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**БИФУРКАЦИЯ МИРОВОГО
ПОРЯДКА: СУЩНОСТЬ, ПРИЗНАКИ
И ДВИЖУЩИЕ СИЛЫ**

**THE BIFURCATION OF THE WORLD
ORDER: ESSENCE, SIGNS AND
DRIVING FORCES**

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Аннотация

В статье авторы приходят к выводу о том, что на бифуркацию современного мирового порядка указывают множество фактов. Обосновывается мысль о том, что система приобретет привычные структурные очертания. Доказывается, что в настоящее время говорить об однополярности, биполярности или многополярности системы преждевременно. Авторы обосновывают мысль, что мы являемся свидетелями процесса разделения акторов системы на меньшинство, которое поддерживает какую-либо старую или новую структуру, и большинство, которое уходит в «свободное плавание», отказываясь от структурных ограничений.

Ключевые слова: мировая политика, международные отношения, мировой порядок, бифуркация мирового порядка.

Abstract

In the article, the authors come to the conclusion that many facts point to the bifurcation of the modern world order. The idea is substantiated that the system will acquire the usual structural outlines. It is proved that at present it is premature to talk about unipolarity, bipolarity or multipolarity of the system. The authors substantiate the idea that we are witnessing the process of dividing the actors of the system into a minority that supports some old or new structure, and a majority that goes into "free swimming", abandoning structural restrictions.

Key words: world politics, international relations, world order, bifurcation of the world order.

Introduction and relevance.

Literature Review. Trying to characterize the modern world order, many scientists and analysts turn to well-established and familiar concepts, whose origins go back to the theory of structural realism. Some talk about the formation of a multipolar world [1, 2], others talk about the revival of bipolarity [3, 4], others talk about a “reset” of unipolarity [12].

Interestingly, each viewpoint, while fundamentally different, is supported by a wealth of contemporary empirical evidence.

Results and Discussion. Some researchers, who, apparently, are in the majority, insist that the world has entered the era of multipolarity [1, 2]. In their opinion, three centers have already emerged in the international system: the United States, China and Russia (perhaps Iran and Turkey will be added to them later). The United States, being the “outgoing” hegemon, seeks to protect the status quo, while China and Russia, acting as the main counter-hegemons, are trying to destroy it by implementing revanchist strategies. Today, China is developing disputed islands (Paracel Islands), pouring artificial islands for military purposes (Spratly archipelago), building and already operating military and economic, which can easily be transformed into military, bases in the Indian Ocean (Dorale in Djibouti, Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Kyaukpyu in Myanmar) to contain India. Russia is successfully supporting B. Assad in Syria, is conducting a special military operation in Ukraine, and is advancing to the Arctic. Of course, all these actions and strategies undermine American hegemony.

The multipolar order has a relatively low degree of stability and constancy and is highly likely to develop in accordance with three main scenarios [2].

First, in a multipolar system, there is a high likelihood of war between superpowers, such as between the US and China or the US and Russia. However, a war between the two superpowers will automatically make the third, which has taken a neutral position, the true winner, as a result of which a return to unipolarity is possible. A war between superpowers can be waged not only directly, but also through intermediary countries, proxy actors, as was the case with Vietnam for the United States or Afghanistan for the USSR.

Secondly, it is possible to reduce the economic interdependence between the centers of the multipolar system. Such interdependence limits the autonomy of an actor, since any action must be planned taking into account the position of another actor. Thus, the United States depends on China for the supply of many goods. China, realizing this, is not afraid to expand its sphere of influence in the world. It is possible that the US may choose a policy that encourages its companies to exit the Chinese market. In this case, we should expect the “conservation” of the multipolar structure.

Thirdly, individual superpowers of the multipolar system can expand cooperation among themselves. Thus, China, during periods of exacerbation of the trade war, threatens to stop buying US dollars in the future and “dump” the available ones on the market, which will cause a major devaluation and serious disruptions in world markets. The United States, in order to avoid such a development of events and correct its ever-growing deficit in its balance of payments, can assign China the role of another manager of the international monetary regime. Under such a scenario, we can expect a gradual transition to bipolarity and a decrease in the role of other powers.

