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## WHY THE UNITED STATES IS DESTINED TO BECOME A REGIONAL POWER

### **Global escalation of contradictions**

For many years, the Likhachov Conference has been focused on the dialogue between cultures and civilizations. Initially we were convinced that further development of the world community is possible only on the basis of aspiration for mutual understanding, dialogue and equal partnership. Life has disproved, rather than reinforced, this view.

Scholars and politicians believed globalization to be a real form of dialogue of cultures and the only reasonable type of interaction between peoples and states; however, it only deepened the contradictions between civilizations. We have become witnesses (and in some ways participants) of a multiculturalism policy crisis. Many countries increasingly aspire to localize their economies, cultures, and political strategies. Competition between civilizations, opposition between countries and their alliances, sometimes reaching extreme levels of confrontations and clashes, intensifies in the world.

There is a growing struggle for status and resources, rights and influence of different countries within specific regions and the world community. Formats of this struggle vary from strong statements of politicians to large-scale

military action. Conflicts are becoming increasingly uncompromising.

Many analysts hold the U.S. responsible for this course of events, as it could not bear the burden of leadership and failed to offer the world decent ways of interaction in a changing reality.

Today nearly every state – its scientific, financial, economic, political, cultural elite and society as a whole – is rethinking their national interests, looking for optimal responses to the challenges and threats posed by the world's transformation which generates global instability and uncertainty.

The Russian Federation is no exception in this regard. Our country is overcoming the crisis of cultural and civilizational identity, formation of the Russian national idea, search for its place in the new globalizing world.

For Russia, the problems of observing its national interests are now becoming particularly relevant and cover the widest range of phenomena – from state sovereignty, economic security of the country in the face of sanctions and crisis trends in the global economy to the preservation of relics of national culture and traditional spiritual values, preservation of its cultural, human, intellectual, technological potential, development of a number of industries, determining the vectors of modernization of education, implementing social programs, etc.

### **The United States is a country of ideological backwardness**

The theme of this report, “Why the U.S. is destined to become a regional power,” is of interest even beyond the context of the prospects of the currently unfolding confrontation between the U.S.-led West and the rest of the world seeking to escape Western dictates. Russia has now become

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the main target of Western aggression, but virtually the entire “non-West” no longer leaves any doubt as to whose side it is on.

The destiny of the U.S. is also interesting in terms of the lessons the world community (Russia being no exception) will have to learn from the declining hegemon’s loss of global leadership.

Some processes, developing rapidly and before our eyes, may look random and disparate. However, their systematical review can reveal the logic of the historical process, the objective facts and laws behind the seeming randomness and fragmentation, and thus create the prerequisites for determining the future strategy and tactics of the states defending the sovereignty in a dynamically changing reality.

The first thing we want to focus on is the question of meaning of the existence of the state as such. Essentially, the history of every state is, on the one hand, a search for an answer and, on the other hand, an answer to this question. I believe that by the end of the twentieth century the United States had failed in this regard.

History has proven that sustainable development and obtaining the competitive advantages of the state today cannot rest only on private economic interest, i.e. the desire of citizens for maximum material enrichment. Individual greed must be controlled and limited, while activity and effort must be directed in a socially acceptable course. It makes more and more sense to involve wide population in the development processes of a country, using motivation beyond material incentives. In this regard, economic development is viewed not as an absolute but as a relative value. It is only a means, not an end. This knowledge has been honed over thousands of years of philosophical and broader humanitarian thought: richness is valuable only insofar as it contributes to social progress and the spiritual and moral development of the society and individuals.

This quest is reflected in the concept of welfare state as an answer to the question of the meaning of the state’s existence. But the U.S. is far behind many countries in practical implementation of this concept. For example, it falls short of Norway, Switzerland, Canada, Monaco, the United Arab Emirates, Belarus, Azerbaijan, or Libya under Muammar Gaddafi. It is no coincidence that the U.S. has lagged behind China in terms of socio-economic development for many years. Moreover, the U.S. systematically consumes far more than it produces, being the world’s largest debtor.

For the economic, political, and cultural elite of the United States, the values of culture, humanism, and the public good have never been immutable. It is common knowledge that many spiritual cornerstones are represented in the form of proverbs and sayings in popular culture. In the United States there is a popular saying, “If you’re so smart, why are you so poor?” Its meaning is that the main measure of a person’s success is money.

