

“WHY THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD REJECTED A WESTERN-CENTRIC WORLD: ESCAPE FROM FREEDOM OR REFUSAL OF A NEW FORM OF SLAVERY?”

In 2023, Josep Borrell, the Head of the European Union's Diplomatic Service, made a significant admission: in an interview with the *Financial Times*, he acknowledged that the West could no longer expect unconditional support from the developing world.

“Latin America, Africa, the Indo-Pacific – three major regions of the world. We can no longer take it for granted that they are on our side. They are hedging their bets,” the EU’s top diplomat conceded.¹ Some might argue that former colonies, many still economically dependent on their erstwhile masters, have always harbored resentment toward Europe and the United States. That may be true. But never before has the opposition from the “Global South” to the West assumed such organized, widespread, and intellectually substantiated forms. Economists speak of “deglobalization.” Western media have, since Donald Trump’s first term, been filled with headlines about “decoupling” – the unraveling of financial and technological ties between the U.S. and Chinese economies. Yet it is worth noting: China, despite its economic achievements, still officially considers itself a developing country and a member of the “Global South”. The fact that the Chinese public attributes the economic strain of decoupling not to President Xi Jinping but to the United States and President Trump is impossible to ignore.²

Thus, the Global South’s turn away from a Western-centric world cannot be dismissed as the product of leftist populist rhetoric or the resurgence of radical left movements – as some liberal Russian political analysts have claimed by pointing to Venezuela under Chávez and Maduro.³ When the growing contradictions between the self-proclaimed “center” (the West) and the “periphery” escalate to the point of economic decoupling between the world’s two largest economies – American and

¹ Financial Times, May 15, 2023

² Alexey Maslov, “Vostochnaya Shkatulka”, dated May 4, 2025

³ Lecture hall of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy. “Not only about Maduro: Why are events in Venezuela so important?”, 2019

Chinese – it becomes intellectually untenable to deny that the South’s pivot is rooted in objective realities.

THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE “COLLECTIVE WEST”

One possible explanation for the Global South’s rejection of the Western-centered order is the weakening – if not outright disintegration – of its core: the so-called “Collective West”. The mutual estrangement between Trump-era America and the “globalist liberals” of the EU, Canada, Australia, and other Western nations is plain to see. However, the Global South’s skepticism of Western policies long predates these internal rifts in the “Collective West” structure. It began solidifying in the 1990s and became mainstream in Latin America and Africa by the early 2000s. The rise to power of President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela dates to 1999, while the African National Congress (ANC) established anti-colonial rule in South Africa as early as 1994. The divergence of these regimes from Western norms – though now glaring – was not initially apparent. By the 2000s, however, it had become clear that Chávez’s policy of redirecting the country’s oil wealth through PDVSA toward domestic poverty reduction would ultimately bring Venezuela into a protracted (“hundred years’ war”) conflict with the United States, a confrontation that he stated in 2008 having become closer with Russia. Similarly, in 2011, under the post-Mandela successors, South Africa – along with much of the African Union – vocally opposed NATO’s military intervention in Libya aimed at toppling Muammar Gaddafi.

The apotheosis of this “anti-Western rebellion” came when many Global South countries refused to join the West in condemning Russia’s Special Military Operation in Ukraine during the years 2022–2025.

So when U.S. President Joe Biden declared in 2024 that “the whole world envies the United States,” the remark was met not with applause, but with skepticism, and was considered ridicule. And this is despite the fact that the U.S. remains the world’s wealthiest nation. According to *Le Figaro* (French newspaper), the average French citizen’s income is comparable to that of residents of some of

the poorest U.S. states.⁴ And France is far from the EU's poorest member. The key takeaway is clear: disillusionment with the West among developing nations set in long before Western societies began fracturing over Trump's electoral victories or the rise of Europe's so-called far-right parties. Since causes cannot follow their effects, it becomes evident that the "world majority" disaffection with the West ran "in parallel" with the growing polarization between anti-establishment voters in the U.S. (which led Trump to victories in 2016 and 2024) and the liberal political elite – both American and European. In this sense, the disintegration of the "Collective West" may be less a cause than a symptom of deeper dysfunctions within Western societies.

