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## CONCERNING CIVILIZATION-STATES

Back in Soviet times, among Orientalists and some of their colleagues in other branches of the humanities, there were many proponents of the so-called civilizational approach. To a certain extent, it questioned the universality of the Marxist ‘five-stage’ or ‘formation’ theory explaining the entire history of human society. This cautious search was not simply a struggle driven by fatigue from the domination of “formationism,” although this cause also played a role. Fortunately, there were provisions in the Marxist legacy that could be interpreted in favor of some modification to the five-stage formula, in particular the “Asian mode of production.” A number of scholars, who at that time promoted the idea of importance of civilizational features in explaining historical processes, continue their research endeavors today.

However, my report is not about the debates of that time, but about the debates on similar issues that are going on today in the humanities of different specialties with active participation of politicians and even journalists. However, it is no longer for the sake of overthrowing Marxism, which had already suffered serious blows (partly unfairly).

Participants in these debates are driven by urgency of the problem, rooted in the widespread notion of the importance of civilizational features of certain societies and distinctiveness of certain states, which are now commonly referred to as “civilization-states” as opposed to “nation-states” or nation-states that dominate the world community. I discussed this point in one of my papers published in *Polis* magazine, to which I can refer anyone interested in this problem so as not to repeat what has already been written.

A considerable number of analysts involved in the debate speak of the phenomenon of *civilizationalism* (al-

though not everyone agrees on the term). Among them are James Dorsey, a Briton working in Singapore, who acts as a journalist and a researcher. He probably wrote more than anyone else on this subject, which he has been studying for many years. He is one of the critics of this trend in world politics and of the “civilization-states” that practiced it. Given the impact Dorsey’s thinking has had on a wide readership, both in the West and in Asia, we should examine in more detail his analytical speculations which are sharply politicized by the author, making them quite detached from academicism and scholarly impartiality.

Citing the example of such major civilization-states as India, China, as well as our country, Dorsey argues, in particular, that “Indian civilizationalism” is capable of creating a new “flashpoint” in the future, and claims that the three leaders have the goal of creating a 21st century world order in which “civilizationalist aspirations are placed above national sovereignty, freedom and minority rights.”<sup>2</sup> Given the scope of the report that does not aspire to be a full-fledged theoretical research which would suggest a comprehensive treatment of the topic, I will not touch upon all its aspects and will focus further on the phenomenon of India.

As for the British author’s claims about Russia, their invalidity is quite obvious. The multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Russia secures the rights of the minorities so convincingly that this is recognized by virtually everyone who is familiar with the situation in our country. I will cite only the opinion of Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, Secretary General of one of the largest and most influential international Islamic organizations headquartered in Mecca, the Muslim World League (MWL). During his visit to Russia in the course of a program including Moscow, Tatarstan and Chechnya, MWL leader praised the unique centuries-long Russian experience of building harmony, accord and peace among different ethnic and confessional groups in the country. Countries of the Islamic world and beyond always speak favorably of the federal structure of the country and its national and religious policies.

Dorsey rebukes the leadership of another civilization-state, China, for treating Taiwan as an integral part of the country in scope of “one China” policy. But the vast majority of the world states does not support the minority of Taiwanese politicians who want declare independence of the island. It is becoming evident that only the United States are gradually drifting toward the “two-Chinas” policy, which of

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<sup>2</sup> Dorsey J. Indian civilisationalism: a potential next flashpoint? URL: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360541828\\_Indian\\_civilisationalism\\_a\\_potential\\_next\\_flashpoint](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360541828_Indian_civilisationalism_a_potential_next_flashpoint).

course raises serious concerns in this friendly state whose people are as proud of their ancient history as we are. Following Western leaders, Dorsey criticizes the national policies of Chinese authorities, accusing them of violating human rights of Uighurs, Kazakhs, and some other ethnic and religious minorities, the vast majority of whom are Muslim. This critic, however, completely ignores the fact that China, like many other states in the world, faces threats to its national security from religious extremists, international terrorists and separatists. It also ignores the success that China has achieved in the economic development of areas densely populated by Muslim minorities. It is indicative that Western politicians, human rights activists and experts, while hypocritically defending Chinese Muslims and openly demonstrating double standards, do not want to see the brutal persecution to which the Russian population of Donbass has been and is being subjected by the Kiev nationalists.