Many researchers prove that the world is approaching or has already come to bipolarity [3, 4]. The centers are called the USA and China. In their opinion, such a bipolar order is characterized by an increased level of stability, not only because of its inherent characteristics as such, which K. Waltz wrote about many decades ago [5], but also because of the fact that competition between the United States and China what is happening today is more in the economic than in the more dangerous military sphere. The term “cold world” is said to best describe such an order [6]. The Cold War involved generally hostile relations between the superpowers, which, however, could be compromised. Under a “cold peace”, relations between the superpowers are generally peaceful, but tensions can reach such a degree that compromise is impossible.

It is known that a bipolar order develops when two superpowers appear, possessing, on the whole, equal enormous capabilities, which sharply distinguish them from the mass of other states. At the same time, practice shows that bipolarity can persist even when a large gap arises between the superpowers in one or another indicator. The modern bipolar order, if

it is one, involves two superpowers, the US and China, with some asymmetry in favor of the former in the military realm.

In 2021, Chinese military spending accounted for 36% of US military spending in the same year (\$293 vs. \$801 billion). The gap between the volume of military spending by China and India, which ranks third in this indicator in the world, reaches a huge size: in 2021, Indian military spending amounted to only 26% of Chinese spending in the same year (77 against \$293 billion) [7]. The military superiority of the United States over China is determined not only by high military spending, but also by a large number of allies and nuclear warheads, as well as a higher level of development of military technologies. All this is enough for the United States to provide strategic stability for the foreseeable future and deter China if it tries to make some kind of military breakthrough in order to achieve a balance. However, in a single Asia-Pacific region, the gap in the capabilities of the United States and China is not as significant as at the global level.

In terms of economic indicators, China has almost reached parity with the United States. According to the IMF, in 2022, China's nominal GDP was equal to 72% of the US (\$18 vs. \$25 trillion). The GDP of Japan, the third in the corresponding list of countries, was equal to only 22% of China's in 2022 (4 against 18 trillion dollars) [8]. Many studies predict that China will overtake the United States in terms of GDP within the next decade [9]. At the same time, China is already ahead of the United States in terms of trade and investment.

Soft power, the ability to influence others through one's own attractiveness, is reputedly less of a factor in assessing bipolarity than military or economic power, in part because it is rather difficult to measure. However, Pew Research Center data show that global attitudes towards the US and China are starting to diverge. Negative attitudes in the world towards the US and China have always been at a relatively high level. However, recently the negative attitude towards China has grown, reaching a historical maximum, while the negative attitude towards the United States has remained basically unchanged [10].

The US and China, of course, have problems, such as political polarization and demographic overgrowth, respectively. Each of these powers can repeat the fate of the USSR and then the era of the new bipolarity will end. However, they retain many structural advantages. The United States has a strong financial system, its currency, despite a number of events, remains dominant, it remains a leader in innovation. China has a huge innovation potential, a high savings rate and outstanding ability to mobilize various types of resources [11]. If we agree with these statements, which have indisputable confirmation, then the modern order can be called bipolar.

In modern political science, it is widely believed that at present there is a “reset” of unipolarity, that multipolarity, which is now much spoken and written about, is just an illusion [12]. According to researchers critical of multipolarity, since the early 2010s. The United States began to gradually abandon the role of global leader. Then the influence of a group in the American establishment increased, which believes that it is necessary to stop spending huge amounts of money and risking the lives of its citizens in remote regions of the planet. The United States has preferred a strategy of dominance to a strategy of downsizing, which implies not a return to isolationism, but a rejection of the duties of a “world policeman” and a transition to a course of “cautious” hegemony. The implementation of the reduction strategy has created a power vacuum in certain regions of the world, which have tried to fill such powers as Russia and China. At the same time, the US has asked allies to take more responsibility for their security concerns.

