy of deterrence» which nowadays is directed against the United States. «Cold War-1» reflected stiff competition between the two opposite ideological and geopolitical programs. Meanwhile, today we have several poles of power and, therefore, «Cold War-2» is viewed as multipolar. The article provides a schematic outline of the strategies pursued by the parties to the «multipolar war», where as a rule asymmetric competition is dominant. It also describes the dynamics of the relationship between the two traditional rivals, the United States and Russia.

The first Cold War¹ represented a tough confrontation between the two ideological and geopolitical systems, whose proponents (often independently of their own will) allied around their leaders, namely the United States and the Soviet Union. The rivalry between the two great powers was observed still during World War II when the «allies» were not only fighting against common enemy, Germany, but quite often and not with less enthusiasm, against each other. It seems that even during the «allied» period² the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union had elements of the forthcoming Cold War.

¹ It was believed that the term «cold war» was first used by the US statesman Bernard Baruch in his address to the US Senate in 1947. However, according to Washington Profile (#89 (720), 2006), this term was introduced by the famous English writer George Orwell who used this expression in his essay published in the «Tribune» on October 19, 1945.

² Some historians viewed the conflict between the USSR and Germany and the alliance between the USSR, USA and Britain during World War II as a sort of «political anomaly». It is difficult to disagree with this opinion as in geopolitical and ideological aspects the USSR and Germany had certain similarities that did not exist in the pragmatic relations between the USSR, USA and Britain.

1. Systemic changes and transitional phase

With the end of the first Cold War and the decline of the bi-polar world order, the United States turned into the predominant power of the world. However, new changes occur in today's world and the unipolar system is transforming into a multipolar one with two processes evolving simultaneously in the current «transitional» phase [1]:

- The US dominance is weakening, giving way to the deterioration of the unipolar system. Today the US political elite admits that even such a power as the United States is not capable of «ruling» the world unilaterally [2,3].
- The major geopolitical actors that already today or in the foreseeable future will impose the multipolar logic on the system of international relationships are becoming stronger and more developed in military, political, economic, and ideological terms.

China, Russia, the Islamic World, a group of Latin American countries, and, with certain reservations, continental Europe are among those possessing this status today. These countries and the United States have engaged into a competition that sometimes turns into an open confrontation characterized by:

- Information wars of the «second generation» that reflect ideological and inter-civilization standoff [4].
- «Local» wars waged through indirect and sometimes direct participation of parties.
- Tough geo-economic competition.

What is happening now is reminiscent of the developments during the Cold War in the second half of the 20th century. Hence, some political analysts tend to term the current phase as Cold War II [5,6]. However, the first and the second Cold Wars have not only similarities, but also differences.

2. Synthetic ideologies and economic systems

The first Cold War represented a conflict of economic and ideological models vying for universality and conventionally called «liberal-democratic» and «communist-totalitarian». Today the situation is different.

It is erroneous to believe that following the demise of the «socialist camp» the liberal-democratic model unilaterally prevails all over the world. Indeed, this model has acquired great importance, however in different civilization zones and countries it assumes completely different forms and contents (See, for example, [7]).

The same situation emerged around ideological concepts. Statements about «the winning universal democratic model» are groundless, as the concept of «democracy» is perceived and applied in various forms and meanings. The same applies to the communist ideology and even China has relinquished «class struggle» and is building a «harmonious society» instead of communism.

Totalitarianism in its «pure form» also does not exist: parliaments and other democratic institutions function alongside the «the royal courts» of the East . In this context it is noteworthy that the United States playing the role of the major adherent of «pure», «universal» democracy and liberalism, adopted some totalitarian components¹ from the communist model and, moreover, acquired religious and «ultranationalist» overtones in the ideology.

It is likely that «universal and pure» economic and ideological models are almost nonexistent nowadays. They have been replaced by modified and in a certain sense *synthetic, hybrid* ideological and economic models that contain different portions of liberal, socialist and civilization (national) values. Among the countries that have been most successful in carrying out such a synthesis, it is worth mentioning China where national and civilization, communist and social as well as liberal concepts perfectly co-exist in both ideological and economic spheres. The example of this rapidly growing power suggests that in the current conditions the competitiveness of states depends on their capacity to form and apply an integral system that includes national and universal (liberal and socialist) components.

