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## On World Order's Evolution: From Pope Alexander VI to Donald Trump

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### ABSTRACT

*The article analyses the evolution of world order from the end of the fifteenth century up to the present day, as well as the influence of Donald Trump. The author examines existing approaches to the typology of historical types of international/world order – toponymical and polar – showing their advantages and flaws. Based on this, the author proposes a typology of historical types of international/world order that combines both approaches. He identifies eleven historical types, including the proposed type (phase) of the post-American world order. The author describes each type, and, on this basis, briefly outlines evolution of the world order, the struggle for it and its changes up to the present. Important observations are made that can be useful for analyzing the current state and anticipating future transformations. In particular, on the one hand, it is shown that during the transition from one type to another, the graduality is interrupted, usually accompanied by a severe period of destabilization. However, on the other hand, the development of these types is cumulative. This means that successful institutions and legal provisions proven by life and history are preserved within the new order framework. The principle of developing new institutions/imperatives is also formulated. So in the course of development of each historical type of world order, new forms and institutions are formed and evolved, which become important or leading for the next type. The following conclusions are drawn from the general analysis: 1) about the uniqueness of the modern American order; 2) about its inevitable change; and 3) about the*

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*importance to preserve the best and working elements from the present and immediate past in the process of transition to a new world order. Therefore, it is necessary to talk about building a new society based on critical understanding of previous epochs and taking into account their best achievements.*

**Keywords:** *types of world order, pole typology, Pax Americana, 'European concert', Westphalian system, Versailles-Washington system, bipolar system, revolutions, change of world order.*

## **1. TYPOLOGY OF HISTORICAL TYPES OF INTERNATIONAL/WORLD ORDER**

### **1.1. Introductory Notes. Typologies**

Elsewhere we have already examined various approaches to defining the concept of 'world order' (see, *e.g.*, Grinin A. 2025). The present article aims to identify the main historical milestones in the evolutionary development of types of world order in recent centuries and to examine historical types of world order. In addressing this task, a brief history of world order, the struggle for it, and its changes up to the present day will also be described.

Leonid E. Grinin, Ilya V. Ilyin, and Alexey I. Andreev, in their article devoted to the world order (Grinin, Ilyin, and Andreev 2016; see also Grinin L. 2016a), mentioned the following types of world order: a concert of great powers; a duumvirate (as was the case after World War I, when, following the defeat of Germany, Britain and France took the leading positions); the bipolar system that emerged after World War II (USA–USSR) and the modern unipolar system (led by the USA). This approach is in some respects coherent to the so-called pole typology. Depending on the number of poles, it distinguishes unipolar, bipolar (or bipolar), and multipolar (though a concert of great powers is not equal to multipolarity) world order. This typology is supported by many American researchers (for more details, see, *e.g.*, Akopov 2013).

There also exists a so-called toponymical typology, which includes historically developed types of the world order, which are named after the place where the documents defining their fundamental principles were signed. It distinguishes the Westphalian (after the Thirty Years' War, *i.e.*, after 1648), Vienna (after the Congress of Vienna in 1815), Versailles (after World War I, 1919), and Yalta-Potsdam (after World War II, 1945) types of world order. Furthermore, we can talk about

a mixed typology, to which we adhere, that combines these two approaches.

We should note that the concept of world order, when applied to history, is rather amorphous, and it is more accurate to speak about international order, since the European order did not immediately become global. However, even before the establishment of the European order, a long and dramatic path had been passed in developing specific international rules and principles of coexistence.

All achievements in international law were reached at a high cost. They were mainly the result of long and bloody wars and developed through prolonged negotiations, after realizing that force alone failed to achieve the desired result and that compromises, couched in international legal forms, were required. Thus, as emphasized in the previous paragraph, destabilization and steps towards strengthening international order went hand in hand. Moreover, progress in Europe was largely determined by the inability to establish the hegemony of a single state and, consequently, by the shifting alliances of various coalitions.

### **1.2. The Cumulative Character of the Evolution and Development of Historical Types of International Order**

It is worth emphasizing that the history of world order and historical typology can provide us with important observations and ideas that can be useful for analyzing the current state and anticipating future transformations. After all, events of the distant past continue to influence contemporary political reality (Fukuyama 2014). In particular, we will show below that although the development of types of international order, on the one hand, demonstrates a break in its graduality during the transition from one type to another, usually accompanied by a severe period of destabilization, but on the other hand, the development of these types is cumulative. This means that successful and long-standing institutions and legal provisions, proven by life and history, are preserved within the new order. Thus, by the time of Napoleon's defeat and the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the idea of a system of great powers in Europe had been firmly established, so the creation of a 'concert of great powers' consisting of five states was greatly facilitated by previous experience. The institution of state and monarchical sovereignty, severely undermined by Napoleon's actions, was also restored.

According to Henry Kissinger, this 'European concert,' is, to a certain extent, a model for the world order today (Kissinger 1997, 2014).

Other political scientists, such as Ralf Haass, have also discussed the need to create a kind of the European ‘concert of powers’ at the global level (Haass and Kupchan 2021). Indeed, as the modern world moves away from unipolarity, it is possible that the future world system will also form something similar to such a ‘concert,’ for example, of several leading alliances of states. In addition to the trend towards cumulative-ness, one can also point to the principle of the maturation of new institutions/imperatives. This means that, as each historical type of world order develops, new forms and institutions emerge and mature, becoming important or leading in the next type. Thus, at the Congress of Vienna, the principle of legitimacy and sovereignty of monarchs was made a priority. But since these were multinational monarchies or monarchies within a group of states of a single nation (in Germany and Italy), they failed to withstand the challenges of the times. And soon, the principle of monarchical legitimacy began to be challenged by the principle of nationalism (in the form of revolutions and uprisings) and the right of nations to self-determination. These principles proved important in the next stage, especially after the First World War, and after the Second World War, they were transformed into the anti-colonialist struggle.