Multipolarity skeptics argue that the world remains unipolar because Russia and China are not equal competitors to the US. Unipolarity in this case is understood not as a situation in which the United States rules the world, but as a situation in which no other power can compare with them in terms of material capabilities. Russia has a significant nuclear arsenal, but its conventional forces are said to be inferior to those of the US. China continues to demonstrate economic growth, but to extract military benefits from it, it is necessary to create

strong and competent institutions and seriously increase the ability to project territorial power, which it still lacks. Skeptics conclude that no major structural changes have taken place in the international system, but that the United States has simply made a new strategic choice, giving rise to the illusion of multipolarity.

Why do all these points of view have many supporters and empirical evidence, while fundamentally different from each other? We believe that the concepts of "unipolarity", "bipolarity" or "multipolarity" do not accurately reflect the current international reality. Rather, the modern world order is in a state of bifurcation.

In geography, there is the concept of river bifurcation, which means the division of the riverbed into two branches. If bifurcation implies a division into two parts, then bifurcation in the world order is the process of dividing the actors of the system into a minority that maintains some old or new structure, and a majority that goes into "free floating", refusing the structural burden, at least for a certain time. With bifurcation, the influence of strong states on weaker ones becomes more limited and conditional [13]. The enormous power they wield does not automatically translate into influence on the political choices of other actors. All actors acquire greater autonomy, freeing themselves from the shackles of various alliances.

The time of bifurcation gives many states much more freedom of action than before, and thus a good chance to implement their own international strategies. Countries like Brazil or India have opened up the prospect of becoming influential players in the international arena. Small states also gained more freedom of action, as they realized that in the bifurcation of the world order that is observed today, not only resources and material opportunities, but also skills and will matter [14]. Thus, thanks to a rapidly growing defense industry, experience in hybrid warfare and an extensive export network through which high-tech products are distributed, Turkey has become an economic and political power. As the influence of the West weakened, the role of Turkey in the former territories of the Ottoman Empire increased. By restructuring its regional relations, it has become not just a role model, but also a game-changing player in the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans [15, 16].

First of all, the growing ambivalence of the foreign policy of many countries testifies to the bifurcation in the world order. It is enough to look at Israel and India in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. Israel calls itself part of the West and considers the United States its closest ally in the Middle East. However, with the start of a special military operation by Russia, Israel refused to supply weapons, mainly the Iron Dome missile defense system, to Ukraine, based on pragmatic interests that outweighed moral considerations. Today, Israel's success in the fight against Hezbollah in Syria depends on Russia.

The Israeli leadership officially declares that it does not supply the Iron Dome system to Ukraine solely for reasons of its own security. Batteries and interceptor missiles of the system, which are available in limited quantities and cost a lot of money, are necessary for Israel itself to protect its territory from threats emanating from Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas. At the same time, there are fears that when delivering the Iron Dome to Ukraine, the advanced secret technologies used to create the system will fall into the hands of other states. Until now, the Iron Dome system has been used only by the United States, which participated in its development [17].

Many experts in Israel are surprised at the ambivalence of its current foreign policy, believing that such a quality threatens national security. Israeli veteran diplomat A. Liel in an interview with Foreign Policy noted: "We owe everything we have to the US... We won the war with the Palestinians in large part because the US took our side... I think our rejection of US requests for assistance to Ukraine could be costly. Israel is overly confident that the US will never do anything against Israel... Israel always says it is a democracy. The government always says that we are the only democracy in the Middle East and part of the West. But in reality, given the occupation, we are not a democracy, but part of the West only when it suits us. In this case, we do not need this, because we want to remain on good terms with Russia and do not want to take risks. I find it immoral to say that you are part of the West, but to act

like a part of the West only when it suits you. It is immoral to leave the United States and Europe with the burden of this war, to stand aside and see how it ends.” [18]. The ambivalence of the foreign policy of Israel, about which A. Liel speaks, and that of other countries is nothing but a sign of the bifurcation of the world order.

