



A New Anarchy? Scenarios for World Order Dynamics

Ivan Timofeev

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the Valdai Discussion Club, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

ISBN 978-5-6043043-5-8



© The Foundation for Development and Support of the Valdai Discussion Club, 2019

42 Bolshaya Tatarskaya st., Moscow, 115184, Russia

About the Author

Ivan Timofeev

Programme Director at the Valdai Discussion Club, Director of Programmes at the Russian International Affairs Council

Contents

3	Introduction
5	The World Order and Power Poles: One, Several, or None?
12	The World Order: New Parameters?
19	Scenario 1. Liberal Order: An Attempt of Adaptation
22	Scenario 2. Strategic Autonomy and a New Multipolarity
24	Scenario 3. Bipolarity 2.0
26	Scenario 4. A New Anarchy

Introduction

The current debate on the world order's future mostly boils down to two opposite points of view. The first one presupposes that after the Cold War the world has finally transitioned to a liberal world order. Its supporters describe it as a 'rules-based order', implying that the rules are laid down by the community of Western states, with its stability shored up by the West's military, economic, and moral superiority. They avoid calling the world unipolar, instead emphasizing how the liberal model benefits everyone and that it is not poles that are important, but effective rules and the prosperity generated by international stability and interdependence.

The other, directly opposite, point of view argues that the liberal world order is unstable and on the verge of a crisis. Its proponents indicate that it is actually a unipolar world order based on the hegemony of the US and its allies. According to this point of view, the unipolar model is unlikely to have any historical chance, being undermined by emerging centres of power like BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and others. They also doubt the efficiency of the rules of the game implied by the liberal model. As an alternative, they see a multipolar (polycentric) world – a community of equal partners, with the UN and other international institutions ensuring its democratic nature.

Interestingly, at least two other models were on the sidelines of the discussion until recently. One of these suggests a world without poles, a chaotic and fast-flowing order, or a war of all against all that goes hand in hand with the collapse of the habitual institutions (from sovereign nation states to classical capitalism). This is a crisis scenario that leads not so much to a new balance as to an all-out reset of the institutions, power, production modes, and international relations. But even though this model wins over by a promise of breaking the mould, it was mostly confined to journalistic and academic writings.

The second model seems more familiar. It suggests building a new bipolarity. Until not a very long time ago, it was courting much scepticism merely by virtue of there being no adequate candidates for the role of the second pole. Unlike multipolarity with its non-explicit rivalry and competition, bipolarity implies a confrontation between two concrete camps. Therefore, this system can be regarded as more structured and stable. However, hardly anybody wanted to lead it until recently, with all 'aspirants' preferring the comfort of the post-bipolar world and promoting either the liberal model (EU, Japan, South Korea and others) or a multipolar

arrangement (Russia, China, India and others). All the while, each of them was enjoying quite tangible perks that went along with the *de facto* existing unipolar world.

The problem is that the current international realities are increasingly cutting the ground from under this comfortable environment, inducing crystallization of two camps with a prospect of choosing between them. Contrary to expectations, the key destroyer of the existing post-bipolar order is not a new ascending power but a global leader, which, in theory, should be clinging to the status quo tooth and nail. We are witnessing a unique situation in international relations, where a global leader is working hard to transform the existing order, its motive being either the wish to control the change for its own benefit, or the fear, real or imaginary, of the new centres of power, or a series of failures in the control system that generate system errors in key political decision-making. The big question is, naturally, the longevity of what is happening. Some are tempted to shrug off the destructive trends as the eccentric US president's pranks and hope that things will return to the old rut after the next change of guard in Washington. But the magnitude of developments is evidence that the current trends are unlikely to remain without consequence, the more so that the major players are not what they were before. China is too big for the old order, Russia is too assertive and independent for it, and the EU is becoming increasingly autonomous.

The developments are a nontrivial challenge for Russia's foreign policy. They are also generating a series of purely research questions. For instance, what will the configuration of the world order be in the future? What scenarios can be expected? How to adapt or how to shape a desired alternative? Answering these will be of extreme importance for transforming Russia's doctrinal attitudes.

The main problem is that Russia's prevalent multipolar concept took shape in the late 1990s and early 2000s under the influence of decades-old ideas promoted by Yevgeny Primakov (Russian Foreign Minister in 1996–1998 and Prime Minister in 1998–1999) and his school. These Russian ideas, in turn, took into account the US theories that emerged between the 1960s and the 1980s. In other words, the basic multipolarity (and generally polarity) ideas were generated and evolved before the current tectonic shifts began. However, the same is true of Western theories on the liberal world order, which also came into being amid a different reality. The problem common to the Russian and US (Western) approaches is that they describe the past and may prove of little use for describing the present and the future.

This report will attempt to outline possible ways of adapting the concepts of polarity, multipolarity, and world order to new international realities and draft scenarios for a future world.

The World Order and Power Poles: One, Several, or None?

The concept of 'world order' is among the most widespread in international relations. Often, it is used to characterize the existing balance of power, hierarchy, and the 'rules of the game' underpinning world politics. Not infrequently, it is described in terms of power and domination, as some centres of power enjoy greater capabilities and influence than others. Moreover, there is constant infighting for the position at the top of the hierarchy. Yet, there is a balance of power that structures the world order and prevents this infighting from descending into total chaos. At the same time, the world order can also be described as the 'collective good', where stability and common norms make the world safer and more predictable. Strictly speaking, both interpretations conceive of the world order as the opposite of anarchy or as a means of avoiding a worse outcome in the form of war between major powers.

Anarchy in international relations is akin to the state of nature described in classical theories of government.¹ State power is the only means of ending the war of all against all. The social contract confers on the state a monopoly on violence under laws created with some degree of input from the people. Given its monopoly on violence, the state emerges as a response to the dual nature of man and a way to contain his 'animalistic' and aggressive impulses.