The 1919 Treaty of Versailles further developed the idea of international conferences, which were quite numerous in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After World War II, there was a renewed attempt to create a world assembly of states, based on the experience (albeit unsuccessful) of the League of Nations, created after World War I. The unipolar American order did not destroy the UN or other international organizations. Therefore, during the formation of a new world order, it is necessary to consider and conceptually formulate ideas about which elements of the existing order should be absolutely preserved and which should be reformed, which should be broken, and which should be replaced. A passage from the Conclusion to our report to the Club of Rome (Sadovnichy *et al.* 2024) is appropriate here. It addresses the issue of the inevitable destruction of the old during the transition to the new: ‘The rejection of the old during the transition to the new is inevitable, but in the process of transition to a new world order, it is important to preserve all the best and most effective from the present and the recent past.’ Therefore, we must talk about constructing a new society based on a critical understanding of previous epochs and with the account of their best achievements (including socialism, capitalism, *etc.*).<sup>1</sup>

## 2. THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE TOPOLOGICAL TYPOLOGY OF WORLD ORDER

Let us now return to the topological approach, that is, to the identification of the types of world order based on the place where the foundations of the new world order are legally established. As mentioned above, there are four types of world order: 1) the Westphalian (after 1648), the Vienna (1815), the Versailles (1919), and the Yalta-Potsdam (1945). Undoubtedly, this approach makes sense. However, although all four historical types are identified absolutely correctly, in our opinion, this typology does not take into account other historical types. After all, it is important to bear in mind that world order was not always formalized legally. Therefore, this typology needs to be refined.

Note that, if we follow the given typology literally, the first two types existed for a very long time. The first one lasted for more than 150 years and the second one for more than a hundred years. However, in reality, world order exists for no more than thirty to fifty years (see below). Indeed, could it be that neither the emergence of new great powers, including Russia and Prussia, nor the decline of the former great powers (Spain, Holland, and Sweden) changed the European order in the eighteenth century compared to the seventeenth century? Could it be that the formation of the German Empire and Italy from numerous states did not change the Vienna order in Europe during the last third of the nineteenth century? We believe that it would be ahistorical to think so.

In particular, Leonid Grinin, Ilya Ilyin, and Alexey Andreev (Grinin *et al.* 2016; Grinin 2016) point out that a world order with a certain established and fairly stable form, recognized and maintained in one way or another by the leading powers, usually lasts for a maximum of three to four decades, or even less. For example, the order established after the Napoleonic Wars and the Congress of Vienna lasted less than 35 years and it was destroyed by the revolutions of 1848–1849 and the Crimean War (1853–1856). The subsequent system of world order, although it began to take shape after the formation of the German Empire (1871), was not fully established until the early 1890s and lasted less than two decades before it was destroyed by the First World War. The Treaty of Versailles (1919) was grossly violated by Germany as early as 1935. The world order after the Second World War lasted for 45 years – from 1945 to 1990 – which can already be considered a record. Let us add that the American unipolar world,

which began to take shape in 1991, started to unravel as a result of the global crisis of 2008–2009, and by its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022, it was already openly challenged.

### 3. OUR TYPOLOGY OF INTERNATIONAL/WORLD ORDER

As can be seen from the above, the toponymical typology of historical types of world order is useful, but clearly insufficient. It is worth taking into account that, according to some experts, the typology of world order remains practically unstudied in the modern theory of international relations, except for some approaches within the frameworks of geopolitics and world-system theories (Sergeev and Kazantsev 2008). The situation has not radically changed over the past years. In this section, we attempt to outline a more detailed and historically accurate typology of mixed types by defining historical types based on key historical milestones and the most significant features of the corresponding world order. However, it should be noted that this is merely an outline, since the topic requires special elaboration. We do not believe that the proposed periodization is the only possible one or that it lacks flaws. On the contrary, it is obvious that any typology has its major limitations (for more details see Grinin and Korotayev 2009, 2025). In our periodization, the chronological framework includes the periods of formation, mature phase, and destabilization of world order. To complete the picture, we have also added the future phase of a post-American world order to this typology/periodization.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Historical types of international/world order*

1) The proto-system of international order of *religious pluralism and colonial divisions*, the late fifteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries (two key milestones were important here: the 1493 papal bulls on the division of the world and the Peace of Augsburg of 1555).

2) *The Westphalian system*, the formation of legitimate principles of coexistence; from 1648 (*i.e.* after the end of the Thirty Years' War) to the end of the seventeenth – beginning of the eighteenth centuries.

3) *Formation of the system of great powers* (until the Boston Tea Party of 1773).

4) *The period of disorder and revolutions* (1773–1798).

5) *The Napoleonic era*. An attempt to establish hegemony in Europe (1799–1815).

6) *The Vienna system* (1815–1871). The age of revolutions.

7) *The period of peace and preparation for the struggle for global leadership* (1871–1914).

8) *The Versailles-Washington System*. The first world order system – the *duumvirate between Great Britain and France*.

9) *Bipolar system* (the Yalta–Potsdam system), 1945–1991. The Soviet-American world order.

10) *Pax Americana*, a unipolar world order (1991 – ?).

11) A new *non-American* world order.