American fiction literature has very fondly (and with great talent) described and introduced into the public consciousness the heroic image of an entrepreneur, the pioneer capitalist, so convincingly portrayed by Jack London and Theodore Dreiser. O. Henry’s character from “The Roads We Take” pronounces the quoted phrase “Bolivar can’t carry double,” reflecting the individualistic nature of American success and the ease of sacrificing friendship to self-interest.

Meanwhile, the development of the American and the wider Western model shows that some of the indisputable advantages of the capitalist world order have not only been exhausted, but have turned into their opposite, becoming the cause of social crises. The idea of a welfare state in the United States has come into clash with the idea of a consumer society.

### **Competition is no longer a development driver of the American capitalism**

The country’s stalemate is caused by many factors. They include, primarily, the fundamental change in the market – the loss of the country’s role as an engine of economic development. The efficiency of classical capitalism in Karl Marx’s time was based on a free market driven by the spontaneous effects of economic mechanisms. It was based on the competition of producers who struggled to meet the needs of consumers by offering better products. But that market is now a thing of the past. The economic center of gravity shifted from the factory floor to the minds of people. Material production has been pushed to the periphery of the economy, replaced by the production of meanings; whereas needs started to be marketed as products.

Through manipulative advertising techniques, large corporations have succeeded in imposing unnatural values and life purposes on the mass population. This path of development of the Western civilization turned out to be certainly profitable for those in power, but a dead end for the country as a whole.

In the recent years, the U.S. scientific elite has been increasingly concerned about this course of events. In particular, the leading American theorists – Nobel laureates J. Stiglitz, P. Krugman and others raise the question of rethinking the central pillars of the dominant economic theory, ascertaining the fundamental flaws in the American model of capitalism and the need to strengthen state regulation of the economy, in fact – to return to the common sense.

Meanwhile, as is often the case, scientific thought and actual practice pursue different paths and toward different ends. Thus far, building the consumerist model of a human being and using workers as a means to an end turn out to be a serious economic and social problem. According to the forecasts of the U.S. mortgage agency Fannie Mae, the U.S. economy could face a crisis in the mid-term and go into recession by next year. Former U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Nikki Haley believes China will soon surpass the United States in GDP, and warned of the country’s bankruptcy because of the policies of the American leader Joe Biden. Such predictions are becoming more and more valid.

For many years, the U.S. boasted very low inflation. In some periods it was equal to 1% and even lower, with a record of 0.01% in 2008. Nevertheless, in 2021 it reached 7%. During the great global crisis, the U.S. prevented devaluation of the dollar and failure of weaker companies. Much of this was done at the expense of building up the national debt. In 2022, it exceeded \$29 trillion. The debt ceiling has now been raised to \$31.4 trillion.<sup>1</sup> Economists believe that “changing the situation is not possible in the 2022 environ-

<sup>1</sup> Колташев В. США в воронке инфляции: как справлялись раньше и удастся ли теперь. URL: <https://tass.ru/opinions/13449227> (date of address: 29.08.2022).

ment – the U.S. financial sector needs a cash boost, and the government debt is so high that a rate increase would result in a default. The first problem will be the need to stop borrowing, as a result of which the economy will lose the impetus for growth – GDP growth depends largely on the growth of government spending, and the latter is supported by an increase in debt.”<sup>1</sup> These are all symptoms of ineffectiveness of the system – the U.S. is gradually losing its role as the financial center, the generator of the world economy and, eventually, the leading political and military player.

The decrepit, uncompetitive U.S. economy is increasingly living off the inflation of electronic financial bubbles, a monopoly on the virtual money machine. In today’s global financial system, the West has become the primary debtor, even though it dictates prices in world trade and turns unfair competition into an essential tool for survival. Of course, the world community does not welcome this kind of a global market.

The liberal model of the consumer society established in America and dominant in the Western world, based on a rather controversial assertion widely promoted in the media, scientific research, fiction, cinema, etc. – “The value of everything, including people, can be expressed in money” – is now exhausted and futile. According to Academician V. S. Stepin, a long-time participant of the Likhachov Conference, prevalence of such principles determining the values and norms of human society pushes humanity “along the path of increasing crises leading to ecological and anthropological catastrophe.”<sup>2</sup> These words were spoken by him in 2016 and turned out to be prophetic.