Thus, the existing ideological and economic systems have both similarities and strong differences. Together these differences dictate the confrontational logic of the new Cold War causing sometimes open conflicts in the spirit of the «clash of civilizations». The civilizational and national identity is a driving force that countervails the hegemony of the United States and strives to form a multi-polar system wherein carriers of that identity will possess a status, corresponding to their perceptions of full sovereignty.

3. «Policy of deterrence-2»

At the early stage of Cold War II the resistance to the US domination was rather reminiscent of «civil disobedience». However, as the time passed «disobedience» became systemic and similar to the «policy of deterrence» used during Cold War I. At that time this policy was prompted by the following factors.

¹A manifestation of totalitarianism in the United States is seen, for example, in adoption of the «Patriotic Act», existence of «secret prisons» under CIA, unprecedented structural and administrative centralization and broad authorities given to special services.

The USSR won an absolute victory in World War II and created a «communist power» from Beijing to Berlin. In those years «the Soviets» possessed offensive ideology, powerful armed forces, and enjoyed high international reputation (of the country that defeated fascism). Yet the political leadership of the Soviet Union was not content with war outcomes as it was believed that there could have been more gains (see, for example, [8]). In that situation the united West led by the United States had to mobilize its resources to stop the expansion of the Eurasian superpower. In the initial phase of the Cold War nuclear weapons were the major instrument of «deterrence» in the hands of the United States. The US nuclear monopoly played a key role in curbing the Soviet Union's encroachments upon the South (Turkey and Iran). Later on the nuclear balance almost excluded a direct conflict between the United States and USSR.

Today the situation is different. It is the United States that plays the role of an aggressive empire with enormous military superiority. The US political elite also did not seem to be content with the absolute victory in Cold War I. The «war on terrorism» that followed September 11, 2001, and the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq are nothing but claims to establish total control over the world's raw material and human resources. In terms of ideology, the US expansion aims at playing down such concepts as «nation state» and «sovereignty». Currently the efforts of many countries are, in fact, aimed at the «containment» of the US ambitions; in other words, nowadays the policy of deterrence is already employed against the United States. In a sense the «new strategy of deterrence» is a struggle for preserving national (civilization) sovereignty.

Interestingly, nuclear weapons still remain a major instrument of «deterrence». For instance, Russia's nuclear potential was probably one of the few factors that enabled this country to maintain its sovereignty in the 1990's. Similarly, the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea (although somewhat hypertrophied) and the consistently growing number of other countries that follow suit are all aimed at safeguarding sovereignty.

Along with it, in the case of Iran and North Korea, the modern strategy of «nuclear deterrence» (Henry Kissinger is one of its theorists [9]) so far has not become a mechanism of «symmetric deterrence» which existed during the arms race between the United States and USSR¹. At that time it was believed that a nuclear exchange would lead to irreparable losses. Today the countries possessing nu-

¹During the first Cold War and also nowadays Moscow often made clear its preparedness to resort to «asymmetric» response to the US threats. However, that «asymmetry» was of technical nature and did not break the «symmetric» development of arms race.

clear weapons pursue asymmetric approaches and tend to follow the concept of «partial retribution» whereby the military bases of the United States or its allies and in some cases just the environment may suffer serious damage.

4. Absence of confronting military and political blocs and the relinquishment of the symmetric arms race

The «arms race» between the «free world» and the «socialist camp» was one of the key concepts of the first Cold War. Two major alliances, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, founded in 1949) and the Warsaw Pact (1955-1991) with a conventional land border running through Europe and partially, the South Caucasus served as the «military instruments» of the two superpowers.

Under such bi-polar military system «arms race» was symmetric as the US and Soviet armed forces had almost equal capabilities. Any breach of military balance was taken very sensitively by the two parties and they would not spare efforts to restore it. This had a heavy impact on the USSR's economy which lagged well behind the West. The «arms race» used by the United States as a strategy to weaken «the Soviets» is viewed as one of the economic reasons for the Soviet Union's collapse.

Confronting military and political blocs are not characteristic of the current «transitional» phase. NATO has expanded out of proportion and is gradually turning into a global organization. It is known that the present-day NATO is structurally less united than the previous one. In the absence of the USSR or an immediate threat, differences have emerged between the supporters of the North Atlantic and Eurocentric approaches. In addition, today's NATO is no longer seen as an organization with a mission of defending Europe; more than ever it is seen as an organization serving the interests of Anglo-Saxons. However in any case NATO has no equal opponent and continues to dominate in the military sphere. As for the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) that includes some former Soviet republics, its standing in the military area is not that strong while the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) with its good prospects has not yet transformed into a military bloc.