#### **4. HISTORICAL TYPES OF INTERNATIONAL/WORLD ORDER**

##### **4.1. The Proto-System of International Order of Religious Pluralism and Colonial Divisions (16th century)**

The ideas about the principles on which the relations between countries and the international order in general should be based started to take shape only in the sixteenth century, when diplomatic relations began to be established and the outlines of a system of great powers in Europe, as well as a system of colonial empires, became visible. However, from that time on, we can only speak of a proto-system of the international (European) order, which took quite a long time to develop. The first steps were taken as early as the end of the fifteenth century (1493), when Pope Alexander VI issued four bulls: ‘Inter caetera’ No. 1 and No. 2, ‘Eximiae devotionis,’ and ‘Dudum sequidem,’ according to which, the globe – and above all, future, as yet undiscovered colonial possessions – was to be divided between Spain and Portugal. Based on these bulls, the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1594 was later drawn up, and the ‘division’ of the world between Spain and Portugal was fixed. So this proto-system was not just European but also a global one.

However, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Reformation and religious wars broke out in Germany and then in other countries. This period generally lasted until the end of the sixteenth century and in some places even longer. The main result of the religious struggles of the sixteenth century was the division of European states, principalities, *etc.*, into Catholic and Protestant ones. As a result of the protracted religious wars, the Peace of Augsburg was signed in 1555, establishing the principle of ‘whose realm, his faith,’ that is, the ruler's faith determined the religious affiliation of the whole territory. This was an important principle that helped put an end to wars in Germany, and later strengthened the idea of religious freedom. However, conflicts continued in other countries (France, the Netherlands) and in 1618 the pan-European Thirty Years' War started. The end of this war in 1648 can be considered the end of this period.

#### **4.2. The Westphalian System and the Formation of Legitimate Principles of Coexistence until the Late Seventeenth – Early Eighteenth Centuries**

The prototype of the legal principles of the system of international relations first emerged as a result of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which ended the devastating Thirty Years' War in Central Europe. These principles were then developed over a period of more than two hundred years (for information about the Westphalian system, see Parker 1997; Rayner 1964; Spruyt 2000). It is particularly important that the principles of sovereignty and the supreme authority's legitimacy were established that were implemented in domestic policy, primarily in the right to decide on issues of war and peace. The principle of legitimacy later came to the fore during the French Revolution.

The Thirty Years' War introduced two new principles into foreign policy, which were later widely used: 1) maintaining the international balance of power by supporting a weaker coalition against a stronger one; 2) prioritizing state and monarchical interests (later national interests) over other interests (religious, ideological, *etc.*).

The significance of the Peace of Westphalia and Westphalian principles of international order is of great relevance. In fact, the ideas of monarch's sovereignty (which later evolved into the sovereignty of the state and the people), although significantly modernized, remain in effect and will continue for a long time.

#### **4.3. Formation of the System of Great Powers in Europe**

The system of great powers in Europe existed and played a crucial role in the international order until the mid-twentieth century. Naturally, the composition of these states changed due to the decline and rise of states, growth of their economies, and successful or failed wars (Ferguson 2024).<sup>3</sup> In the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries, this system was just beginning to take shape and it was fully developed in the eighteenth century. Many factors contributed here, and one of the important ones, which is worth mentioning because it persisted throughout the nineteenth century and part of the twentieth, was the rise of Great Britain. However, Britain did not have a strong enough land army, so in the second half of the eighteenth century, it sought to shape the balance of power in Europe by aligning itself with one state after another, forming and breaking up coalitions, purchasing tens of thousands of continental troops, and paying many millions of pounds sterling for them.<sup>4</sup>

A very important moment was the rise of Russia as a great power at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and, accordingly, the decline of Sweden to the status of a secondary power. Frederick II the Great's activities in Prussia and his wars of conquest played a major role, making Prussia one of the great powers. The Seven Years' War (1756–1763) finally established the system of great powers, consisting of Great Britain, France, Austria, Prussia, and Russia, for more than a hundred years. During the same period, the British colonial empire expanded rapidly by gaining part of the colonies from France. However, events in the North American colonies significantly changed the situation. Therefore, we date this phase up to 1773 (*i.e.*, to the Boston Tea Party, which marked the beginning of the American people's liberation struggle against Great Britain).

**The period of turmoil and revolutions (1773–1798).**<sup>5</sup> The last quarter of the eighteenth was quite a difficult time for Europe, partly because the overall economic situation was challenging, and Europe also began to experience cyclical economic crises that gained a European scale.<sup>6</sup> But, most importantly, revolutions began to break out. The Boston Tea Party in 1773 marked the beginning of a period when a new, non-European, player emerged: the future United States. Revolutionary events unfolded in the Netherlands (for more details see Tilly 1996; Grinin 2022a). And most importantly, the Great French Revolution introduced many new elements into international relations, including the idea of popular rule, sovereignty of nations, and the idea of a republic and so on. Europe and European order were preparing to change.

#### **4.4. The Napoleonic Era. An Attempt to Establish Hegemony in Europe (1799–1815)**

For many centuries, there had been no attempts to unite Europe. The decisiveness and speed with which Napoleon redrew the borders of European states, created and destroyed new republics and kingdoms, were unparalleled. The symbolic act of destroying the old order and breaking with the Westphalian principles was the destruction of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, which had existed since 962. It served as a reminder of Europe's former Roman unity. Napoleon destroyed this empire in 1806 by forming 40 large states instead of 300 small German states. During his rule, Italian and Polish states were also established. The system of great powers that had formed after the Seven Years' War (*i.e.*, after 1763) was temporarily weakened significantly. However, soon a coalition of these great powers

crushed Bonaparte in order to restore this system, albeit on different and more legitimate grounds.

#### **4.5. The Vienna System (1815–1871). The Age of Revolutions**

The Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), attended by the victorious powers, became a crucial landmark in the formation of principles and forms of control over international relations. This was also facilitated by the emergence of the Holy Alliance of sovereigns, which emerged as a result of the Congress. The monarchs sought to preserve the status quo in Europe and together combat revolutions. This new ideological shift marked a return to the principle of legitimacy of monarchical rule.