But there is no monopoly on power in international relations, with each state playing for itself. There is no 'sovereign' to tower above others and enforce peace in case of war. States never possess full information about intentions and capabilities of other states. This means that they have to live in the Hobbesian fear of facing attack from the outside at any moment. To be sure, international relations are also based on a cooperative principle that embraces trade, friendship, and mutual assistance. But the mere possibility of war makes states default to thinking in terms

¹ See, for example, Hobbes, T, 1991, 'Leviafan ili materija, forma i vlast' gosudarstva tserkovnogo i grazhdanskogo' [*Leviathan or The Matter, Form and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil*], collected works in 2 volumes, vol. 2, Moscow, Mysl', Chapters 17, 29.

of the worst-case scenario, something that generates a 'spiral of fear' and the 'security paradox' that compel nations to more aggressively build up their capabilities as they seek greater security. As a result, a military confrontation occurs. In a world of anarchy, the only reliable guarantor is power and might. Yet, while building up their capabilities, states may end up with their security in ruins. A state of anarchy dooms the world to an endless string of wars, and peace comes as just a short break between endless conflicts. What is needed is a system or an order that would make it possible to break the vicious circle of the 'security paradox'.²

The liberal political theory has emerged as a powerful politico-philosophical doctrine that poses an original solution to the problem of anarchy. Liberalism is based on the assumption that human reason is a force without bounds. Liberals are anthropological optimists and believe that man is good and creative by nature. His reason should be emancipated from irrational ways and precepts. Society can be organized as a perfect clock mechanism kept in motion by free and rational individuals. War as such is a manifestation of irrationality that distorts human nature. Anarchy should be restricted by the imposition of a clear and rational order. It must be translated into the language of law, similar to a social contract that exists within a state.

The Kantian Triangle of peace, a combination of three factors required for taming anarchy, is a totem of sorts for liberals.³ The first factor is a state's internal system. 'Democracies do not fight each other': the more people can influence decision-making, the less the likelihood of war, because it is the people that bear the brunt of its hardships and only want to fight as a last resort. The second factor is economic interdependence. The stronger the commercial ties between states, the fewer incentives to go to war, because the damage it will cause will exceed benefits. The third factor is the international community. States can form alliances based on common interests. And beyond that, the international community can form a united front to oppose aggressor countries.⁴ This solves the problem of the monopoly

² *The security dilemma concepts of John Herz and Herbert Butterfield are notable in this context. They were analysed in detail by Kenneth Booth and Nicholas Wheeler in: Booth, K & Wheeler, N, 2008, 'The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics', N.Y.: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 1–18. Robert Jervis's ideas should also be mentioned. See: Jervis, R, 2009, 'Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma', in Art, R & Waltz, K (eds), 'The Use of Force', New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., p. 44–71. (This work was originally published in a 1978 issue of World Politics.)*

³ See: Kant, I, 1996, 'K vechnomu miru' [Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch], in Kant, I, 'Collected Works in 6 Volumes', vol. 6, Moscow, Mysl'.

⁴ For more details, see: 'Traktaty o vechnom mire' [Essays on Perpetual Peace], 1963, ed. by Andreyeva, I & Gulyga, A, Moscow, Sotseugiz.

on violence. The function is handed over to a supranational body authorized by the rest to handle decision-making on matters of war and peace.

The liberal theory of the world order is a critical component of the US foreign policy doctrine. Despite the influence of conservative realists, it features all the key tenets of the liberal theory to some degree, such as democracy, free trade, and international institutions. Implicit in all this, however, is the idea that the US itself should play the leading role. Symptomatically, the liberal view of the world lacks the concept of poles. In a liberal world order, there simply cannot be such a useless thing as poles. But such a world is not, in fact, devoid of poles. The stability of the order is underwritten by US leadership and might, thus making it unipolar in essence.

The theory of the liberal world order has been subject to criticism from both the left (Marxists) and the right (conservative realists). Like liberals, Marxists proceed from the assumption that wars result from a distortion of human nature which must be set right through rational organization of the world order. But this should be a qualitatively different project.

Like liberals, Marxists focus on the decisive role of human reason in transforming the world. War and anarchy are aberrations of the social system. Reasonable corrections are the way to solve the problem. But while liberals see correcting a political regime as the main tool ('democracies do not fight each other'), Marxists hold that the state's existence per se is a violation of order. Ideally, the disappearance of the state should solve both the problem of anarchy in international relations and the problem of the state of nature in a nation. After all, property is at the root of the state of nature. The disappearance of property and inequality will automatically deal with the state of nature issue. In reality, Marx himself and his numerous followers did not seek to discount the state (See, for example, Marx, K, 'Vosemnadtsatoye brumera Lui Bonaparta' [The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte], in Marx, K & Engels, F, 'Complete Collected Works', vol.8.). This thesis was also discussed by Tatyana Alexeyeva (See: Alekseeva, TA, 2001, 'Sovremennye politicheskiye teorii' [Modern political concepts], Moscow, Rosspen, p. 39). As a superstructure, the state may impact the basis of socioeconomic relations and act as an independent force with its own interests. Neo-Marxists (primarily Antonio Gramsci and Nicos Poulantzas) considerably expanded this thesis, calling liberal reasoning into question (See, for example, Gramsci, A, 1997, 'Tyuremniye tetradii' [Prison Notebooks], in Alekseeva, TA (ed.), 'Anthology of World Political Philosophy in 5 Volumes', vol. 2 'Foreign Political Philosophy in the 20th Century', Moscow, Mysl'; Poulantzas, N, 'Politicheskaya vlast' i sotsialnye klassy kapitalisticheskogo obschestva' [Classes in Contemporary Capitalism], in Alekseeva, TA (ed.), 1997, 'Anthology of World Political Philosophy in 5 Volumes', vol. 2 'Foreign Political Philosophy in the 20th Century', Moscow, Mysl').

Marxists, rather convincingly, demonstrated the weakness of the liberal Triangle. *Democracies do not fight each other and peoples do not want war*. Perhaps. But what to do about the ‘iron law of oligarchy’? What about nationalism and using the energy of the masses to foment war? What about how identity is constructed and how public opinion is manipulated? *Commercial interdependence prevents war*. Perhaps. But what do we do about the fusion of bureaucratic and corporate interests? What do we do about imperialism and neo-imperialism, the core–periphery relationship, or global inequality? *International organizations and communities promote peace*. They do, but stronger states would fashion such institutions to suit their own vision and exploit them in their own interests. Neo-Marxists, for their part, choose not to interpret world order as a single political construct. There is a certain world economic system (World System).⁵ The problem is that while the liberal norms of living together are good for the World System’s core, they will produce totally different or opposite results on the periphery. For example, democratizing a country with a weakly defined sense of statehood will only further consolidate its peripheral status.