Let's move on to India. Dorsey severely criticizes the prime minister of this civilization-state, Narendra Modi, for the concept of Akhand Bharat (or Akhand Hindustan, "undivided India"), that is, an India that "would stretch from Afghanistan to Myanmar and include nuclear-armed Pakistan as well as Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives" (he forgot to add Tibet, which would complete the picture). Much has been written about this concept, and in this case I can also refer anyone interested to the abundant material available. Of course, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of today's India has some nationalist adherents, but they do not determine the country's political course. Dorsey admits that since Modi took over the Indian government in 2014, he has refrained from publicly voicing the Indian nationalist geopolitical ambitions, well known to everyone. At the same time, the British author recalls that the last time Modi spoke in this vein was not so long ago, namely in his 2012 interview as Gujarat Chief Minister, when he said that "India, Pakistan and Bangladesh should be reunited again."

Such unionist aspirations do exist among some Indian politicians, but it should not be forgotten that this is not a project of forced unification of these states or their wider circle, but their reunification on the basis of common history and civilizational proximity, as well as on the basis of voluntary reunification of peoples, which would lead to the creation of a mighty state in South Asia, capable of becoming one of the world's leading powers. According to Dorsey, the concept of "Hindu Rashtra" (now commonly translated as "Indian system of government," Hindu polity), in which the Briton sees the embodiment of Indian nationalism, may be still relevant. Although the concept has clearly somewhat lost its appeal, let us not forget that its proponents have previously stressed that it is not about Hinduism, but about "Indianness." Not everyone is included in the community of South Asian religions, though. In addition to Hinduism, these include Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, and, as a proponent of Indian nationalism put it, "Islam with an Eastern value system like Indonesian."

Let me say that such scathing attacks on the Modi government by a prominent Western mainstream author are unlikely to strengthen India's orientation toward closer cooperation with the United States and its closest allies in Europe and Asia, or to help build genuine trust between the parties. Yes, it is true that due to pragmatic geopolitical con-

siderations, including those related to the uneasy relationship with China, New Delhi participates in such formats of this cooperation as QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), which brings together the United States, Japan, Australia and India. It is also true that Narendra Modi ascribes great importance to this quadrilateral security dialogue, as evidenced by his recent speeches. Specifically, on May 24, 2022, during the meeting of the QUAD group leaders, he stated that the interaction between the four nations "contributes to the creation of a free Indo-Pacific region." Nevertheless, there was no unanimity between them: the Indian Prime Minister never agreed to join the anti-Russian sanctions of his QUAD partners. Still, attempts to "pull" India into the Western camp continue. Thus, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz invited Modi to attend the G7 summit in June in the Bavarian Alps.

In elaborating on the nationalism of the Indian authorities and pro-government politicians, Dorsey refers to the views of Ram Madrav, former general secretary of the BJP and member of the executive committee of the conservative nationalist organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which is nearly a century old and has an estimated 6 million followers. Madrav seeks common civilizational values among the different religions of the region which could be called the "Greater Indo-Pacific," similar to the "Greater Middle East" invented in the United States. In a recent interview, Madrav told the Briton: "Eastern civilizations and Eastern religions profess the same value system." As an example of such a religious value system, the politician referred to the "humanistic Islam" practiced by the Nahdlatul Ulama – as Dorsey put it, the largest "Muslim civil society" movement not only in Indonesia but also in the world (it was formed as a result of a separation from another moderate reformist non-governmental Sunni Muslim movement, the Muhammadiyah, founded in 1912 and to this day remaining another powerful religious and social structure in Indonesia). Nahdlatul Ulama, a movement that unites up to 90 million Sunni Muslims by some estimates and no more than 30 million by others, advocates ridding Islam of a series of obsolete, long outdated norms. By the way, some experts believe that Indonesia can be included in the number of civilization-states – if not today, then at least in the near future.

The British expert is also dissatisfied with Delhi's policy towards the nearly 200 million Muslim "minority" (Dorsey estimates the number of Muslims in India at 14% of the total population – 1.4 billion). He recalls the 2019 amendments to India's citizenship law that gave eligibility to Indians living in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, but not to Muslims, and the removal of autonomy from Jammu and Kashmir, which was the only state in India where Muslims were the majority. There were many Western experts and analysts from Muslim states that didn't see it as a violation of Muslim rights.

Unfair criticism of the policies of "civilization-states," which include the most influential non-Western countries with a long history of defending their national identity in the face of the hegemonic aspirations of Western powers, exacerbates the contradictions evident in the papers and speeches of mainstream Western authors, including James Dorsey, among others. One might assume that the debate over the problem of civilizationalism in the face of new global challenges and geopolitical uncertainty will maintain the current momentum in the near and medium term.