At the same time, a fairly effective system of the ‘European concert’ also emerged, which was the more or less coordinated action primarily by the five great powers – Great Britain, Russia, Austria, Prussia, and France – aimed at maintaining equilibrium and balance of power, and preventing problems from escalating into war. It provided for multilateral diplomacy, consultations and the possibility of regular international conferences, as well as assistance in countering revolutions. The system existed until the Crimean War of 1853 (but in some aspects, it lasted until 1914). According to Henry Kissinger, this ‘European concert’ was based on the idea of a balance of power. Here we see the operation of the *cumulative tendency* discussed above.

Thus, the aspiration to establish a renewed legitimacy of power was a significant factor in European politics between 1815 and 1848. At the same time, adherence to these principles sometimes contradicted countries' national interests; in particular, the suppression of the Hungarian uprising in Austria by the Russian troops in 1849 was objectively unnecessary for Russia, which was interested in weakening Austria. Despite the obvious conservatism of the idea of the legitimacy of sovereignty of monarchs and monarchy, it must be noted that a peaceful period of nearly 40 years began in Europe as a whole. This was a tremendous achievement!

Three trends ultimately undermined the system of the ‘European concert.’ The first was the outbreak of revolutions (‘the Spring of Nations’), whose particularly powerful wave swept across Europe in 1848–1849. As a result of the revolution in France, Napoleon III came to power, and made perhaps the main contribution to the destruction of the European order. The second trend was that, instead of the principle of monarchical sovereignty, the principle of national sovereignty, which had developed during the French Revolution and the reign

of Napoleon I, actively gained ground. This is another example of the tendency towards cumulative effects. Therefore, the revolutionary waves in Europe and Latin America in the 1820s, 1830–1831, and 1848–1849 (for more on these waves, see Grinin 2022b), as well as industrialization in Europe, strengthened the idea of national sovereignty, which contributed to the unification of Germany and Italy. The third factor is the policy of Great Britain. Let us note an interesting point for us. Let us recall that Britain actively used the principle of the balance of power to serve its own interests – namely, to prevent any hegemony on the continent.<sup>7</sup> And they were not willing to accept Russia's strengthening position both in the East (due to successful wars against Iran and Turkey) and in Europe (due to Russian military aid to the Austrian Empire against the revolution in Hungary in 1849). Therefore, Russia's attempts to seize the Black Sea straits and strengthen its influence in the Balkans ultimately led to the Crimean War of 1853–1856.

The collapse of this 'European concert' was greatly facilitated by the dislike of Britain, France, and other European countries towards the Russian Empire. This dislike was also reinforced through the development of a specific ideology that portrayed Russia as a backward, barbaric, uncultured country with a servile mentality and despotism – an empire that was dangerous to Europe (a vivid example is the travel notes of Marquis de Custine [1843]. For a contemporaries' assessment of the relationship between Russia and Europe, also see Danilevsky 1995).

This period lasted until 1871, when the German Empire was formed. The Kingdom of Italy had been established from several Italian states a bit earlier. Europe was actively following the trend of creating nation-states (for more details about this era, see Zinkina *et al.* 2017).

#### **4.6. The Period of Peace and Preparation for the Struggle for Global Leadership (1871–1914)**

This period, despite constant attempts to change the balance of power, was a period of peace in Europe, to which everyone was accustomed, and this was actually the first stage of globalization, freedom of movement, a period of prosperity and increased well-being. In that sense, this period is very similar to the early decades of the modern American order.<sup>8</sup> That period witnessed a rapid economic growth, rising living standards and unprecedented freedom of movement and devel-

opment of globalization. However, in both cases, the leading powers led the situation to a crisis in their pursuit for even greater power.

During the Congress of Vienna, the German Confederation was established (replacing the Holy Roman Empire of German Nation, which had been abolished by Napoleon). Although the number of German states decreased from three hundred to about forty, Central Europe remained fragmented. However, this was considered a necessary component of the balance of power, and maintaining this state of affairs in Germany was a key goal of the national policies of France, Britain, and all other powers. The rivalry for influence in this part of Germany shaped the policies of the two largest German states – Prussia and Austria.

That is why the main change in Europe in the early 1870s was the unification of Germany under Prussian rule, which occurred as a result of several wars that were victorious for Prussia (thanks to Bismarck's skilful policy and the mistakes of Austria and France). This immediately and dramatically changed the balance of power because in the center of Europe a state emerged that surpassed any other power in strength.

So Britain faced the challenge of preventing Germany from becoming even stronger, while France urgently needed to find an ally. Ultimately, the conflicts between Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the Balkans led to Russia and France forming an alliance against Germany (1892), followed by a treaty between France and Britain (the Entente, 1904). The military and economic strengthening of Germany prompted Britain, in line with its preferred strategy, to join a less powerful grouping in order to weaken a united Germany, which had become the leading continental power. The rapid development of industry in European powers, the surge in technical innovations (Grinin L., Grinin A. 2015; Grinin *et al.* 2024), and significant changes in the means of warfare – all of this pushed rivals (especially Germany) to seek to change the balance of power through military victory. As a result, military-political alliances formed, and Europe found itself divided into two opposing blocs. Unlike the last decades of the nineteenth century, the early twentieth century was marked by numerous wars in various parts of the world (the Boer War, the Russo-Japanese War), including in Europe (the Balkan Wars), as well as acute diplomatic conflicts. The crisis of the international order system was increasing, and, as we have already mentioned, such situation usually leads to intensified conflicts and wars.

We have discussed the principle of formation of new institutions during the period of development of the existing world order. This also applies to the transformation of the European order into a global one. Although the main events continued to unfold in Europe, the rapid strengthening of the United States and the rise of Japan, which defeated Russia, were preparing the transition from a European to a truly global system of international order.