Today the U.S. world leadership is supported not through efficiency of the socio-economic model, but by armed forces, monopoly of the “printing press” and dominance in the global information space.

### The Collapse of Democracy

Another important phenomenon is degeneration of the political system that has always been America’s pride: democracy. Democracy is known to be based on the method of collective decision-making with equal opportunities for citizens to participate in the process.

Democracy in the American way has come to the logical end of its development – a declarative form of government privatized by big capital. First, Donald Trump and his staff manipulated the minds of voters by targeting a campaign in which every individual voter was lured by a personalized image of “the best possible” president through social media (mostly Facebook). This image was pre-calculated on the basis of the analysis of so-called big data, accumulating almost all aspects of human life – from shopping and visiting doctors to types of recreation and watching TV channels or viewing Internet sites.

In the end, Trump was elected, but it turned out that he did not meet the demands of the ruling elite. In the next election, his opponents went for blatant and primitive fraud in the course of the “postal vote” and vote count. When Trump demanded a recount, it turned out that the ballots had been destroyed. The whole world saw that American

democracy appeared to be a dummy, a piece of scenery privatized by the ruling class. Obviously, such a “democracy” cannot drive the country’s development.

The same thing happened to the national mass media; in it, the U.S. lost another powerful driver of the country’s growth – the “fourth estate,” the freedom of speech. Trump’s unsuccessful attempt to “drain the Washington swamp” clearly demonstrated that all branches of American government, including the judiciary branch, have merged into a single organism that has shifted to a totalitarian government and society.

In the post-Trump U.S., problems have intensified – not only in socio-economic development, but also in interracial relations, political stability, and citizens’ attitudes toward history. Gender and family agendas have undergone previously unthinkable collisions. The society seemed to have lost freedom as the basic American value.

### Degradation of the elite

Apparently the country has entered a fundamental crisis of its existence. History shows that when different nations enter such crises, the crucial factor of overcoming them is the quality of the national elite, its ability to analyze the situation, choose and put together a corpus of ideas capable of taking the country to a new upward trajectory of development.

Alas, there is a profound deficit in this respect as well. As capitalism developed, intellectuals – philosophers, scientists, writers, and university professors – played an increasingly significant role in the history of the West. Their ideas, arising from the analysis of economic, political, social, and cultural reality, had a meaningful, sometimes decisive influence on the authorities and society.

Today, however, we see that virtually all spiritual production in the West, and primarily in the United States, has been privatized by monopolistic structures. Intellectuals have become servants who produce ideas at the behest of elite corporations that do not have the public good among their priorities.

Add deformation and exhaustion of other strata of the national elite whose representatives have lost the ability to respond adequately to changes in the surrounding world and the situation in their country. The elite has exhausted its potential for generating new ideas and meanings and identifying promising development paths.

The collective portrait of the U.S. political elite is disheartening. In the primaries, Bernie Sanders, who was 79 years old at the time, competed against Joe Biden. The party could offer no other candidate. The actions of the current vice president Kamala Harris raise doubts in her adequacy. The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi is older than Biden, and her speeches and actions also at times deviate from common sense. During her visit to Russia in October 2021, U.S. Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland demonstrated an ignorance of geography unacceptable for her position. Hillary Clinton, John McCain, Sarah Palin, etc. are examples of the general trend of degradation of the American elite.

The lack of understanding by this “elite” of what is happening and their inability to see into the future, their helplessness in the face of change are striking. No wonder that the writings of many contemporary politicians, scientists, and cultural figures are full of concern. Piotr Dutkiewicz,

<sup>1</sup> Колташев В. Оп. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Степин В. С. Трансмутации ценностей и интересов на современном этапе развития цивилизации // Современные глобальные вызовы и национальные интересы : XVI Междунар. Лихачевские науч. чтения, 19–21 мая 2016 г. СПб. : СПбГУП, 2016. С. 236.

a renowned Canadian scholar and a long-time participant of the Likhachov Conference, believes that “the nature of the global contradictions of the modern world and the uncertainty of future prospects make fear of the future a driving force of human actions and a significant motivator of political decisions.”<sup>1</sup>

The internal degradation of a very recent great power makes its global leadership increasingly problematic. There is a growing mismatch between the global superpower ambitions of the United States and its actual economic and political capabilities.

