

TOWARD A NEW WORLD ORDER OF THE 21ST CENTURY

One hundred years ago, in the third year of the First World War, two unrelated events affected the world order for many future decades. The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks resulted in the ideological polarization of international relations. The newly established Soviet state perceived its relations with the outside world in terms of ideology (communism versus capitalism) rather than in terms of conflicting national interests. “We assert – Lenin declared in May 1918 – that the interests of socialism, the interests of world socialism are superior to national interests, to the interests of the state” (Pipes 1993, p. 166) The outside world reciprocated by treating Soviet Russia as an ideological enemy. Even after the normalization of diplomatic relations and the access of the Soviet Union to the League of Nations ideology remained the dominant factor in mutual relations between USSR and the outside world.

It was also in 1917 that, in his congressional address (of April 2) President Woodrow Wilson – when asking for the declaration of war against Germany – defined the goals of the United States in terms of values rather than interests. Wilson declared that the United States “shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest to our hearts – for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own Government, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal of dominion of right by...a concert of free peoples” (Whitney 1978, p.250).

After almost three centuries, Ideology re-entered international relations as

¹ Minister of National Education of Poland (1996–1997), deputy to the Polish Parliament (Sejm) (1991–1997, 2001), Dr. Sc. (Sociology). Author of scholarly papers on sociology of politics, including the monograph *Social Studies of Political Relations*, many articles, including “The Eastern Europe: the Fate of Democracy”, “Poland and Russia: National Interest or Historical Memory?”, “World War Two and The New World Order”, “The Political Crisis in Ukraine and its Consequences”, “The National Self-Determination: Political and Legal Dilemmas”, “The Theory of National Interest in Science and in Politics” and many others. Honorary rector of the European Higher School for Law and Management in Warsaw, honorary president of the Central European Association for Political Science, professor emeritus of Warsaw University, senator emeritus of Ljubljana University, doctor emeritus of the Oles Gonchar National University in Dnepropetrovsk. Honoured with the Order of Polonia Restituta of the second class.

the crucial factor. It does not mean that after the First World War states ignored their interests but it means that along with national interests – and sometimes even above them – ideological conflicts became dominant factors shaping the world order. What after the Westphalian Peace Treaty of 1648 and after the Vienna Congress of 1815 was the essence of world order – the balance of power based on national interests – has been replaced by ideological divisions. The Second World War was an armed confrontation between three distinctly different ideological camps: (1) the “Axis” of Nazi Germany, fascists Italy and nationalistic Japan, (2) the coalition of liberal democracies led by the United Kingdom and the United States, and (3) the communist Soviet Union. While each of this camps had its state interests, the war was fought for the goals which extended far beyond narrowly defined national interest. The victorious powers made an attempt to build the post-war world order on the mutual recognition of their respective national interests, as reflected in decisions of the Yalta Conference in February 1945 and in the Charter of the United Nations. Soon, however, it became clear that the fundamental ideological differences made lasting co-operation between two blocs of states impossible. The “cold war” was called (by the US President George H.W. Bush) “the struggle for the very soul of mankind” (Leffler 2007, p. 3). It was only because of the dramatic growth of the magnitude of weapons of mass destruction that the ideological confrontation between the two blocs have not resulted in the third world war.

Toward the end of the “cold war” the last leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail S. Gorbachev made an ambitious attempt to free world politics from ideological confrontation. He has abandoned the Leninist concept of the dominant role of “class interests” in international relations, replacing it by the appeal to “universal human values”. In his main book he called for the establishment of “common European home” (Gorbachev 1987) and accepted the democratic transformation as well as the full sovereignty of the socialist states of Central Europe. The British historian Archie Brown stressed the importance of Gorbachev’s approach to the new world order. “The notion of one civilization, of which the Soviet Union

should be a part, and of one international economic system...- wrote Brown – figured prominently in Gorbachev’s thought and speeches in the second half of his General Secretaryship” (Brown 1996, p. 315).