#### **4.7. The Versailles-Washington System – the First System of World Order. The Duumvirate between Great Britain and France**

World War I was the result of the processes described above; the political map of the world and the balance of power changed fundamentally. When Japan and the United States entered the group of the leading players, politics became truly global; even the first worldwide body appeared – the League of Nations – which attempted (albeit far from always successfully) to influence the formation of new principles of international relations.

After World War I, a truly global order began to take shape. The Washington Conference (1921–1922), through the Four-Power Treaty (between the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Japan) and the Five-Power Naval Treaty (the same powers plus Italy), adjusted the relations among the victorious powers in the East Asia-Pacific region as well as set strict limits on total tonnage for capital ships.<sup>9</sup> However, in our opinion the world order fully transformed from a European one into a global one only after World War II, because in the interwar period, the main political events still happened in Europe and the center of the main political decisions, influencing the world, concentrated in the hands of two winners – France and Great Britain.

The world order established after World War I lasted only for a very short time, becoming, as the French Marshal Ferdinand Foch had foreseen, merely a ‘truce for twenty years.’ The radical changes that occurred during this period, including the emergence of the USSR, the development of new weapons, the severe economic crisis of 1929–1933, Germany's unwillingness to accept the restrictions imposed on it, and other factors, led to a new escalation of tension and another war. Japan began its conquests in China even earlier – in 1931.

Among the most important new principles and institutions, it is worth mentioning the rise of nationalism and the realization of the right of nations (of course, not all of them) to self-determination. This mostly

happened due to the collapse of four powerful empires as a result of World War I (the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman empires) and the wave of revolutions between 1917 and 1923 (Grinin L. and Grinin A. 2020; 2021, 2022a; Grinin, Grinin, and Korotayev 2022).

Germany's defeat and Russia's weakening effectively created a duumvirate of power between France and Great Britain. The United States and Japan were still considered, albeit erroneously, as peripheral countries. Thus, for the first time in the history of modern Europe, the principle of equilibrium/balance of power temporarily ceased to function. Even during the peak of Napoleon I's rule, Great Britain and Russia somehow balanced his strength. However, one of the principles or one of the laws of the world order, states that the absence of competition launches and accelerates the degradation of the leader (about it, see Grinin A. and Grinin L. 2024). As a result, lulled by Germany's weakening, Britain and France proved unprepared for Germany's rapid rise, and gradually gave ground to it one after another, starting from 1935. The examples of the USSR and Germany also show that the buildup of power by geopolitically weakened adversaries in a situation of temporary imbalance of power can occur quite quickly in history. It should be noted that the absence of a competitor in the form of the USSR for a certain period (approximately from 1991 to 2014) also lulled the United States into a sense of complacency, which was one of the reasons for the weakening of American power.

#### **4.8. The Soviet-American World Order (the Yalta-Potsdam System, 1945–1991)**

The order that emerged after World War II differed significantly from previous versions of the world order. The world became bipolar, and later, bipolar and bloc-based (NATO and the Warsaw Pact). Moreover, the world order was shaped by ideological differences, which was not the case at least since the period of religious wars in the sixteenth century. In addition, the creation of stable ideological blocs occurred in the world arena for the first time.

The reasons for the collapse of the USSR and the socialist military-economic bloc must be discussed separately since this is a very large and complex topic. This collapse led to the rejection of balance of power as the most important principle of world order, which we will discuss further below. The disappearance of the bipolar structure of international relations that occurred at the turn of the 1980s–1990s, led to a fundamental disruption in the balance of power in favour of

the United States, which found itself at the top of the global hierarchy. This shift towards unipolarity meant not only the onset of an era dominated by a single superpower. The mechanisms for maintaining inter-state balance that had previously limited the hegemonic aspirations of great powers underwent a crisis.

## 5. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MODERN AMERICAN WORLD ORDER. PAX AMERICANA<sup>10</sup>

**The shift towards Pax Americana at the end of the twentieth century.** The collapse of the socialist bloc and the Soviet Union in the late 1980s – early 1990s destroyed the previous two-bloc world order. Since a unipolar world began to emerge after the collapse of the USSR, the ideas about a new world order were often projected onto the belief in unchallenged dominance of Western economies, institutions, and ideas (see, *e.g.* Attali 1991) that were supposed to improve the rest of the world. The Soviet Union still existed when, in 1990, in his speech delivered to the U.S. Congress, the U.S. President George H. W. Bush announced the emergence of a ‘new world order’. As soon as the USSR collapsed, the Wolfowitz Doctrine emerged in 1992, named after the then-US Deputy Secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz. The doctrine consisted of six articles examining in turn the status of the United States as a superpower, its dominance in world politics, unipolarity, the preventive action policy, the threat from Russia, and energy policy. The doctrine proclaimed the status of the United States as the only remaining world's superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union and as the victor in the Cold War. It set maintaining this status as its main goal. According to the doctrine, the US political and military tasks in the post-Cold War era were to build a new world order and prevent the emergence of rival superpowers, whether in Western Europe, Asia, or on the territory of the former Soviet Union (Armstrong 2002; Basha 2023; Fazi 2024; Lyapina 2010; Fedorov 2024). The doctrine became an important part, if not the foundation, of the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy and the so-called Bush Doctrine. Wolfowitz and his co-authors aimed at ‘setting the nation's course for the next century’ so that the new world order would become an important stabilizing factor for all subsequent coalitions. Of course, we are still a long way from a century, but the main ideas of the Wolfowitz Doctrine are still in the active arsenal of American politicians and are constantly being used (Fazi 2024; Fedorov 2024), namely, to proactively hamper the growth of China, Russia, and other countries as powers

competing with the United States, and to create a strong alliance of democratic states.