Conservative realists criticise liberals from a different angle, calling into question the very possibility of setting international relations on a rational footing.⁶ The world is too complex and non-linear to be squeezed into a single rational matrix.⁷ Instead of contemplative projects, state policy should rely on pragmatism, common sense, and best practices. Social engineering has no place in foreign policy. Power and might are the main currency in international relations. Each state seeks power and hegemony. The only way to protect oneself is to balance the power

⁵ Wallerstein, I, 2001, ‘Rozhdenie i buduschaia konchina kapitalisticheskoi mirsistemy: kontseptualnaya osnova sravnitel'nogo analiza’ [The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis], in Wallerstein, I, ‘Analiz mirovykh system i situatsia v sovremennom mire’ [World Systems Analysis], Saint Petersburg, Univesitetskaya kniga, p. 23–25.

⁶ This skepticism is quite clear in Reinhold Niebuhr, who remains an intellectual authority for many realists. Niebuhr’s prime target is the socialist commitment to the idea that reason has no bounds. See: Niebuhr, R, 2008, ‘The Irony of American History’, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 4; Niebuhr, R, 1986, ‘Ideology and the Scientific Method’, in McAfee, RB (ed), ‘The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses’, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 205–210.

⁷ Anthropological pessimism is also a basic assumption in Hans Morgenthau’s writings criticizing liberal political theory. See: Morgenthau, H, 1946, ‘Scientific Man versus Power Politics’, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 51–52.

of others and create an environment where war would be too costly for an aggressor.⁸ Diplomacy should be free from ideology and aimed at finding ideal compromises between states based on their interests. In this view, a world order is possible but temporary by definition. What may be implied is a continuous alternation of world orders. The problem of anarchy cannot be eradicated. But a state must adopt measures to safeguard against the claims of other states.

Interestingly, the poles concept is a product of the realist and conservative thought. It was superimposed on a holistic approach that emphasized the role of the system of international relations. In other words, states' behaviour depends on how the international order is organized. However, both liberals and Marxists proposed holistic alternatives of their own. Liberal thought emphasises the dominant role of globalization and economic interdependence in reducing the potential for conflict between states. The new architecture of the world economy has steered economic rivalry into a constructive track, largely removing it from the realm of power politics. Imperialism with its hierarchy has been replaced with the more flexible network structures of states. Most countries that form these structures have been 'old democracies' or successful 'transition democracies'. The emergence of a large number of international organizations has reduced the Hobbesian fear and uncertainty. The phenomenon of power itself has been diversified: it is the liberals who have put forward a modern interpretation of soft power and 'art of economy' as applied to foreign policy. Neo-Marxists have marshalled strong counterarguments here as well. The periphery remains plunged in conflict and vulnerable. The use of force by advanced countries against 'rogue' nations has long been the norm. Development problems are felt in full force. The potential for conflict in the periphery has not disappeared. As part of the world order, it can well destabilize the 'brave new' liberal world. There are also questions regarding the semi-periphery – major developing states modernizing from the top down. To what extent will they be willing to follow the existing rules? Where will the growing might of countries like China and India be directed?

⁸ See, for example, Carr, E, 2001, *'The Twenty Years' Crisis'*, London: Palgrave, p. 102–120.

As usual, conservatives (or rather neo-realists) put forward a new vision. The main yardstick for leadership in international relations is still military might and power. A politician should keep away from economics, although it is obvious that military superiority is impossible without an advanced economic and technological infrastructure in place. At the same time, the international system remains asymmetric, with a large number of weak players and just a few strong ones. But it is the strong players that assemble coalitions around themselves and form poles of power. They can afford the luxury of being strategically independent or relatively dependent on others, while the majority share a dependence on the strong. A multipolar system creates too much uncertainty, since it is more difficult for several players to agree amongst themselves. A unipolar system is also potentially unstable and short-lived. A bipolar system is the most stable arrangement, although it is not eternal either. Sooner or later, the power hierarchy changes and it is incumbent on every state to fashion a fitting response to this challenge.

Interestingly, neo-realism exerted a strong influence on the Soviet and later Russian theory of international relations. Under the Soviets, it was a fresh and relatively acceptable addendum to the dominant ideology. In the post-Soviet period, when liberalism enjoyed a brief ascendancy followed by a precipitous decline, neo-realism became, in one way or another, the most popular political philosophy, with Yevgeny Primakov as the most influential intellectual and political proponent of this philosophy. Russia's foreign policy doctrine is based on realism, as reflected by the categories it employs – polarity, power, might, national interest, security, etc. Globalization is mentioned in practically every key Russian doctrinal document, but – quite in the spirit of realism – it coexists, as it were, with national interests and security issues without detracting from their significance

In the post-Soviet period, multipolarity has also become a key concept in the official Russian narrative. On the one hand, it was convenient from the point of view of Russia's new role in the world: Moscow was unable and unwilling to counterbalance the US or engage in a costly arms race. But it aspired to and, in fact, played the role of an important centre of power. The Russian interpretation of multipolarity also envisaged the possibility

of and need for an equitable dialogue with other countries and centres of power. The idea of equality made the concept of multipolarity attractive for Moscow's other partners as well. At least, China and India to this day believe that a multipolar world is the most desirable construct.

The picture was somewhat different in the United States. The realist principle was always rather strong in US foreign policy doctrine, with national interests and security traditionally holding pride of place. But the US vision of the post-bipolar world was different from the Russian one. Americans tended to see themselves as winners in the Cold War. Given their considerable edge over all others, Americans eschewed questions of equality, at least in terms of security. However, they also tried to refrain from the unipolarity concept. The liberal component in America's foreign policy doctrine remained clearly expressed and strong, while organically combining conservative fundamentals. Democracy, human rights, free trade, and globalization were positioned as the basic values and derivatives of US foreign policy. They also cemented the legitimacy of US leadership as a criterion of the world order's fairness. While the Russian criterion of fairness was the equality of sovereignties, the United States emphasised market freedom and democracy. An important distinction in this sense was that the US saw itself as a source and guarantor of fairness, whereas Russia avoided this role in the belief that sovereign equality is an axiom in international relations.

In other words, for Russians and Americans polarity and world order itself mean fundamentally different things. Russians see multipolarity as important in itself and a marker of equality and fairness. For Americans, it is of secondary importance. The number of poles is not so important in a US-centric world. What is important is the existence of this order. But the problem is that both points of view are increasingly divorced from reality. The world is changing, and this calls for new doctrinal reflections.

