

Ukraine, 1st phase in the New Division of the World

Description

*By **Andrey Sushentsov**, program director of the Valdai Club via RT*

Relations between Russia and the United States have entered a prolonged phase that can be described as a “*long confrontation*.” If the interaction between Moscow and Washington were still the central process of international life, as was the case during the Cold War, this new phase might be considered temporary. But the Moscow-Washington confrontation is now one of many. More importantly, it is taking place in conditions that occur once every few centuries – a period of global redistribution of power and resource potential.

This process affects our country and the US only in part. Within a few decades, the center of global production and consumption will finally shift to Asia, and the center of world economic gravity will be on the border of India and China. In this context, the long-standing Russian-American confrontation will remain one of the main fault-lines, but certainly not the only one.

Why do I think this confrontation will be protracted? Despite significant resource advantages and strong positions in key areas, the US finds itself in a situation where its pursuers are catching up fast. Washington is faced with an increasingly dense international environment that poses obstacles to previously unfettered American action.

The four US strengths that underpin its offensive strategy are: first, its still-advanced military power; second, its central global financial system, which provides an international settlement infrastructure and a convertible currency; third, its strong position in a number of technological fields; and fourth, its ideology and values platform, which, together with the other three dimensions, provide what can be tentatively called a “*pyramid of credibility*” for American strategy in the world.

This pyramid exists in the economic and financial spheres as well as in foreign policy. Trust explains the irrational behavior of some European states. Incapable of a balanced analysis of the consequences of their decisions, for example on the Ukraine crisis, they are now forced to ask themselves, as the German magazine *Der Spiegel* does: *“What if the United States has no permanent allies? Western Europeans trusted the logic offered by the United States, they literally ‘bought’ the proposal. It was that the West would deal Russia a quick defeat, a lot of economic resources would be freed up, and relations with Moscow would be rebuilt on a different platform, more favorable to the EU. The belief was that it would be an effective strategy.”*

The US has one of the most advanced schools of strategic thought – the European classical school received its greatest impetus in the first half of the 20th century in American universities, research, and expert circles. Analysts such as Hans Morgenthau, Henry Kissinger, and a few other native Europeans were able to systematically outline their ideas and then integrate them into the practice of US foreign policy. This inoculation of European strategic thinking fitted well with the classic American maritime strategy and bore fruit that enabled Washington to achieve its goals in the second half of the 20th century. Now, however, we see that this strategic school is faltering: sober, realistic thinkers are in the minority in the establishment. Is this the result of post-Cold War “*giddiness*,” the feeling that this brief moment of military and political dominance would be endless?

At the end of 2021, in the acute phase of the Ukraine crisis, the US made a big mistake, in my opinion, by deciding to apply a strategy to crush Russia instead of a positional strategy. In world history these have been the two classic military-political variants. The strategy of crushing is always based on significant material, power, and ideological advantages, the possession of the initiative, and belief in the rapid defeat of the opponent. This was the idea of Alexander the Great when he began his campaign: a very advanced army, possession of advanced military technology for the time, the principle of the phalanx developed by the Thebans and then adopted by the Macedonians, with strong cavalry units. They did not suffer a single defeat during the entire campaign. The main obstacle for the Macedonians was the confrontation with the Greek mercenaries from Athens, who used the classic positional strategy. What is the point of such a plan? It gives up the initiative, allows the other side to act, and relies on the need to mobilize and concentrate resources. It avoids a decisive battle for as long as possible and only engages in it when it is impossible to lose. From this description we can see the typical strategic behavior of Russia in different periods of war.

The US tried to crush our country while not possessing superior resources and misjudged the capabilities, both its own and those of its allies, to achieve its goals – which were to isolate Russia, to stimulate internal protests and undermine support for the government, to create major obstacles on the front line and, as a result, to defeat the country as quickly as possible. Now the confrontation in the military sphere has entered a different phase and the Americans are forced to look for a way out of this situation.

US strategic culture is characterized by a transitional approach to allies, and it is to be expected that at

some point the cost of owning 'the Ukrainian asset' will be too high for the Americans to continue to benefit from it.

The RAND Corporation's paper *Avoiding a Long War*, published in January 2023, is very telling in this regard. It explicitly states that the relative benefits of owning the Ukrainian asset have generally already been realized, while the costs of maintaining it continue to rise. This does not mean that after the conditional end of the Ukraine crisis the US will stop trying to use an offensive strategy of crushing our country. For them, we are a key rival in determining the crucial question of the 21st century: will American hegemony continue, or will the world move towards a more balanced polycentric system? And while few of us expected to find ourselves in a military crisis so soon into the process of resolving this issue, it's now accelerating developments.

The drama of "*hegemony or polycentricity*" will not be resolved in Ukraine, because there will be other points of tension in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and eventually the Western Hemisphere, where Russia and the US will be on opposite sides of the barricades.

Our confrontation with the Americans will last for a long time, although we will see certain pauses, which the US will use to propose issues of common interest for discussion. From the experience of the Cold War, we recognize a common responsibility for the survival of mankind, and I consider the risks of nuclear escalation in the confrontation to be relatively low. Russia's task will be to create a network of relationships with like-minded states, which may even eventually include some from the West. The US strategy is to forcibly extinguish points of strategic autonomy, which Washington succeeded in doing in Western Europe in the first phase of the Ukraine crisis, but that move was one of the last successes in this regard.