In the 1990s (and later as well), the United States focused not only on expanding the geographical reach of previously existing Western institutions but also on extending their influence to new areas of international interaction (Istomin 2020). As a result, very soon the characteristics of the new world order in a number of works became almost synonymous with the idea of Pax Americana (Brzezinski 1998; Collins 2002: 118; Friedman 2010; 2011). However, some ‘hawks’ – geotheorists – also soon became disillusioned with the validity and rationale of US foreign policy. In particular, Zbigniew Brzezinski (2005) noted that Washington's foreign policy after September 11, 2001 was marked by extreme short-sightedness and lack of foresight, and that it spread excessive panic and cost too much. In his view, it generally made America more vulnerable and undermined the legitimacy of its global dominance.

According to some analysts (Yakovenko *et al.* 2023), the doctrine of the ‘New American Century,’ which began to be developed in 1997 by a group of neoconservatives led by William Kristol and Robert Kagan, had a tremendous impact on American elites, primarily on the Republicans (and above all on George W. Bush's team). The new vision of the world is based on secular and religious messianism, which assumes the establishment of American imperial rule in the name of so-called ‘universal values,’ as well as the belief that the United States has a legitimate right and duty to save or transform the world according to its own principles. They proceeded from the idea that ‘what is good for America is also good for the whole world’ and believed that a policy of ‘moral purity’ was necessary, which could also rely on military force. One should note that the first part of this idea – that American leadership is good not only for America but for the whole world – has been reinforced in the consciousness of American elites, while the part related to ‘moral purity,’ which had previously been merely a declaration, has now been completely forgotten or even sounds as a mockery after the Jeffrey Epstein scandal.

But, one way or another, the United States, unlike previous world leaders, concentrated key leadership resources in their hands: from technology, finance, and military to science and culture. This was the first (and, apparently, the last) case in world history (Grinin and Korotayev 2015; Grinin, Korotayev, and Tausch 2016; Grinin L. 2016b; Grinin, Grinin, and Korotayev 2026; Grinin A. 2025).

The United States has also established itself on the concepts of 'limited sovereignty' and 'humanitarian interventions,' which justify the possibility of interfering (including military intervention) in the affairs of states that are unable or unwilling to meet the standards for protecting human rights and maintaining order in a country, as set by the United States and other Western countries (Istomin 2020; Khudaykulova 2016).

However, in practice, George W. Bush's foreign adventures turned out to be overly costly and not particularly effective. Soon after, a global financial and economic crisis began, which clearly demonstrated the limitations of the United States' resources. Therefore, Democrat Barack Obama had to take into account both criticism of foreign policy and the changing situation. A course was set to reduce the cost of foreign policy, including by paying less attention to the Middle East where the fires of the 'Arab Spring' revolutions were raging. In particular, an agreement with Iran was ultimately signed in 2015, and by shifting focus to the Asia-Pacific region (see Grinin, Issaev, and Korotayev 2016; Grinin A. 2025), the Obama administration sought to turn to more sophisticated forms of dominance in foreign policy. One of them was called 'leading from behind.' This, in particular, applied to the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, which was carried out with the support of the Gulf countries and Europe (Krauthammer 2011). 'Leadership from behind' was somewhat reminiscent of the strategy of indirect rule in the British Empire. But the British colonizers acted much more subtly. In the case of Gaddafi, the United States ultimately succeeded in overthrowing its sworn enemy, but the result for Libya and the region was tragic. Barack Obama's foreign policy, similar to that of his predecessor, George W. Bush, was full of colour revolutions (Goldstone *et al.* 2022a, 2022b; Grinin L., Grinin A. 2022b, 2022c), which ultimately led to a sharp deterioration of relations with Russia after the 2014 'orange revolution' in Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation. Thus, the United States' hegemony not only failed to strengthen but was also openly questioned for the first time.

According to Alexander Yakovenko and his co-authors (Yakovenko *et al.* 2023), the 'offshore balancing' strategies were also used during the administrations of Barack Obama and Donald Trump as a natural response to the massive interventions in MENA countries during George W. Bush's term (Layne 2006). When implementing 'offshore balancing' to restrain Russia and China, the main role in the

emerging flexible architecture is assigned to regional players, while the United States was supposed to provide them with political and economic support, allowing more active intervention only in the most extreme cases. Indeed, this strategy was implemented in the cases of Georgia in 2008 (the South Ossetia conflict) and events in Donbas since 2014. It actually continues even during the special military operation since 2022, which was confirmed by the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who said that from the very beginning it was a proxy war between Russia and the United States. This strategy is also used against China, in particular in its clashes with the Philippines.

**Methods of modern American foreign policy.** Below are formulated a number of characteristic features and methods of modern American foreign policy (Grinin L. 2015, 2016a; Grinin A. 2025).<sup>11</sup>

1. The arrogance of a superpower, the abuse of power at the expense of diplomacy, including in relation to allies. Since 1945, the United States has carried out many wars and interventions (Hersh 2024), but their frequency has increased significantly in the last two decades – from 1991 to 2011. It is also stated that the United States has unleashed more than 200 armed conflicts since 1945 (Sovina 2023). With coming of Trump, the relations with allies are becoming worse and worse.