The World Order: New Parameters?

There is a temptation to narrow the new international realities down to the qualitatively new technological environment. Indeed, the world has changed significantly over the last two decades. The wave of advances in the information technology (IT) sector constitute a critical factor in international relations. Social media and the Internet have made the world flatter and more transparent. A qualitatively new decomposition of time and space has occurred. The unprecedented ease of access to information is matched by its equally unprecedented overabundance, and an apparent pluralism of views is outweighed by the fragmentation and polarization of opinions and political positions. The Internet has turned into a potent force for group polarization and ‘tribalization’. Little technological know-how is required for users who share the same beliefs to find each other and band together against their opponents. In other words, the new information environment has opened up new horizons for political mobilization, ideological indoctrination, stigmatization of ‘the other’, and populism of every stripe.

For a long time, changes in the information environment were a peripheral issue in international politics. Social media revealed itself as a powerful mobilizing tool during the Arab Spring revolutions. The Internet has allowed radical Islamists to develop more sophisticated recruitment and propaganda techniques. Digital technology has also played a role in the post-Soviet ‘Colour Revolutions’. Yet, while all these problems remained on the periphery, the ‘international community’ was slow to respond, though the UN and other organizations did try to counteract the growing threats.

The real crisis broke out after the developed countries themselves realized that the global information environment could be a weapon and source of threats. In comparing the putative Russian or Chinese election ‘meddling’ with the September 11 attacks (9/11) and Pearl Harbor, US legislators and bureaucrats are not simply engaged in a rhetoric exercise. More likely, we are witnessing the breakdown of old patterns and feelings of vulnerability and exposure on the part of a superpower that enjoys overwhelming and unquestioned superiority in the digital environment. What is even more unusual

CYBER FACTOR IN WORLD POLITICS

Cyber Operations



Distributed Denial of Service

The intentional paralyzing of a computer network by flooding it with data sent simultaneously from many individual computers



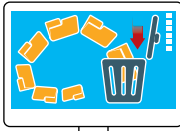
Espionage

The act of obtaining confidential information



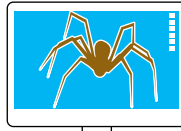
Defacement

The unauthorized act of changing the appearance of a website or social media account



Data Destruction

The use of malicious software to destroy data on a computer



Sabotage

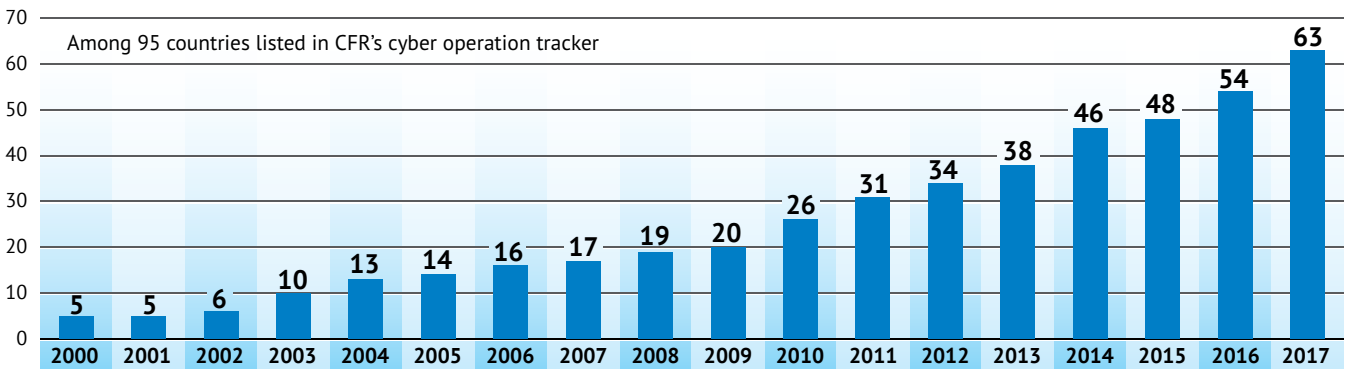
The use of malware that causes a disruption to a physical process



Doxing

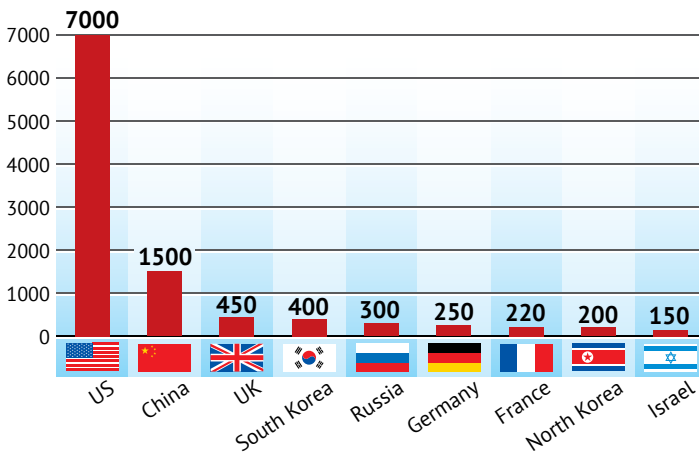
The act of searching and publishing private or identifying information about an individual or group on the internet

Proliferation of the military computer operations units



Source: Council on Foreign Relations.

Financing of cyber forces (\$ m/year)



Source: Zecurion Analytics (2017).

United States Cyber Command (2010)



Information Operations Unit of the Russian Armed Forces (2017)



is that the incidents that triggered allegations of 'meddling' and the subsequent pandemonium were quite insignificant and episodic. However, the public reaction has been disproportionate to an unprecedented degree. Evidently, the events of the past two years can be compared with the Cuban Missile Crisis. Like then, the political elites are armed with fundamentally new technologies (missiles and nuclear warheads). Like then, there are no rules agreed upon to play by – the basic precepts and redlines had yet to be formulated. And like then, a local incident may engender global consequences. Yet, the current crisis is more protracted and considerably more dangerous. It has gone far beyond foreign policy and is tugging on domestic political strings. It poses an ongoing challenge for both the US and Russia with its long-standing apprehensions regarding interference in its sovereign affairs, the EU and China, which preventively gave thought to its national digital environment and set about creating a 'domestic' Internet of its own.