OBJECTIVE CONTRADICTIONS

Today, even the most serious scholars acknowledge that the anti-Western turn in the developing world – including rising powers like China and India – has objective geopolitical, economic, and cultural causes.

It's not merely about China's economic success, though that success undoubtedly played a crucial role in inspiring poorer nations with the hope of a "Chinese alternative". Since the 2010s, as China began surpassing the U.S. in certain GDP indicators, even mainstream Western media began publishing analyses of the Chinese economic model's comparative efficiency versus American and European models.

But the issue runs deeper. Harsh sanctions imposed by the Obama and Biden administrations on members of the so-called "Axis of Evil" (Iran, North Korea, and, from 2014 onward, Russia), along with their allies, have had severe collateral effects on the people of developing countries. Iran's economic blockade by the U.S. and EU has directly harmed its partners in the poorer parts of the Arab world – particularly Palestinians and people of Gaza, as well as Yemenis and Lebanese. This, in turn, has triggered widespread antipathy toward the USA, Israel, and, to a lesser extent, the EU across the major part of the Global South. Muslim-majority nations like

⁴ Figaro, August 22, 2023

Indonesia and Malaysia – let alone the Arab world – express deep solidarity with Palestinians and Lebanese.

Donald Trump's attempt to reverse offshoring through a tariff war targeting Chinese industry has also provoked backlash. His punitive 145% tariffs on Chinese goods disrupted global trade and alienated both the working classes and business elites in developing countries. Entrepreneurs recognized these measures as trade-blocking rather than regulatory – and ordinary citizens saw them as destabilizing. As a result, the USA has not only forfeited its image as a fair economic arbiter, but even its secondary reputation as a self-interested but stable superpower.

Even some countries of the Global South, such as India, Indonesia, and Vietnam – targeted by the USA as alternative investment destinations to China – remain deeply skeptical of Washington's trade policy, despite the short-term benefits from the influx of American capital. These nations – India, Indonesia and Vietnam – understand that the USA is not investing out of affection for their people, but in search of cheap labour and market conditions comparable to those of China.

The result is a growing realignment of sympathy in the Global South – away from the USA and EU and toward countries like China, Russia, and Iran, which have positioned themselves in defiance of Western hegemony.

But it is not economics alone that attracts or repels nations from a particular socio-economic system or political regime.

The Global South's drift away from the United States and Brussels has also been driven by geopolitical – and, perhaps even more importantly, ideological – factors.

GEOPOLITICAL REASONS

Let us briefly list them, providing examples.

First – the geopolitical reasons. They are as follows:

First, it turned out that aligning with Western countries does not bring peace, nor does it guarantee protection from external aggression or internal civil wars. There are countless examples. The United States failed to protect its ally, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, during the 2011 Arab Spring uprising. On the contrary, the Americans supported that “color revolution” from the start, which briefly

brought to power in Egypt the extremist Muslim Brotherhood movement – banned in Russia. U.S. and NATO interventions in Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and various sub-Saharan African countries not only failed to improve conditions but often worsened them. France, meanwhile, was unable to provide its client states in Africa – Mali, Niger, the Central African Republic – with protection from terrorism perpetrated by radical Islamist groups. As a result, French military contingents were expelled from these countries, where pro-Russian military regimes have since taken power.

Second, it became clear that the wealthy Western countries talk a lot about helping the “Global South” but do almost nothing in practice. In 2018, UN bodies published discouraging statistics: Western nations allocate only 0.15–0.2% of their GDP to aid poor countries. Under Trump, the share of such spending in the U.S. budget declined even further.

Developing countries have come to understand that under this model, they are doomed to “eternally chase after” their highly stingy Western sponsors. Moreover, in the early 2020s, a rapid remilitarization of the Western world began, marked by surging defense budgets in both the EU and the USA. This trend further reduces the already weak “military weight” of developing countries in the global balance of armed power – exceptions being giants like China, India, or Brazil, which can afford massive defense spending despite persistent poverty. Saudi Arabia also maintains enormous military expenditures, but following its normalization of relations with Israel, many fellow Arab nations now regard Riyadh more as an agent of the colonial system. (Multinational Israel, for most Arabs, is seen as a similarly “multiethnic” colonial force – much like the French-speaking European community in 1960s Algeria that oppressed the indigenous Arab and Berber populations, and in which Italians and Portuguese were present in numbers comparable to the French.)⁵

Against the backdrop of widespread disillusionment with the West among poor nations, Russia’s global prestige – dented in the 1990s – has begun to rise again. Even the conservative American publication *U.S. News & World Report* was forced

⁵ Alain Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*, Flammarion, 1982, page 79.

to admit: more and more people around the world view Putin's Special Military Operation in Ukraine as "anti-colonial".⁶ This fact drives the Western mainstream press into a frenzy. That press wants to see Russia as a degraded version of the West – therefore, it brands both the Soviet Union and modern Russia as "colonial empires". According to this view, Russia's actions in Ukraine are merely an attempt to resurrect Soviet-era rule and reclaim territories lost during a supposed "anti-colonial upheaval", enslaving the people who live there.

However, neither developing countries nor even anti-Putin political exiles from today's Russia – those who still recall historical truths – believe that Ukrainians in the USSR were an "oppressed and colonized" nation. On the contrary, they supplied a disproportionately large share of the Soviet leadership. Ukrainians also retained their influence within the power structures of the Russian Federation. And the nations of the Global South well remember that in real colonialism, colonized peoples have no representation in the governing structures of the metropole. This is precisely why the West is now obsessed with placing black and "color" minorities into every government and corporate structure.

IDEOLOGICAL REASONS

Does the inclusion of former representatives of oppressed peoples into the power structures of the USA and EU – such as African American descendants of slaves like Condoleezza Rice and former Secretary of State Colin Powell, or London Mayor of Pakistani origin Sadiq Khan and former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak – mean that the West is truly committed to equality and parting with its colonial past?

Not really, because these representatives of racial minorities, integrated into the Western elite, are required to accept the West's ultra-liberal ideology. According to this ideology, the world is divided into good democracies and bad autocracies. Yet, a vast portion of the Global South – including many former colonies – falls into the "autocracy" category from the viewpoint of the USA and the EU. This is deeply offensive even to countries like Azerbaijan and Georgia that find themselves labeled as autocracies, not to mention nations such as Russia, China, Myanmar, etc.

⁶ Putin Declares Anti-Colonial War, US News and World Report, Sept 30, 2022

As a result, Powell and Rice – African Americans who reached high office in the USA – displayed contempt toward their historical homeland, Africa. Not because of the skin color of people living there, but because they viewed Americans (including themselves being black-skinned) as more democratic, civilized, and bred in an “open society”.

In the Global South, a question is being asked more and more frequently: who are these judges? Why are these people – who often read little and clearly pander to their superiors (just look at Secretary Marco Rubio’s obsequious behavior toward Trump) – considered so much better and more democratic than us? What makes their ideology so superior and humane that they represent “civilization”, while we merely have “traditional beliefs”, not even dignified with the term “religion”?

Upon closer inspection, the ultra-liberal ideology of the modern EU (and of the USA until Trump’s victory) reveals totalitarian traits, reminiscent of far-right (Hitlerian) or far-left (Trotskyist, Pol Pot-style, or early Stalinist) regimes. The difference is that while Trotsky and Pol Pot pushed socialist ideals to the extreme, and Hitler distorted patriotism, the modern West – especially the EU – has done the same with liberal humanism.

The modern West has shown that even noble ideals like gender equality can be taken to absurd extremes – such as demanding access to women’s restrooms for transgender individuals who retain male genitalia and fully functional male libido. The idea of female dignity and bodily autonomy has been distorted and dragged through the mud by the MeToo movement, which extorts money from public figures over sexual harassment 30–40 years ago – claims that are unverifiable and undocumented.

It turns out that today’s ultra-liberal West, like the far-right and far-left regimes of the past, is capable of destroying “politically incorrect” historical monuments, including statues of famous people (Queen Victoria in Canada, General Lee and Columbus in the USA). Christianity is being pushed into the same dark corner in Europe that it was banished to in the USSR under Khrushchev and Brezhnev – without any influence on public life.

And, most importantly, this ultra-liberal ideology is inclined toward armed aggression and disregards the results of elections if the outcomes don't favor its preferred candidates.

A prime example is Ukraine, where the USA and EU supported a violent coup to oust the legitimately elected president Viktor Yanukovych – ignoring the 2010 election results that they disliked. The next logical step for Brussels and Washington was to back the war launched by the new Kiev authorities in 2014 (not in 2022), which involved aircraft, tanks, and firearms. In those early days of 2014, the hypocrisy of the new Western ideology was laid bare. The same ideology that was previously horrified by the idea of Yanukovych using live ammunition against its (pro-Western) protesters now endorsed bombs and tanks when they were used against “infidels” – that is, Ukrainians who favored maintaining ties with Russia or speaking Russian. These were moderate, democratic minority rights by any standard. The real problem was that the West viewed the “metropole” of this minority – Russia – as its ideological adversary.

Over the past decades, the Global South has accumulated extensive experience observing the ideological contortions of the modern West. A single unifying ideology is now impossible for either the Global South or even for Russia in all its diversity – and it's not needed. It is enough to unite people of different faiths and ideologies in opposition to Western ultra-liberalism. Some time ago, Soviet communists, Serbian Orthodox nationalists, and Greek liberals once united in the struggle against Nazi Germany and Italian fascism.

ECONOMIC REASONS

As for the economic reasons behind the Global South's disenchantment with the West and the Western-centric world model, they are even more numerous and, frankly, outrageous.

First, it turns out that under new environmental standards, infrastructure requirements, and limited access to credit, industrial projects in developing countries become prohibitively expensive and thus uncompetitive. This was convincingly explained by Bolivian President Luis Alberto Arce at the St. Petersburg International

Economic Forum (SPIEF 2024). Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin also offered a compelling breakdown in his speech.

“Abandoning fossil fuels puts developing countries in a much worse position in the medium term than developed nations, which completed their industrialization process with access to cheap hydrocarbon energy,” Mishustin told to the business paper *Vzglyad*⁷.

An even simpler and more vivid explanation of how Western environmental fantasies disadvantage the Global South was offered by Igor Yushkov, an expert at the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation and the National Energy Security Fund. He said the following:

“This is about global injustice. Europe and the USA – the so-called Western civilization – achieved high economic development precisely by progressing through all stages of the energy cycle, uninterrupted. First, they burned wood, then coal, then oil, and later gas. Now they are technologically and financially able to switch to renewables. But many developing countries haven’t completed these stages. In some parts of Africa, they still burn wood – coal hasn’t even arrived yet. And now they’re being told they can’t use coal and must leap directly to renewables. The fact that they lack the money and technology to do so doesn’t concern the West,” Yushkov explained⁸.

Second, the existing credit system is blatantly unfair: it allows the USA, which prints the world’s reserve currency, to finance its economy and consumption interest-free – at the expense of the Global South.

Third, the West has ceased to be an economic role model. The declining standard of living among the middle class in Germany and the USA has convinced the Global South of the truth in Mahatma Gandhi’s words:

“The mere mechanical expansion of Western economies into new markets will destroy Western civilization precisely in the act of spreading it. Why? Because capitalism is a supranational phenomenon – it was never a tool of any one nation.

⁷ <https://vz.ru/economy/2023/4/27/1209332.html>

⁸ <https://vz.ru/economy/2023/4/27/1209332.html>

On the contrary, it turns even European countries into its tools, gradually becoming a parasite that feeds primarily off its European 'host body'.”⁹

In conclusion, it's worth mentioning that the retreat of developing countries from the Western-centric world system built over the past 500 years has geopolitical, ideological, and economic reasons. While scholars in these countries may seek academic explanations for this psychological “deglobalization”, ordinary people advance it through protests, migration, and voting for governments critical of the West. There will be no return to Western centrality.

⁹ <https://aeon.co/essays/the-idea-of-the-west-has-always-been-in-motion-and-in-crisis>