Unlike the first Cold War era, currently the military supremacy of the United States is incontestable. The military budget of the United States amounts to almost half of the global military spending, while by its technical capacity the US armed forces deployed throughout the world are far ahead of the armed forces of other countries, including those of its former «major enemy», Russia.

Meanwhile, military preeminence cannot ensure ideological, political, and economic domination for the United States in the world. The most vivid example of that is the situation in Iraq as well as what is likely to happen in Afghanistan in the near future: military occupation of this or that country does not at all provide total control over the situation. However does not mean that military potential is an insignificant factor and should be paid less attention to. This merely proves that civilizational, ideological, information, economic, and natural resources (particularly, energy resources) have acquired key importance. Given the existing realities, the parties to the Second Cold War (especially the United States) avoid the futile classic arms race, paying special attention to the development of other than military resources. Hence, geopolitical actors often use various types of «weapons», especially, the above mentioned resources¹, against the United States and sometimes against each other. The existing situation predetermines the asymmetry of the current Cold War.

In light of the above circumstances, it is worthwhile to briefly consider the relationship between the United States and some of the «resisting countries» and analyze the dynamics of the relations between such traditional rivals as the United States and Russia.

5. Europe and the United States

In the current multipolar Cold War, Continental Europe whose leaders, Germany and France, hold a distinctive position are evading trying to evade the US influence and pursue their own policy. For these countries the EU format is a sort of opportunity, albeit so far theoretical, to transform into full-fledged European powers. At the same time the EU format is a «strait jacket» which allows the United States to block the projects that do not meet its interests through pro-American European states. The differences in the North Atlantic and Eurocentric concepts have already cooled down the relations between Europe and the United States in the areas of economy and information. In this context it is noteworthy that France launched a 24-hour TV news channel that is supposed to compete with CNN and according to President Jacques Chirac, will challenge the «Anglo-Saxon cultural imperialism»².

¹ It is interesting that Russia is trying to stop the expansion of NATO to Ukraine, employing asymmetric methods. In Crimea, for example, Russia openly supports the successfully unfolding anti-NATO movement.

² See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,329654306-1110633,00.html>.

6. The «Hispanics» vs the US: the War of Civilizations Continues

Historically the anti-US movement in Latin America stems from the Hispanicvs Anglo-Saxon civilization conflict which later transformed into a national liberation struggle with an inherent «leftist deviation». The modern «Latin American Cold War» is, in fact, waged against the first US «imperial» concept, the Monroe Doctrine, which has largely remained unchanged. The new in this war is that confrontation has been transferred onto the territory of the United States. The rapidly growing Hispanic population is turning into a serious demographic problem for the United States and in future the «Latinos» may outnumber «Anglo-Saxons» (English-speakers). This may pose a sort of an asymmetric (with civilization implications) challenge to the United States.

7. The Islamic world and the United States

The developments in the relationships between the United States and the Islamic World are perhaps the most dramatic ones and are consistent with the rules of asymmetric confrontation. Indeed, worries about terrorist organizations and shahids are largely being replaced by concerns over Iran. As a regional power, with its civilizational traditions, national and religious ideology and aspiration to obtain modern technologies, including nuclear, Iran has all the chances to turn into a magnet for the heterogeneous Islamic world. The Cold War between the United States and Iran has been there since the Islamic revolution and is currently entering a new peak phase. Being a major rival of the United States in the Near and Middle East, Iran has unfolded a classic (and quite successful) asymmetric network struggle against the US. Iran's successful strategy also has an impact on global processes.

8. China and the United States: Ideological asymmetry

China possesses enormous resources and, according to the majority of estimations, may soon compete with the United States on many parameters and criteria. Even today the economic potentials of China and the United States are quite comparable which in principle determines the symmetry in business competition. Along with it China's military capability and technological prowess is lower than those of the United States and here China's nuclear arsenal is seen as an asymmetric deterrence factor.

Comparability of resources forces Washington to pursue a well-balanced and

regulated policy in relation to China which slightly reminds of the relationship between the United States and USSR in the 1970's when the military potentials of both countries were almost equal. However, unlike the Soviet Union, China has competitive economy and strong ideology. The state and public system of this «alternative superpower» subordinate to an efficient and harmoniously synthetic ideology which poses a challenge to the United States, the leader of «universal democracy». The US has so far failed to find ideological keys to unlock China and, therefore, feels less confident with China as compared with «the Soviets». The «asymmetry» in relationship between these two countries stands out in their political and social strategies, wherein the two countries preach often contrary concepts.