The digital age has given rise to a qualitatively different kind of anarchy in international relations. In the familiar Cold War logic, fear and the security dilemma were linked to military force, the threat of its use, and ideological rivalry, with norms and rules of coexistence hinging on this perception for a long time. Today, those military capabilities are still in place. Moreover, a new revolution in military affairs is in progress, including the cyber sphere. However, the digital environment and the general breakdown of established ideologies have destroyed the accustomed models that formed perceptions of security problems. The result has been the erosion of the restraining mechanisms of use of force that existed before. The use of force is growing more likely. It is a bitter paradox for veterans of the Cold War, with its clear rules, ideologies and norms, that provoking a crisis today requires nothing more than trolling or creating fake social media accounts as opposed to redeploying weapons to friendly countries close to a potential adversary's borders or undertaking significant ideological efforts there. Virtual crises can now set in motion quite real military machinery. To use the language of stock brokers, digital technology has created truly limitless potential for a decline in relations between great powers. The new 'bottom' has proved much deeper, with the 'support levels' too weak to arrest the fall of the 'listings'.

Another feature of the current international layout is the diversity of dimensions, or projections, of the world order. The world has long ceased

to be about power politics and security issues alone, although they continue to be a significant component. Strictly speaking, international security remains the prerogative of a limited number of powers. This was the case for a long time, and existing political theories could adequately describe this asymmetry. They also recognised the existence of dimensions other than force. But the attention accorded to them was either secondary (in the case of realism and other conservative theories) or focused on specific points of globalization and interdependence (in the case of liberal theories). In the meantime, they have formed quite concrete structural sets whose specifics are lost in existing views on the world order. We can single out at least two such sets. Just as power dimension implies the terms of 'powerful' versus 'weak', the other two sets can also be put within binary oppositions of their own.

Democracy, human rights, free trade, and globalization were positioned as the basic values and derivatives of US foreign policy

The first pair of these oppositions is '*developed*' versus '*underdeveloped*'. The world features a quite concrete structural set of states with a high level of economic development, human capital, and technological competence. However, while in the past these assets were converted into military might or went hand in hand with it, the US allies have taken advantage of the Cold War to form a unique cluster of successful states without ambitions for power. The problem is that in the long term this cluster may face a difficult choice of either remaining under the umbrella of US guarantees or gradually expanding their strategic autonomy. With such communities as the EU and such countries as Japan drifting in the direction of strategic independence, the matrix of the international order may be headed for a total reset. The familiar pole of 'the US plus allies' no longer looks like a given.

At the same time, the Cold War has bequeathed to the modern world order the underdeveloped world. This does not imply developing countries, many of which have made strides and achieved impressive success and high growth rates. Rather, these are nations whose development has been hopelessly crippled. True, many of them are developing, but the rest of the world is progressing at the same speed or even faster. Strictly speaking, next to no one is seriously concerned with the fate of these states, even in view of related challenges like terrorism, migration, drug trafficking, or international crime. They came in for more attention when new, non-Western projects for these countries were put

on the agenda. For example, China's growing activity in Africa and other regions, including the 'community of common destiny' concept implementation, has been causing, judging by the evidence, growing concern and drawing more attention to these countries than was the case after the Cold War, when mostly they were left to their own devices.

The other opposing pair is *'stateness' versus 'democracy'*. The latter half of the 20th century was the heyday of democratic regimes. A number of countries managed to build stable democratic systems combined with strong stateness marked by high-quality institutions, absence of internal conflicts, and efficient domestic policies. The abovementioned cluster of advanced states succeeded in breaking out of the *'stateness–democracy'* dilemma despite their restricted sovereignty over foreign policy decision-making. But quite a few countries still face this dilemma. There is a cluster of states, formally democratic, with persistently weak statehood. In the post-Soviet space, for example, these are Moldova and Ukraine. Free elections and alternation of power coexist with weak institutions, internal divisions, and the dependence of development on external assistance. The current processes in Ukraine can, with good cause, be called the *'Moldovization of Ukraine'*.

At the same time, there is a large number of states that prefer to achieve a tolerable degree of stateness by authoritarian means. These countries witness a relatively strong internal consolidation and institutions that are relatively effective in carrying out modernization 'from the top down' and quelling internal conflicts. The problem with these states is that their attempt to democratize in the interest of further development may disrupt the existing balance and provoke a serious crisis of stateness with all the ensuing consequences for foreign policy. Some examples in the post-Soviet space are Belarus and Kazakhstan. The great powers in this category are China and Russia. Compared with them, India, for one, is in a somewhat better position, with its *'stateness–democracy'* dilemma being far less pressing than exigencies of development.

When *'stateness–democracy'* short circuits occur, even in small states, it can lead to grave international consequences. Ukraine is a glaring example of this. This kind of short circuit in a major state can trigger global revolutionary change as the collapse of the Soviet Union demonstrated. Though in theory it is long past the *'stateness–democracy'* trap, the United States today poses a major challenge to international stability, mostly for domestic political

reasons. Undoubtedly, the US is unlikely to collapse. But its domestic infighting is entering into a strong resonance with world processes, resulting in greater uncertainty.

Finally, another important characteristic has to be noted. A large number of experts point to the *non-linear nature* of modern international relations. Policy documents adopted by various countries warn about the growing turbulence and acceleration of international affairs. The non-linearity postulate has long been treated as a banality. At the same time, the understanding of non-linearity remains vague and amorphous to the extreme. Normally, it is interpreted as something uncertain and barely predictable. However, this superficial interpretation overlooks some really important properties. In the final analysis, even a linear world outlook is unable to solve the problem of uncertainty. This means that important adjustments are in order, which will make it possible to identify its truly significant parameters.

The digital age has given rise to a qualitatively different kind of anarchy in international relations

In the strict sense of the word, non-linearity implies non-proportionality in cause-and-effect interdependencies. For example, there can be an interdependence of this kind between efforts and results. There are numerous examples where minor efforts led to considerable results. And *vice versa*: considerable efforts yielded paltry or even negative results. The meaning of non-linearity is that the same effort can produce fundamentally different results at different times: we seem to live as before, but the results are not what they used to be. Non-linearity also results from the fact that many processes are unfolding in a definite resource niche. Here, the term of resources encompasses the broadest possible range, from purely material (raw materials, finance, etc.) to non-material things (public support, trust, acceptance of values, consolidation of society, etc.). It is also of importance that the resource niches are flexible for many processes. This means that new technologies, strategies, and mobilization techniques can be of help in exceeding their framework. Exceeding resource constraints can in itself engender non-linearity – a dramatic breakthrough or backsliding – as a price of overexertion.