India, being a US partner in the Indo-Pacific region, has taken a neutral position in relation to Russia, which launched a special military operation in Ukraine. India, long considered a swing state [19], to try to maintain good relations with both the US and Russia indicates that it has chosen a course of strategic ambivalence. India's decision to publicly denounce Russia stems not from abstract concerns about the stability of the world order, but from the understanding that alienating Russia could negatively affect its own security. If India takes the West's position, then there is a high chance that Russia will start closer rapprochement with China and Pakistan, which India considers states that pose an immediate and constant threat to it. Maintaining friendship with Russia prevents deepening its ties with China and minimizes its ability to build new strategic ties with Pakistan. Therefore, a neutral position and refusal to openly criticize Russia gives a chance to protect itself from strengthening its ties with China and India, which are contrary to the main interests of India [20].

The events of recent years show that India is striving to occupy a prominent position in the international arena. India understands that it is easier to achieve this goal, at least at the current stage, not under conditions of unipolarity, bipolarity or multipolarity, but under the condition of a bifurcation of the world order, the fruits of which it is actively using today. This state allows it to avoid the pressure of the dominant power (under a unipolar system) that is not interested in the rise of India, the inevitable clash with one of the two dominant powers with the possibility of falling into a “strategic trap” (under a bipolar system), the need for complex maneuvering between several diverse centers (in a multipolar system).

The bifurcation in the world order is indicated, in particular, by the reaction of many Asian countries, including the largest ones, to the West's attempt to achieve international condemnation of Russia for its actions in Ukraine. China, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Mongolia, Laos and Sri Lanka abstained in March 2022 from voting for the adoption of the UN General Assembly Resolution ES -11/1 "Aggression against Ukraine" [21]. The decision of these countries showed that they are no longer with the West, but not with Russia either, they are guided exclusively by their own specific interests, and not by sometimes illusory world-structural considerations.

China did not vote for this resolution, because it considers Russia as the most important political and strategic partner, with which it does not want to spoil relations. At the same time, the US, the EU and Japan are more important economic partners for him than Russia, relations with which are no less important, so he did not directly vote against the resolution either. India took a neutral stance for similar reasons. It has a large number of Soviet and Russian weapons that need to be maintained in working order, given the potential threat posed by China. At the same time, India, along with the United States, Australia and Japan, is included in the "four", which performs the function of the main counterbalance to the growing presence of China in Asia. It is no coincidence that the former Indian Ambassador to Russia, P. Saran, answered the question on which side India is on, as follows: “We are on our side” [22]. In essence, China and India are dissatisfied with the unipolar order dominated by the US, but do not express new structural preferences, continuing, albeit to a lesser extent, to “invest” in the old order.

The behavior of many African states also points to a bifurcation in the world order. Only 28 out of 54 African states supported the West in the fight against Russia. This is largely due to the fact that they increasingly question the leadership of the West in world affairs, which constantly applies double standards. The desire of African countries to “move away” from the West J.-I. Ollivier explains by posing a series of questions: “Why, for example, the violation of the rules in Europe, no matter how blatant it may be, should polarize the entire

planet and divide it into two hostile camps, while injustice and suffering in other parts of the planet do not lead to this? ... Why should the global South suffer twice from globalization, once because it was forcibly connected to it, and the second time now, when they are trying to force it out of it? ... Why should Africa, perhaps the weakest link in the international chain, try to bind Russia today, and maybe China tomorrow?" [23].

The main reason for the bifurcation of the world order is the continued pressure of the West, led by the United States, on other countries that are already ready to pursue a completely independent policy. Thus, US military cooperation with Ukraine is seen by Russia as interference in its traditional sphere of influence. This, as D. Mearsheimer notes, led to the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine [24].

One of the main theses of V.V. Putin at the Munich Conference in February 2007 was the unacceptability of the unipolar model and the inadmissibility of NATO expansion in the east. At the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, the US persuaded the alliance to announce that Ukraine and Georgia would become members. Russia expressed dissatisfaction with such a statement, calling the entry of these countries into NATO its existential threat. At a closed meeting of the Russia-NATO Council, held shortly after the summit, V.V. Putin directly pointed out the impossibility of Ukraine's entry into NATO within the borders existing at that time [25]. The United States ignored Russian interests and launched the process of transforming Ukraine into a western bastion that directly borders Russia and, among other things, involves its rapprochement with the EU and the consolidation of the pro-American regime.