2. The use of so-called ‘soft power’ (a euphemism for interference in internal affairs through various methods, acting through all sorts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-profit organizations (NPOs) in coordination with intelligence services and special forces) to exert influence on governments, lawmakers, businessmen, *etc.* If necessary, subversive activities and coups as well as color revolutions are carried out (Filin *et al.* 2022; Filin and Khodunov 2024; Mitchell 2022; Moll 2014; Grinin 2022c). The increasingly active use of intelligence and electronic surveillance to control the policies of allied countries (more about soft power and its transformations see in Striker 2024). Regarding the theory of ‘soft power,’ it is worth making a few clarifications. Joseph Nye (Nye 1990, 2004, 2011), a recognized authority in this field, argues that the key to American hegemony lies in its ability to inspire obedience rather than to achieve it through coercion. However, the substitution of soft power with other methods began long ago. It is not surprising that as the US influence weakens, even Joseph Nye himself started to shift his concept towards ‘smart power,’ which is viewed as a successful combination of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ power tools, and then towards the concept of ‘sharp power,’ embodying the widespread distribution of ideas and methods for constructing

post-truth in the context of modern information warfare (Rusakova and Zhakyanova 2022). With coming of Trump, the use of 'soft power' began to decline significantly.

3. 'Dollar diplomacy' through loans, aid, and the influence of international financial organizations, which has grown stronger due to the imposition of certain rules of operation for national central banks.

4. Narrow pragmatism in foreign policy to the extent that some actions begin to contradict others and, most importantly, the overall goals of foreign policy and the country's interests. The intention to force the enemy to capitulate and lack of willingness to make compromises that could ensure cooperation in the future.

5. The ideology of exceptionalism and imposition of one's own standards (including in the political and legal systems) and the excessive influence of domestic political struggle on foreign policy (*e.g.*, Grinin and Korotayev 2020).

6. Direct blackmail and threats. Under Donald Trump, this has become one of the most frequently used methods. In addition, there is a new, but clearly not flattering for American foreign policy, phenomenon: verbal pressure on opponents, insults and humiliation through social media and during face-to-face meetings.

7. Threats and the imposition of extremely high import tariffs under far-fetched pretexts, largely to create a favorable image of the protector of the American people within the United States. One may say this is Trump's signature foreign policy tactic.

Undoubtedly, all these practices have been used before, but in the last two or three decades they have become more obvious and undisguised, while their justifications have become much weaker. Additionally, Trump has introduced a number of his own cynical methods.

The 9/11 events destroyed the illusion that the USA is unreachable to enemies and can attack without threat of revenge. This became a turning point in the US policies, so many aspects and methods of its domestic and foreign policy became exaggerated. On the one hand, the USA rejects its own principles of freedom and starts to investigate population and other countries' leaders. They eventually lost respect for the international law and the principle of state sovereignty. On the other hand, the United States' authority rapidly decreases in the world (Wertheim 2024; Bandow 2024; Moyn 2024; Sanders 2024; Smith 2024; Hersch 2024; Macgregor 2024; Brands 2024). Their authority decreases even in the military sphere. It is important to emphasize that as a result of the war with Iran, Trump has destroyed the notion of US

invincibility and, in doing so, has further accelerated the disintegration of the contemporary world order, opening new opportunities for powers that challenge the US-centric world order.

**Changes in the US geostrategy.** Since Donald Trump came to power in 2017, the United States has been trying to reorient its main geopolitical doctrine towards China, viewing the latter as the main adversary of the United States, although it has not been able to abandon the idea of considering Russia as a rival as well. Now, in the wake of China's containment, the United States has faced the need to form new military blocs (see Grinin 2025: ch. 2). The main goal of all their efforts is to create a broad anti-China front. Another important military and political trend, which has become increasingly evident in recent years, is the gradual expansion of NATO's area of influence to include the Southeast Asian region, with the United States seeking to shift the burden of maintaining its hegemony onto its partners (*Ibid.*).

The Air Force and Navy cannot provide themselves with the necessary number of personnel with required qualifications; many military production facilities are unable to expand (the inability to increase shell production is a telling example); appointments are made based not on professionalism, but on the basis of belonging to minority groups. At the same time, the military forces of China and Russia continue to grow. The balance of power begins to even out and is restored.

Many analysts hope for some technological or other miracle that will revive American power (currently, this is the development of AI) or for the United States' ability to hold off its rivals. Many have noted various possibilities for sustaining the US leadership (Bremmer 2015; Nye 2024). No one can rule out the revival of US power or its emergence from decline. However, the degradation of political and other elites, increasingly active borrowing, intensified domestic political struggles, and many other factors make this revival unlikely. And this probability decreases with each year and electoral cycle.

## **6. TRUMP AND DESTABILIZATION OF THE AMERICAN WORLD ORDER**

The coming of Trump's administration to power marks a new stage in the erosion and destruction of the Pax Americana. The actions of this administration manifest in the deliberate dismantling of many structures necessary for maintaining the American world order. If the US policy continues on this path, it is possible to predict that the destruction of the current world order will accelerate and, after some time,

despite Trump's declarations that he wants to reduce the intensity of military and political conflicts, the tensions will only intensify.

Trump's policy means giving up control over the world order. Trump believes that the strength of the United States in itself, its technological, financial and economic might, especially if this might is strengthened, is quite sufficient to consolidate the US leadership position in the world without unnecessary effort and expense. In this sense, it seems quite logical that Trump has set the task of strengthening technological leadership, and also seeks to increase military spending (White House 2025). He believes that it is possible to withdraw from world organizations or reduce one's activity in them, ignore the interests of allies, strengthen isolationism and reduce international activity. At the same time, for now, in addition to activity in terms of supporting Israel, the following lines of Trump's international strategy can be distinguished:

1) the fight against the so-called globalists in the USA and Europe, by which Trump and his group understand an alliance of left-wing and supranational financial groups that generally support global projects and movements (green projects, LGBT (the movement is forbidden in the Russian Federation – *Editor's note*), promotion of policies to support migration, various minorities, strong social policies, anti-Israeli sentiments, promotion of democracy, including with the help of the CIA and other services, *etc.*). Of course, left-wing and global forces have different interests and are far from synonymous, but in this case we proceed from the position of Trump, who saw this coalition in the Democratic Party. This is a fundamentally new trend in the US foreign policy.<sup>12</sup>

2) Attempts to reduce the front of active actions in the Middle East and Europe in order to focus on the Asia-Pacific region. As regards Europe, this is new compared to the course of Biden's administration. With respect to the Middle East, at first glance, this is a continuation of US policy since 2012. But it looks different. Besides, the declaration to lessen the American attention to this region remains a declaration not yet transformed into real actions.<sup>13</sup>

3) Previously, the USA tried to cover its weak points with the help of allies. Now Trump ignores or humiliates allies.