Thus, effort and resource constraints are the two crucial parameters that engender non-linearity. Yet another crucial characteristic of non-linearity is that one and the same process can have fundamentally different dynamics, such as stable onward development or stable degradation. It can also be cyclical

or plunge into 'dynamic chaos' with a totally unpredictable outcome (usually these are periods of wars or revolutions that are brief by historical standards but critically important for future periods of stability).

This theoretic conclusion is of extreme importance. It is not so important how we see the world order – as a rules-based liberal world, multipolarity, or pluralistic unipolarity. The important thing is that one and the same order can have totally different parameters under different dynamic regimes and therefore lead to fundamentally different outcomes than those originally intended. It is clear that the liberal order as it is today and was in the 1990s are two rather different systems, although we see them as one and the same thing in the normative and even institutional sense. Multipolarity can be discussed in a similar way. What worked perfectly 20 years ago can engender stagnation and instability today. For example, the declining efficiency of the liberal order is resulting in efforts to maintain it and restore the 'good old days'. However, the state of resources that previously made it possible and efficient can be absolutely different now. Expanding such efforts will only rock the boat still further. The problem with non-linearity is also that the descent into the 'dynamic chaos' is, as a rule, fast and unpredictable: everyone feels that something is wrong, but no one knows when exactly the order may collapse. Often the collapse is catastrophic in nature, involving sudden, fundamental, and all-encompassing disruptions.

From the point of view of non-linearity, the existing world order is little different from its predecessors, whose dynamics and subsequent replacement were non-linear processes. Today, however, the price of transformation can be extremely high, given all the destructive capabilities of a 'risk society'. The existing doctrines only modestly account for new technologies, different projections of the world order, and its non-linearity. We are facing a situation where the gap between the doctrine and reality is growing frighteningly wide. This is a bad symptom in itself, showing that the speed of change is so high that its reflection fails to catch up with it. As such, adequate political decision-making is lagging behind as well.

From here, we will attempt to outline possible scenarios in which the world order transitions to new 'stationary states' with more or less stable rules that introduce a new logic to international relations.

Scenario 1. Liberal Order: An Attempt of Adaptation

There is no doubt that the liberal world order is going through rough times. New centres of power are growing, the US president emphasises the pre-eminence of national interests over global leadership, international norms and institutions are crumbling. Ironically, the liberal order is being destroyed by the nation that presided over its inception and was its leader for a long time. Nevertheless, any established system is prone to crisis. It will either go to perdition or emerge from the crisis as a stronger and better adapted system. This scenario should hardly be ruled out, all the more so as the liberal order has a considerable margin of safety. Among other things, its durability lies in the fact that the US has not yet made a definitive choice in favour of an alternative, while its allies are expressing their preference, in different ways, for the comfortable world order they are accustomed to.

The process of adapting the liberal system may start with the next presidential cycle in the US. Donald Trump's policy agenda is opposed by a huge number of people both in the US and elsewhere, who are increasingly outraged by his rejection of the established interpretation of world leadership in favour of patriotism and going alone, pressuring allies, and undermining a number of regimes and institutions. It could be assumed that reverting to the old policies will be as (or more) radical than the U-turn made by Trump himself. The incumbent president is unlikely to consolidate his innovations. For that, he has too little time. Moreover, it is still unclear whether Trump's approach is a real policy agenda or an imitation of anti-globalism and a return to the country's roots. In any event, the highly likely victory of Trump's opponents in 2020 or 2024 will lead to a decisive, demonstrative break with his legacy. They only have to wait out the president for a few years and then hope that everything returns

The process of adapting the liberal system may start with the next presidential cycle in the US

to normal. In this case, the following trends, among others, are likely to emerge by the mid-2020s:

- Maximal security guarantees for US allies will be restored, and the US security umbrella will no longer be 'commercialized'. The US will build up its military presence both in Europe and Asia. Transatlantic solidarity will be bolstered, including in order to contain Russia. Russia is a convenient pretext for consolidation, even if the actual threat it poses is minor.
- The US will revive free trade projects in Asia and the Euro-Atlantic region and reset its globalist agenda.
- The US will compromise with China. This scenario amounts to a surreptitious policy of military containment of China, even if it is packaged as something less radical. In any case, the economic pressure on China will be decreasing. Generally, a goal of the new US foreign policy agenda will be to engineer a split between China and Russia. A 'deal' with Beijing will provide more opportunities for isolating Moscow. The US will renounce its policy of simultaneous containment of Moscow and Beijing in favour of tackling each of them individually. Moscow will be first. Beijing, if necessary, will come next. China is playing for time and may well accept this scenario.
- Pressure will build on Russia. The US will closely coordinate with the EU containment and sanctions policies against Moscow, including the goal to effect regime change in Russia. The support of Ukraine and other post-Soviet 'champions of democracy' will be given an even bigger boost than ever seen before. The Trump-era measures against Russia will grow tougher (however tough they were from the outset).
- The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), or Iran deal (if, sanctions notwithstanding, Iran remains committed to the deal) will be revived. Washington will emerge from its JCPOA-related international isolation. At the same time, it will harden its position on the Korean nuclear problem, which will not be resolved by that time.
- America's allies and partners will give their unqualified backing to its return to the old course.
- The US will make up with India and drop all discriminatory measures restricting trade with Delhi.
- The US will selectively strengthen its presence in the Middle East and embark on a tough containment policy *vis-à-vis* Russia in the region.

The big question is how effective this U-turn will be. Will it solve the problems and imbalances that have piled up? How long-term will the policy of liberal order restoration persist? It is quite likely that its apologists ultimately will get just a skilful imitation performed by political leaders. It is likely as well that Trump, Brexit, European populism, and other phenomena are not just a fluctuation but a symptom of more fundamental and long-term problems. Nevertheless, the likelihood itself of a liberal U-turn seems high, as does its backing by many influential players.