As a result of the US-led coup, pro-Russian President V.F. Yanukovich resigned his post and left the country. In response, Russia supported the aspirations of Crimea to join it and the uprising in Donbass against the new Ukrainian authorities. In December 2017, the United States allowed its commercial companies to sell "defensive" lethal weapons to Ukraine for the first time. Since then, the volume of arms supplies to Ukraine from other Western countries has increased, the scale of training programs for the Ukrainian military by Western specialists and joint military exercises have increased. De facto, Ukraine ended up in NATO. The redeployment of NATO military groups in Eastern Europe and the aggravation of the conflict in the Donbass forced Russia in April 2021 to increase the number of its forces located on the border with Ukraine.

to July 10, 2021, the United States and other NATO countries conducted military exercises with Ukraine in the Black Sea Breeze. The scenario assumed not only the development of the interaction of ships and fire destruction of surface and underwater targets, but also the landing of an amphibious assault, which was supposed to join the Ukrainian armed forces, leading "the fight against illegal armed groups receiving comprehensive assistance from the neighboring state" [26]. With these joint exercises, which were undeniably provocative and anti-Russian, the United States demonstrated that it openly supports Ukraine.

Shortly before the exercises, the Western countries consecutively carried out two provocative operations near the southwestern and southeastern extremities of the Crimean Peninsula. While preparing for the exercises, the British destroyer Defender crossed the Russian border and went 3 km deep into Russian territorial waters near Cape Fiolent. After warning fire from a Russian border patrol ship and a bomber, the British destroyer left Russian territorial waters. The next day, the Dutch frigate Evertsen, moving in neutral waters, abruptly changed course and headed towards the Kerch Strait. After the Russian planes began escorting a potential intruder, the destroyer returned to its previous course.

In November 2021, US Secretary of State E. Blinken and Ukrainian Foreign Minister D. Kuleba signed the "Charter on the Strategic Partnership between the United States and Ukraine", which explicitly states that Washington expects from Kiev deep and comprehensive reforms necessary for its full integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. At the same time, the Charter emphasizes that the United States will support Ukraine's aspirations to

join NATO in every possible way, guided by the Bucharest Declaration of 2008 and the Brussels Communiqué of 2021 [27].

In mid-December 2021, Russia invited the US and NATO to sign a treaty and agreement guaranteeing common security [28, 29]. Among other things, they stipulated that the United States and NATO should commit themselves not to expand the alliance eastward, refuse to accept former Soviet republics into it, and also stop all military cooperation with states that were formerly part of the USSR and are not now members. The United States and NATO, having familiarized themselves with the projects handed over to them, rejected Russia's proposals. D. Psaki, who then held the position of press secretary of the White House, said that the United States adheres to the principle that any state has the right to independently determine its foreign policy course, make decisions without outside interference [30]. NATO Secretary General J. Stoltenberg confirmed that the alliance will not renounce expansion and will not compromise on Ukraine's right to choose its own path [31].

In January 2022, Russia held talks with the United States (Geneva), NATO (Brussels), and the OSCE (Vienna) in an attempt to once again secure security guarantees from them. At all these meetings, Western countries refused to give legal promises not to accept Ukraine into NATO. At a press conference held on January 12 after the meeting of the Russia-NATO Council, J. Stoltenberg said that all countries have the right to choose their own path, and the idea that "if you are next to me, you cannot do what you want", carries a great danger and is nothing more than a "return to thinking in the spirit of spheres of influence" [32]. On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine, which has become the clearest sign of the bifurcation of the world order so far.

Conclusion. As a result of the study, the following was achieved:

– many facts point to the bifurcation of the modern world order. Perhaps, after some time, the system will acquire the usual structural outlines. However, today it is premature to talk about unipolarity, bipolarity or multipolarity. So far, we are only witnessing the process of the system's actors dividing into a minority that supports some old or new structure, and a majority that goes into "free floating", abandoning structural restrictions.

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