### America versus Europe

The United States did not play a dominant role in Europe before World War II. Great Britain sought to set Germany against the Soviet Union and contributed to Hitler’s political nurturing. But this scenario did not fully materialize. Hitler created an “axis” with Rome and Tokyo that turned into a global adversary for the UK–U.S. partnership. It became clear even to the leaders of the major powers that the era of the independent existence of nation-states and their ad hoc alliances was coming to an end. The era of global confrontations of alliances was pending. De Gaulle began to nurture the idea of uniting the continental states of the Old Europe (the European Union), Churchill – the Anglo-Saxon project of uniting Great Britain and the United States, Stalin responded with the Warsaw Pact.

Today, the West is a complex geopolitical configuration. Construction of a united Europe took place under the military and political control of the Anglo-Saxon bloc (the United States and Britain), where Britain played the role of junior partner. With Brexit, the influence of the U.S. on the life of Western Europe has not diminished thanks to NATO. This military bloc ensures U.S. control over the European Union.

The modern American project of the world order originally did not provide for the equality of the countries that make up the European Union, nor for the independence of the EU. The equality of countries within the European Union is nothing more than a slogan. The countries of “Old Europe” are in the lead: Germany, France, Italy. The periphery of the European Union does not play a distinctive role.

Recently admitted to the EU, the former members of the Warsaw Pact behave like vassals of the United States, just as limotrophic countries should. As for the states outside the EU borders, the influence is ensured there through controlled, corrupt power structures and a deliberately cultivated environment of instability. Ukraine is a rather convincing example. As George Soros said in an interview to the British newspaper *The Guardian*, “what is happening in Ukraine is my best project.”<sup>2</sup>

Through the efforts of its corporations, the U.S. has become the world’s chief corrupt official, providing shady

profits to those in power in various countries and siphoning the super-profits from these countries.

It is no coincidence that it was the U.S. that contributed most to the destruction of the hard-won system of international law, which has been replaced once again by the law of force. New savagery and neo-barbarism are being committed ostensibly in defense of the true values that mankind has honed over thousands of years of historical development. In reality, these values are shamelessly trampled.

### Agony of the West

The current situation in the world, which emerged after February 24, the start of the Russian army’s special military operation in Ukraine, has highlighted a number of phenomena that had previously been veiled. In particular, it turned out that the so-called “collective” West had the limits of collectivism. These limits run along the lines of national interests.

Beyond the borders of the EU, despite U.S. pressure, an increasing number of countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America are choosing a path that is essentially oppositional to the West. China, India, Brazil, Turkey, Indonesia, South Africa and even Mexico refused to impose sanctions against Russia. This came as a shock to America, which is used to telling other states what geopolitical stance they should take.

Against the background of a weakening “collective” West led and guided by the United States, emergence of the “collective East,” “collective Asia” and other forces that increasingly openly ignore the role of the United States as world leader is becoming more pronounced.

As a result, the U.S. is moving painfully but surely toward being a regional power. America began to drift from the center of world politics to its periphery.

We will have an opportunity to discuss the peculiarities of this process at the 21st and subsequent Likhachov Scientific Conferences.

### The American Dream Failed to Come True

For now, I will conclude with a reflection from the writings of William Faulkner: “The American Dream: What Happened to It.” The great writer recalls its meaning: “...every individual man... will have an inalienable right to individual dignity and freedom within a fabric of individual courage and honorable work and mutual responsibility. Because now what we hear is a cacophony of terror and conciliation and compromise babbling only the mouth-sounds, the loud and empty words which we have emasculated of all meaning whatever – freedom, democracy, patriotism – with which, awakened at last, we try in desperation to hide from ourselves that loss.”<sup>3</sup>

That’s a shame, of course. Millions of people in Russia were inspired by that dream.

<sup>1</sup> Дуткевич П. Ключевые противоречия мирового порядка // Контуры будущего в контексте мирового культурного развития : XVIII Междунар. Лихачевские науч. чтения, 17–19 мая 2018 г. СПб. : СПбГУП, 2018. С. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Джордж Сорос: «Происходящее на Украине – мой лучший проект». URL: <https://russtrat.ru/comments/20-aprelya-2022-0007-9994> (date of address: 29.08.2022).

<sup>3</sup> Фолкнер У. О частной жизни : [перевод Н. А. Анастасьева] // Анастасьев Н. А. Владелец Йокнапатофы. М. : Книга, 1991. С. 408.