The utopia of one “common home” has not materialized for several reasons. One of them was the rapid and unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union following the abortive coup of August 1991 and the prolonged crisis of post-soviet republics, including the Russian Federation in the last decade of the twentieth century. The other, and more lasting one, was the emergence of new ideological divisions after the cold war.

These divisions took two main forms.

The first reflects the ideological orientations of the principal Western powers, particularly the United States of America, committed to the policy of promotion of values and institutions of liberal democracy all over the world. The most dramatic manifestation of such policy was the American-led attack on Iraq in March 2003, which for several years to come poisoned the international situation and resulted in the intensification of what Samuel P. Huntington called “the clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996). Former National Security Advisor to President Carter and an internationally recognized political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski called this policy “catastrophic” and warned that “democracy becomes a subversive tolls for destabilizing the status quo, leading to an armed intervention that is justified retroactively by the argument that the democratic experiment has failed and that the extremism it produced legitimates the one-sided employment of raw power” (Brzezinski 2007, p.155-156). The subordination of American foreign policy to ideological criteria of liberal democracy was the strongest during the administration of George W. Bush (2001-2009) but it continued during Barack Obama’s administration, even if in less fragrant forms. One of the consequences of the dominance of ideology is that in their relations with other states the United States tended to be guided by its evaluation of their domestic policies, particularly by the criteria of human rights. During his electoral campaign Donald Trump declared his intension to reorient American foreign policy from ideology to

pragmatically interpreted national interest. It remains to be seen if – and how – this approach will affect the world order.

The second challenge came from the rapid growth of Islamic fundamentalism. Its growing influence and radicalization change the very nature of the world order. Radical Islamic fundamentalism ignores national interests and is ready to sacrifice them at the altar of faith. Its objectives are total and cannot be subject to compromises. After the second Iraqi war and particularly after the Arab Spring the confrontation between radical Islamism and the rest of the world intensified. Civil wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen as well as political tensions in Egypt and some other Arab states have a lasting, destabilizing impact on the world order.

The crucial question for the coming years is whether the crucial powers will be willing and able to depart from ideological approach to international relations and to return to the old paradigm of national interests. In several of my writing, including some published in Russian (Wiatr 2013, Wiatr 2015), I have postulated such approach arguing that it is by far easier to reach acceptable compromises when relations between states are based on mutually recognized national interests than when they reflect conflicting ideological goals. National interests do not exclude conflicts but the nature of such conflicts is different from the nature of conflicts based on ideologies. When conflicts result from opposing interests, there is always ground for a compromise. Conflicting sides agree to solutions which satisfy them partly (and, by definition, leave them partly dissatisfied). Diplomacy become an art of compromise. It may fail, but if conducted wisely it can produce mutually acceptable solutions. When, however, conflicts are based on values and ideologies a true compromise is very difficult and often quite impossible.

In the present world there is only one ideological conflict which cannot be solved through compromise. It is the conflict between radical Islamism and the rest of the world. As long as this challenge continue to grow, major powers of the world have no alternative but to present a common front in opposition to the Islamic challenge. Samuel P. Huntington was right when he postulated the alliance

between two great civilizations (those of Western and Eastern Christianity) in their opposition to aggressive Islamism. For years (perhaps decades) to come this is going to be the main international conflict, which will call for common effort of all powers regardless of the differences in their internal political systems. The liberal democracies should and will defend – I hope successfully – their institutions and the spirit of freedom on which they are based. They should, however, be able to cooperate with other powers whose domestic order differs from so-called Western values. Democracy is born and develops out on domestic roots and cannot be effectively exported from abroad. In the new world order we should be able to cultivate common interests and peacefully solve our conflicts of interests where such conflicts emerge. In this we may benefit from studying the lessons of the past. The centuries preceding the dominance of ideological were not a “paradise lost” but they were by far less dangerous than the times of the great ideological confrontations.

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