Today China pursues a well-thought policy in Eurasia, Latin America, and Africa. Of special notice is the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) that has good chances to become a political counter-balance to NATO.

9. Russia and the United States

Asymmetry is also typical of the relationship between Russia and the USA. Russia's economy is considerably inferior to that of the United States. However, due to certain parity in nuclear weapons, vast territory (an important advantage in geopolitics), natural resources (up to 20-25 per cent of the world's natural resources), Russia is a serious rival of the United States. These main actors of the First Cold War have great influence on the global political climate and therefore it is important to go through the developments in relations between the two countries following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

1991-1999 – «The stage of paralysis». During that period the United States treated Russia as a defeated country. As a consequence, Eastern Europe and the majority of former Soviet republics were pulled out of Russia's orbit. Moreover, Russia's own sovereignty and territorial integrity were put into question as Moscow almost lost control over Northern Caucasus and scenarios suggesting division of the country into 8-9 segments were under serious discussion.

Russia was ruled by political and economic elite that was implementing assignments from outside. Actions initiated by the United States and the West in ideological, political and economic domains basically faced no serious resistance. Yevgeny Primakov's «shuttle diplomacy» during events in Yugoslavia or «Kosovo march» of Russia's paratroopers were just an emotional spillover and could not have any tangible impact. British experts rightly explain Russia's relative success in the Caucasian conflicts and Transdnistria by efforts of individual and inde-

pendently acting generals rather than those of the Kremlin. It is interesting that when asked about the internal situation in Russia, Vladimir Putin¹ who was appointed prime minister in 1999 and who started the military operation in Chechnya replied that «Chechnya is everywhere in Russia».

2000-2005 – «The Stage of passive resistance» or latent Cold War. In the early years of Putin's presidency it was difficult to discern any changes in the Russian-US relations that continued to follow the «sovereign-vassal» format. Furthermore, after September 11, 2001 there was a rapprochement between the two countries under the umbrella of the «anti-terrorist coalition». However, the deployment of «temporary» US military bases in the republics of Central Asia and the violation of initial agreements on their withdrawal, the arrival of the US military in Georgia as well as NATO's and EU's expansion have immediately dispelled Kremlin's illusions about possible strategic partnership with the United States. For its part, the United States, foreseeing Russia's possible rebirth, wanted all its projects implemented within a short timeframe. At this very stage the United States, combining «preventive anti-terrorist war» with geo-ideological strategy of «establishment of universal democratic system», was able to achieve impressive results (simultaneously creating an image of Russia as a failed state). This includes, in particular:

- Baltic States with their overtly anti-Russian attitude as well as some Eastern European countries were admitted to NATO and the EU (or the terms of their admission were approved);
- The United States benefited from the unilateral termination of the Anti-Missile Defense Treaty, whereby the missile and nuclear balance between the two countries was partially upset;
- «Colored» revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine brought openly pro-Western and anti-Russian administrations to power;
- The so-called «Kozak's plan» on the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict earlier adopted by all the parties to the conflict was ruined which allowed to get Moldova out of Russia's influence (under this plan Moldova was supposed to turn into a federal state that would include Transnistria).

¹ Putin's terrific career is still a subject of ongoing debates. Some tend to believe that it was Boris Yeltsin's resolute decision, while others relate it to intrigues orchestrated by Boris Berezovsky. According to a somewhat conspiratorial version, Putin's appointment as a president was the result of a «multi-step combination initiated by KGB».

In contrast with the previous one, at this stage Moscow was trying to resist those processes. Indeed, the actions undertaken by Moscow were consistent with the rules of the Cold War, yet were of «hidden», latent nature. Russia's comments on the existing differences between the two countries were more than reserved as the country did not have sufficient resources to show direct «resistance».

Along with it Moscow was able to restore control over the country, to develop economy (the key was the establishment of a partial state control over energy resources), and improve the army. Moscow also managed to carry out a more or less successful foreign policy, particularly in relations with Berlin, Paris, Beijing and Tehran as well as considerably revamp its reputation within the post-Soviet space.

10. Since 2005: Classic Cold War

A new stage commenced on July 1, 2005 when China and Russia adopted a joint declaration under the umbrella of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), in which the key theses were contrary to the provisions of the US doctrine. The declaration proved that Russia and China already have sufficient potential to stand against the US domination. Indeed, the failure of the United States to orchestrate a «colored» revolution in Uzbekistan in 2005, the withdrawal of the US air force base from this country and other developments that made US presence in the Central Asia miserable all confirm the newly emerging realities. Russia was able to change the unfavorable situation in Ukraine, where the parliamentary elections in 2006 led to the formation of a pro-Russian cabinet.

The developments around Iran's nuclear program also had significant impact on the relationship between Russia and the United States. Russia's stance on this issue was close to that of China and on some provisions to those of Germany and France which forced the United States to make certain short-term concessions.

The thesis about the «American threat» is gradually becoming a key element of Russia's political line. A clear evidence of that is the analytical report on the Russia-US relations by V.Falin and G.Yevstafiev disseminated in the State Duma in summer 2006 [10]. According to this document (which was a kind of response to the report, «Russia's Wrong Direction; What the United States Can Do and Should Do» published by the US Council on Foreign Relations in spring 2006), Russia is perceived by the US as an enemy with all ensuing consequences. In this context, it is interesting to remember a statement by the US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, wherein Russia (along with Iran and China) was listed

among the potential enemies of the United States as well as Putin's «Munich speech» made in response to this statement.

These developments which are typical of a classic Cold War are accompanied by the formation of a new Russian ideology. As a result some Russian media outlets portray the repellent image of the United States much more skillfully than during the Soviet times.

A new round of Russian-US standoff has embraced other areas, in particular, economy, where the two countries have engaged in stiff competition over energy resources. All current differences as well as the resultant ideological and economic confrontation are consistent with those that occurred in the first Cold War (despite certain difference).

Prospects

The modern multipolar and asymmetric Cold War is currently in its early stage. The shrinking political resources of the United States and the strengthening of rival countries toughen the «cold» confrontation.

Meanwhile, the possible emergence of a multipolar system in the context of «Cold War II» may lead to a conflict of interests of the parties that are currently struggling against the «US hegemony». The proliferation of nuclear weapons will considerably complicate the regulation of international relations and the development of arms control mechanisms. In such conditions the implementation of the «policy of detente» as during the first Cold War will become much more difficult.

These developments may require revisiting many provisions related to «regional security». For many countries the problems of geopolitical orientation will become pivotal and they will have to adapt to the new realities of multipolar global policy.

December, 2006

Reference sources and literature

1. Gagik Harutyunyan, «Transitional state: geo-ideological factor in global developments», 21st Century, #2, p.3, 2005; Gagik Harutyunyan, «Intermediate war», 21st Century, #2, p.3, 2006.
2. *Christopher Layne*, The Unipolar Illusion Revisited (The Coming End of the United States Unipolar Moment), International Security, Vol.31, #2, p. 7 (fall 2006); *Richard*

- N. Haass*, «The New Middle East», Foreign Affairs, <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20061101faessay85601/richard-n-haass/the-new-middle-east.html>
3. *Dmitri K. Simes*, «Non-realists», http://www.russ.ru/docs/125481293?user_session=a4a4a8b6395cde95de935bf9c8340226
 4. *Gagik Harutyunyan*, «Civilizational factor in the context of information security», 21st Century, #1(3) p.3, 2006.
 5. Gagik Ter-Harutyunyan, «Cold war-2 (with geo-ideological perspective)», Golos Armenii, 05.12.2003.
 6. Vlad Sobell, «Psychological principles of a new cold war», Johnson's Russia List, 22.09.2006, <http://www.inosmi.ru/stories/02/07/18/3106/230049.html>; *Oliver Morgan*, «Oil and Gas Rights: The weapons of a new cold war», *The Observer*, 16.10.2006 <http://www.inosmi.ru/translation/230482.html>
 7. *Steven Rosefield*, «A comparative economics of world's nations», ROSSPEN, Moscow, 2004.
 8. *Victor Suvorov*, «The Last republic», AST, 1995, Moscow.
 9. *Henry Kissinger*, «Nuclear weapons and foreign policy», «Inostrannaya Literatura» Publishing House, Moscow, 1959.
 10. *Valentin Falin, Gennady Yevstafiev*, «On the possible scenario of US actions in relation to Russia in 2006-2008», Political class, #21 September, 2006, <http://www.politklass.ru/cgi-bin/issue.pl?id=626>