Virtual crises can now set in motion quite real military machinery

For Russia, this turn of events promises growing pressure. Moscow will find it difficult to manoeuvre by exploiting the nuances and differences in US and EU approaches. It will be more difficult to lean on China and even more so on India and other partners. Possibly, the euphoria caused by the revival of the old ways will not last long. But even a short-lived effort to adapt the liberal order can make life much more difficult for Moscow. Reducing the turbulence in world politics, particularly within the US–EU–China–India quadrangle, undercuts Russia's positioning as a 'fortress' towering above the chaos and uncertainty of world politics. In a more stable liberal world order, Russia's influence might be reduced, while its isolation will be a simpler task.

This country is facing a difficult choice between going on the defensive with all the ensuing consequences for development, albeit with a hope that the liberal revival will fizzle out soon, on the one hand, and an attempt to compromise with the West, which is fraught with the risk of a speedy surrender of its positions without any guarantees of successful growth and development, on the other. By that time, Russia is unlikely to sever its ties to the world economy despite sanctions and attempted isolation. This means that opportunities to adapt to a revamped liberal order will remain open in one way or another. Witte-style diplomacy⁹, i.e. remaining committed to positions of principle under the most adverse conditions, may prove of use again.

⁹ Count Sergei Yulyevich Witte, was a highly influential econometrician, minister, and prime minister in Imperial Russia, one of the key figures in the political arena at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.

Scenario 2. Strategic Autonomy and a New Multipolarity

However, any attempt to revive the liberal world order may end in fiasco. To be sure, Trump's numerous opponents will raise liberalism and American leadership as their banner, and they are likely to find support in ally countries. But the new international realities will soon dispel such liberal idealism. China and Russia – two 'well-armed gentlemen' – are too big or too recalcitrant for the old order. The European Union is increasingly independent, albeit in no hurry to break off transatlantic ties. While remaining a US ally, Japan is gradually departing from its usual policy as it becomes a more powerful military-political player. India is following its traditional non-aligned path. Moreover, the US itself is less and less inclined to coordinate its actions with allies. It is proving difficult to restore leadership by creating new trade alliances despite America's still ample economic power and its appeal as a destination for investment.

Given these developments, the following trends should be expected:

- Transatlantic ties will be reset, including the purpose of containing Russia. Moscow will remain a consolidating factor for NATO, which remains a powerful military-political organization. The EU will play a subordinate and secondary role for NATO. But it will develop and consolidate its own foreign policy and security institutions.
- The Ukrainian problem will remain unresolved. At the same time, the post-Soviet space will increasingly become a 'toxic' asset for the West, with its heavy investment cancelled out by corruption and institutional weakness. The Eastern expansion of the Euro-Atlantic security institutions will stay limited. But the EU will pursue an active policy of drawing post-Soviet countries into its economic orbit.
- The US will face problems establishing new trade and economic regimes in Europe and Asia. A combination of factors is at play here, including 'Trump's legacy', players' desire to retain a free hand, and US inability to offer lucrative terms.

- Washington's proposed deal to normalize relations with Beijing will fail. Americans will regard China as a strategic threat. But the extensive economic ties will remain as before. Washington will become quite cautious in its anti-China sanctions and trade war policy. China will maintain beneficial relations with the US, while retaining a free hand to work with Russia and other partners. The US will have to contain Russia and China simultaneously. But there will be no military alliance between Moscow and Beijing, something that will dramatically reduce the double containment threat for the US.
- US attempts to form a united front against Russia will fail. The EU will not support an escalation of sanctions. Cooperation with China will offset US sanctions. China will derive its own benefits from this cooperation. Russia enjoys significant room for manoeuvre.
- Iran will succeed in circumventing US sanctions and restrictions. Despite its alliance with the US, the EU will maintain relations with Tehran, in fact ensuring the implementation of JCPOA. China and Russia will support the EU, while pursuing their independent policies with regard to Iran. North Korea will become a *de facto* nuclear power. Multilateral UN sanctions will not work.
- Russia will remain active in the Middle East. China will enhance its role in the region by launching large-scale programmes to restore the Syrian economy and promoting humanitarian projects in other countries.

The familiar pole of 'the US plus allies' no longer looks like a given

The key feature that distinguishes the multipolarity scenario from the new liberal order scenario is that there are growing centres of power, for which strategic autonomy or progress in that direction is a more attractive proposition than US leadership. Strictly speaking, such a world lacks organizing principles or ideas, but it is not beset by anarchy and chaos. The main question is how long this order can exist and whether it can be stable in principle.

At first glance, multipolarity is more beneficial for Russia and its foreign policy agenda. It has more room for manoeuvre, more chances to capitalize on its strong points (military power and might), and greater resistance to isolation. But this world is hardly less harsh than the liberal order. In a multipolar environment, everyone fights for their own interests, uncertainty is higher,

and errors will not be forgiven even if you pledge adherence to certain norms. The cost of error grows based on Russia's internal development problems. It will require a Gorchakov¹⁰-style policy that can subtly balance interests and achieve spectacular political results with modest economic resources.

Scenario 3. Bipolarity 2.0

The new bipolarity scenario is rooted in the growing US pressure on China and Washington's attempt to preclude the crystallization of Beijing's military and political might. Furthermore, the 'China card' is being played in the context of US domestic political competition. Regardless of who becomes the president in 2020 and 2024, the US-China confrontation will become irreversible. The trade war will undermine both countries' economic interdependence. Washington will impose sanctions against Beijing and gradually expand their scope. China will retaliate with painful countermeasures. An arms race in Asia will pick up speed.

These processes will threaten China's stable economic growth. Expansion of the military-industrial complex and military production will emerge as an important compensatory factor against the background of an economic slowdown. At the same time, it will fuel arms race, broaden its resource niche and make a reversal of the political course extremely difficult. Ideologically, China will promote an alternative vision of the world system. Given this turn of events, the following trends should be expected:

- The US will consolidate its relationship with allies in Asia. The countries in the region will face a tough choice between the US and China. It will be extremely difficult to sever deeply entrenched economic ties. But the growing political confrontation will put mounting pressure on business communities. The US will actively seek to draw Vietnam and India into an anti-China coalition.

¹⁰ Alexander Mikhailovich Gorchakov was a Russian diplomat and statesman with an enduring reputation as one of the most influential and respected diplomats of the 19th century, was the Foreign Minister of the Russian Empire in 1856–1882.