4) Strengthening of the anti-Chinese trend.

5) Activity in terms of claims on foreign territories, which has not been seen from the USA for over a hundred years.

The world order that has been established since the 1990s is based on a number of mechanisms, primarily the United States' unconditional hegemony and a number of advantages enjoyed by the US and its allies from world-system core countries; the ability of the United States to prevent changes in borders, the emergence of regional conflicts, *etc.*; a certain balance of power and some limitation of rivalry in the area of the arms race; a system of international organizations that generally supports the US dominance; the desire to expand and strengthen the process of globalization; the development of the principle of free trade; freedom of capital movement; compliance with international trade rules; the dictate of rules that limit (essentially in favor of the United States and its allies) the emission of national currencies, *etc.*

Most of these mechanisms have weakened as a result of mistakes of previous American administrations, but much is being eroded deliberately or abandoned by Trump. The use of US soft power had been declining over the past decade, but Trump has essentially abandoned it entirely.<sup>14</sup>

Trump weakens the Western alliance, weakens the US activity, in particular by ignoring global forums, and transfers domestic political confrontations to the international arena. By rejecting many of the described methods and forms of American foreign policy, he directly undermines the foundations that still underlie the US power and leadership. His foreign policy has created an atmosphere of distrust, tension, and outright conflict between the United States and its allies. Inconsistency, constant fluctuations, outright chaos, the introduction and abolition of tariffs and sanctions, refusal to comply with agreements, absolute disregard for international rules, and many other factors create an atmosphere of complete misunderstanding of the US foreign policy course and strengthen the desire to reduce any contacts with it. However, we suppose that after Trump, this largely uncontrollable foreign policy will return to its usual course, albeit with enormous damage to the United States' position, authority, and prestige.

In international politics and in geopolitics, in the struggle for world order, the rule of the zero-sum game works. In other words, the weakening activity of the United States will mean increasing activity of other players. And this means a new stage in the reconfiguration of the World System, when a variety of actors will gain influence.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this context, it is appropriate to replace Joseph Schumpeter's (1939) term of 'creative destruction' with the term 'preservative destruction'.

<sup>2</sup> Based on this typology, the following section is constructed on the basis of the following publications: Grinin, Ilyin, and Andreev 2016; Grinin L. 2016a.

<sup>3</sup> This 'balancing' embodies the essence of the principle expressed by Lord Palmerston: 'We have no eternal allies, and we have not perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual.'

<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, this erased Poland from the European map. The former leading powers, Spain and Portugal, experienced a complete decline; the same reason virtually nullified the roles of Genoa and Venice. The technological backwardness of Holland, which was the leader in the seventeenth century (Arrighi 1994), led to a series of its defeats in wars and the loss of its political role. The Ottoman Empire, which played a very significant role in international affairs in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, also steadily weakened. On the other hand, Austria and Prussia rose to prominence.

<sup>5</sup> This period could formally be considered a part of the previous one, but it differs significantly from the preceding period, at least in the fact that a non-European power emerged – the United States. Powerful political processes also emerged that had not previously played a significant role but began to play one later – revolutions (this period of disorder and revolutions also differs from the subsequent ones, although they are genetically linked).

<sup>6</sup> In particular, the 1772–1773 crisis, which unfolded against the background of severe crop failures of 1771–1772, and the crisis of 1780–1883 (see Virt 1877; Hansen 1951; Braudel 1981–1884; Grinin and Korotayev 2014, 2016; Grinin, Korotayev, and Tausch 2016).

<sup>7</sup> The fact that this principle was of vital importance to Great Britain is evidenced by their fierce struggle against Napoleon's hegemony for more than 15 years. They paid 50 million pounds sterling (more than \$300 billion in today's money) for this war – a fantastic sum for that epoch (Ferguson 2024).

<sup>8</sup> However, while the last third of the nineteenth century was also a time of revolutionary pause, the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century was a period of two revolutionary waves (see Grinin 2022a; Grinin L. and Grinin A. 2022a, 2022b).

<sup>9</sup> This was an interesting but a failed attempt to reduce the possibility of a new war. However, as early as in 1934, Japan refused to extend the agreements on limiting the naval fleet.

<sup>10</sup> See Shakleina 2012; Istomin 2020; Grinin A. 2024. About the pre-history of the US growing hegemony and its accompanying doctrines see also Shishkov 2014: 133–146.

<sup>11</sup> Of course, other countries' policies possess similar traits to some extent, but they are not as pronounced as in the United States.

<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, the State Department is now acting in the exact opposite direction than before. While earlier, for example, the State Department demanded support for diversity policies, including LGBT (the movement is forbidden in the Russian Federation – *Editor's note*) in a variety of countries, now, on the contrary, it demands a refusal of this support.

<sup>13</sup> Actually, it is difficult for the USA to leave the Middle East because the United States has an ally there that does not let the US leave it. This is Israel. And it will try to keep the US there (see below for details).

<sup>14</sup> It is especially worth noting here the attempt to destroy the American international development agency USAID, as well as the reform and reduction of the staff of the National Security Council, which has been in operation since 1947, and the subordination of this body to the State Department headed by Marco Rubio.

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