- China and Russia will consolidate their ties. In the face of a growing pressure from Washington, Beijing and Moscow will establish a military-political alliance.
- The EU will attempt to stay above the fray, unwilling as it is to lose the benefits of its partnership with China or step up confrontation with Russia. Nevertheless, the logic of strategic interdependence will prevent the EU from maintaining neutrality. Europe will witness a surge of anti-China sentiment.
- China and Russia will essentially sabotage sanctions against North Korea.
- China and Russia will support Iran. China will pursue an active policy in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, being perceived as a rival to the Western presence.

The advantage of the new bipolarity for Russia lies in the opportunity to reliably overcome diplomatic isolation and considerably bolster its security based on its alliance with China. The system itself may prove stable, given the high containment potential of both poles. It is easier for Russia to overcome economic pressure from the part of the US and its allies.

An obvious disadvantage would be the considerable contraction of room for manoeuvre. In an alliance with China, Russia will play the role of a junior partner. Moscow's economic relations with China will be asymmetrical, with Russia growing more dependent. A similar situation may gradually emerge in the military-political sphere. In a China-US conflict, Russia will almost automatically have to join the fray with all the ensuing consequences. Ideologically, Moscow is unlikely to have the initiative either for it will have to fit into Beijing's system of coordinates. In this scenario, Russia will become a 'well-armed Canada', a big and sufficiently developed country that is much more important militarily, though dependent on a senior partner.

Given its foreign policy traditions, Moscow may refrain from joining the new bipolar world as part of one of its poles. But if Russia accepts this scenario, it will need the skills of Alexander Izvolsky¹¹ and Sergey

**When 'stateness–
democracy' short circuits
occur, even in small
states, it can lead
to grave international
consequences**

¹¹ Count Alexander Petrovich Izvolsky was a Russian diplomat remembered as a major architect of Russia's alliance with Great Britain during the years leading to the outbreak of the First World War, Foreign Minister of the Russian Empire in 1906–1910.

Sazonov¹² in order to uphold its interests in the harsh reality of strategic interdependence. The main thing in this context is to avoid the fate that Russia suffered when the said ministers were in office.

Scenario 4. A New Anarchy

The defining feature of this scenario is that it can come about by virtue of a whole range of unpredictable events, like military incidents, cyberattacks, man-made disasters, terrorist attacks, religious conflicts, etc. However, it implies just one outcome, which is a major international conflict involving leading world powers and a wide array of armaments, which will affect a large number of countries, negatively impact the world economy and carry dramatic consequences for the future balance of power in the world. At a minimum, we can consider several possible forms that this catastrophic scenario might take.

- An intentional or unintentional incident involving Russian and US troops leading to uncontrolled escalation. For now, Syria is the most likely setting of such an incident. Similar incidents are possible in the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions, and anywhere both countries' militaries overlap. An incident involving Russians and a country allied with the US is possible, but the risk of escalation in this case seems lower. The conflict's rapid escalation will result in disaster. The high speed of attack and counterattack, the impossibility of emerging from the conflict without losing face, deep mistrust, and the existence of pre-planned options for this kind of a situation – all these factors will underlie the irreversible nature of the conflict. A regional conflict will set into motion both sides' militaries, with a high probability of them using tactical nuclear weapons and the conflict escalating to a full-scale nuclear war.
- A cyberattack against one of the powers resulting in a large-scale man-made disaster with high casualties. The attack will be attributed.

¹² *Sergey Dmitryevich Sazonov was a Russian statesman and diplomat, served as Foreign Minister in 1910–1916.*

to Russia or China. Actions will be taken against them (regardless of the real source). Cyber strikes will escalate to a limited and later large-scale armed conflict. In case of a cyberattack against Russia or China, escalation seems less likely.

- An incident in the South China Sea involving Chinese and US combat aircraft or ships: a limited and ideally fast-moving military operation aimed at destroying Chinese military infrastructure on the disputed islands. The conflict will take time and turn into a protracted military confrontation between China and the US with the risk of a nuclear exchange. The chances that this conflict could be reversed seem higher than in the case of a Russian–US clash. But escalation cannot be ruled out either.
- A conflict resulting from misinterpreting the intentions and plans of the other side. It could be a replay of what occurred in 1983, when major military exercises were mistaken for military aggression, something that considerably increased the risk of escalation. Given that today's mechanisms of communication between Russia and the US are far less stable than during the Cold War, this option could well become a reality.

The existing doctrines only modestly account for new technologies, different projections of the world order, and its non-linearity

The onset of each of these options is probable, but it is unlikely that they will develop into an uncontrolled disaster. Obviously, numerous other options are possible as well. In the past, however, contemporaries would often mistake the majority of disasters as improbable too, but they happened nonetheless and entailed global consequences.

In the new anarchy scenario, all players pay a price. In case of a nuclear conflict, the losses threaten to be irreparable. Even a major conventional conflict will paralyze the world economy, finance, transport, and other crucial infrastructure.

In the anarchy scenario, Russia has what it takes to survive. But it is more vulnerable compared with other major powers (US, China), particularly if the conflict becomes protracted. The situation will call for Stalinist-style rule, but it is far from clear that the modern Russian state and society are ready for such a rapid transformation.

Undoubtedly, all four scenarios are 'ideal types'. Many other options are possible as well. But it is important to recognise that the anarchy scenario can follow any of the three other alternatives – liberal order, new multipolarity, or new bipolarity. These scenarios are not mutually exclusive and can appear in succession. For example, an attempt to revive the liberal order and failure of a new liberal project could set in motion a transition to a new multipolarity and on to bipolarity as a more stable structure.

Each of the alternatives poses its own risks and opportunities for Russia. Multipolarity seems to present the best combination of the two, although life in such a world will be far from easy. Besides, multipolarity may prove an unstable condition gravitating either towards bipolarity or a monopoly of one project. However, both a liberal order and a bipolar world are not without opportunities for Russia, even though they entail a painful transformation, losses, and a difficult adjustment to the external environment.

It is a worrisome sign that the major players lack reliable interaction mechanisms in the event that the worst-case scenario comes to pass. All sides are increasingly inclined to see containment as the best option, complete with all the ensuing consequences such as the 'spiral of fear', the Thucydides trap, and 'security paradox'. A war provoked by a stupidity is quite possible in this situation. But unpredictable circumstances and paltry pretexts will hardly excuse the likely casualties and costs.

 ValdaiClub

 ValdaiClub

 ValdaiClub

valdai@valdaiclub.com



Council on Foreign and Defense Policy



RIAC
Russian International
Affairs Council



MGIMO
UNIVERSITY



NATIONAL RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY