

The Pendulum of History: Thirty Years after the Soviet Union

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The collapse of any global empire always had a profound and lasting impact on the entire world history, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union was also the case. The Soviet Union was more than just a country; it was an “empire” that united countries covering the Eurasian continent, a military alliance and a large economic association, as well as a worldwide ideology and a peculiar social system.

Therefore, the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991 fundamentally changed the world system and the international order. It led to the end of the Cold War, the change of the international structure, the rise of the U.S. unipolar hegemony, the triumph of liberalism, and the appearance of prospects for uniting the East and the West. It aroused people's hopes for a better future and a belief that the world would henceforth take a happy road.

However, thirty years on, almost all the major changes brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union have gone into reverse. Five main reversals clearly stand out today.

FROM THE END OF THE COLD WAR TO THE START OF A NEW ONE

The end of the Cold War was the most significant outcome of the Soviet Union's collapse. Opinions differ as to when exactly the Cold War ended, with some associating it with the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, and others, with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact on July 1, 1991. However, its root cause was the collapse of the Soviet empire. The confrontation between the East and the West that had lasted for more than forty years was resolved. It was widely believed that the world would enter an era free of confrontation. However, the present-day realities indicate that a New Cold War has emerged full blown.

The New Cold War is specifically the current state of China-U.S. and Russia-U.S. relations. Some think that the current great power relationship is dissimilar to that of the Cold War. There are no world blocs of nations competing with each other, no military alliances standing against each other, no economic markets isolated from each other, and no ideological struggle between communism and capitalism. Humankind is now facing increasingly dangerous common threats, major countries have not only competitive but also common interests, they are engaged not only in confrontation but cooperation as well.

All this is true. Indeed, what is happening now is not the kind of the Cold War the world witnessed in the 20th century. Yet just saying that today's great power relations are not like the old ones is not saying what they are. What exactly is happening in the world today? This is a question of paramount importance.

I believe the 'Cold War' is a name that emphasizes the nature, rather than the outward shape, of great power relations. A Cold War is a form of international politics, particularly for great power relations. Rivalry still exists and its traditional content will remain. Although present-day relations between great powers differ from those of the Cold War era in many ways, they are in some ways even colder.

Both China and Russia are interested in establishing cooperative relations with the United States, and there could be certain cooperation between them. However, the United States positions China and Russia as strategic rivals and challengers, which has been repeatedly expressed in U.S. official documents and speeches. The United States pursues an open, comprehensive, and systemic policy of strategic containment of China and Russia.

The New Cold War between Russia and the United States predates that between China and the United States. A look back at Russia-U.S. relations over the past thirty years gives an impressive picture. U.S. presidents, including Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump (but not including George H.W. Bush as he was in power for only a year after Russia had gained independence), left the White House with Russian-American relations worse than they were when they took office, without exception.

Although Russia-U.S. relations started worsening in 2007, the Ukraine crisis of 2014 came as a clear sign of increased confrontation. The list of negative issues in Russia-U.S. relations is long and continues to grow, while the list of constructive issues is too short. Contradictions, conflicts, mistrust and enmity between Russia and the United States have continuously accumulated and expanded. It is hard to find a name for such a relationship other than a New Cold War.

China-U.S. relations entered the New Cold War later than Russia-U.S. relations, but the turning point was sharper, the degradation is faster, and the contradictions are more acute and more comprehensive.

China-U.S. relations have always been plagued with serious problems and contradictions and have intermittently spiraled into fierce confrontation. During Trump's term in office the bilateral relations saw an overall deterioration. The original basis of China-U.S. relations was completely deconstructed, and the bilateral relations were put into a completely different environment. While previously close economic ties and huge volumes of trade used to be the driving force and stabilizer of China-U.S. relations, now they have become a source of contradictions and irritation. The United States began to "decouple" economically and technologically from China, and China's political system became

a target for American attacks. Washington also crafted the so-called human rights issue in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, carried out militarily provocative activities against China in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, blamed China for the spread of the pandemic, using it as a pretext for building regional and international coalitions against China. Put simply, the United States has laid open all-round siege against China. So, it would not be an exaggeration to call it a New Cold War.

Since the United States is engaged in the New Cold War with China and Russia at the same time, and China and Russia are close strategic partners, the New Cold War tends to develop on a broader scope, with the United States as one side and China and Russia as the other side. This factor makes the New Cold War different from the 20th-century Cold War. Another difference is that China and Russia are not a military alliance and military confrontation is not the main content of the New Cold War, it is more manifest in international politics. The political division between the United States and China and Russia has become an objective reality. The United States carries out the policy of dual containment against China and Russia, while China and Russia support each other and jointly resist the strategic pressure from the United States.

There are many uncertainties about the future development of the New Cold War. Will it intensify or abate? Will the strategic cooperation between China and Russia be maintained if the United States implements the policy of separating China from Russia? Will the New Cold War be a long-term state of great power relations or merely a transitional form? There are no definitive answers to these questions.

However, it is clear that, at least in the medium term, the New Cold War between the U.S. on one side and China and Russia on the other side is likely to intensify, the strategic partnership between China and Russia will be maintained and consolidated despite U.S. possible attempts to separate them, and the New Cold War will remain the basic feature of great power relations in the future.

FROM OLD BIPOLARITY TO THE FORMATION OF A NEW ONE

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, the bipolar structure of the world order, which had lasted for forty years, disappeared. The collapse of the

Soviet Union made the United States the only superpower, a hegemon, whose national strength left other countries in the dust. For a while it seemed that this state of affairs was unshakeable and would last forever. However, today it is clear that, although the United States continues to be the most powerful country, the unipolar system is becoming more and more difficult to sustain, and a new bipolar structure is emerging.

In the new bipolarity there has occurred a reversal of roles and leading actors. The United States remains, but the Soviet Union has been replaced by China. The new bipolarity is obviously smaller in scale as it involves two countries rather than two political and military blocs. And it is also less influential as it does not determine the entire world politics.

Not everyone would agree with the existence of this bipolar structure. I believe that the present-day international system is in transition, and international politics is marked by great contradictions and coexistence of multipolar, bipolar, and unipolar components. In this grand pattern, multipolarity is the macro framework, bipolarity is rising rapidly, and unipolarity tends to decline. The relationship between the new bipolarity and multipolarity is complicated, but they are not antagonistic or mutually exclusive. The new bipolarity does not go beyond the multipolar structure, it is still within its framework. I would describe it as a prominent bipolar structure within a multipolar framework.

The formation of the new bipolar structure stems from two factors: the rapid rise of China, and the U.S. containment policy against China.

The 1990s, when the Soviet Union collapsed, was also a period when China's economy began to grow rapidly after the start of economic reform and adoption of an open policy. Over the past thirty years, China has turned from a poor and backward country to the second largest economy in the world. Although China is still behind the United States in terms of overall national strength, the distance with the United States is so close that the U.S. can feel the breath of China catching up behind.

Unlike the Soviet Union, which balanced out the United States in military might, China's balance with the United States is primarily manifest in economic indicators. According to some reports, in 1992, immediately after the collapse of the USSR, U.S. GDP was estimated

at \$6.52 trillion, which was about 25.6 percent of world economic output, while China's GDP was at \$426.9 billion, which accounted for 1.67 percent of the world economy. Thus, China lagged behind dramatically and ranked tenth among world economies. By 2020, U.S. GDP had more than trebled, reaching \$20.94 trillion, but at the same time, the U.S. share of the world economy had dropped to 24.7 percent, while China's aggregate economic strength had increased by more than 34 times during the same period, rising to \$14.72 trillion, which makes up about 70 percent of U.S. GDP and about 17 percent of the world economy. With the expansion of China's economic base, its share of the world's economic aggregate has been growing by about one percent every year, from 4.8 percent in 2005 to about 17 percent today. According to various forecasts, with the current trend maintained, China will overtake the United States as the world's largest economy in the near future.

The narrowing gap between China and the United States is observed not only in economic indicators. China has been investing on a large scale in science and technology, manufacturing, infrastructure construction, military buildup, overseas investment, international aid, education, culture, medical care, environmental protection, and social welfare. As a result, China's overall national strength and capabilities have been improving steadily and rapidly. Today, with the fourth industrial revolution in progress, China is at its forefront. It ranks first in world trade, makes large-scale foreign investments and implements projects around the world. China's ability to design, produce and build is mind-boggling. The renminbi's status as an international reserve and settlement currency is on the rise. China's military strength is increasing, and military modernization is proceeding rapidly. All these advances have increased China's comprehensive national strength and made the United States feel that China is "the only competitor with the potential to combine its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological might" to mount a sustained challenge to the United States.

The change in the national strength between China and the United States is the natural result of their differing development speed. It carries no special political implications all by itself.

The existence of two most powerful countries does not necessarily mean the emergence of bipolarity. If the two great powers are irrelevant to each other or cooperate with each other, this is not bipolarity.

Only a competitive and confrontational relationship can turn the two major powers into a bipolarity. The U.S. regards China as its strategic rival and carries out containment policy, making Sino-U.S. relations competitive and antagonistic. It is the key factor to turn China-U.S. relations into a new bipolarity.

Judging from the current trend, the new bipolarity will not only continue, but will become increasingly prominent in international relations. China and the United States will maintain their strong positions in the world for a long time to come. China is still growing faster than other major countries and catching up with the U.S.. America's dominance in the world is declining, but only relatively, and mostly with regard to China. The U.S. economy is not in absolute decline, it is also growing at a normal rate, and the U.S. will remain the strongest country in the foreseeable future in terms of overall strength. The combined GDP of China and the United States will continue to account for more than 40 percent of the world economy, and the economic gap between them and other countries will continue to widen, which makes the material basis of the new China-U.S. bipolarity increasingly stronger.

On the other hand, the U.S. strategic containment policy towards China has been widely agreed upon in the U.S.. No matter whether the Republican Party or the Democratic Party is in power, this policy will not change. Beijing has no more illusions about the fundamental changes in the U.S. policy towards China and will resolutely fight back on issues concerning China's core interests, which means that China-U.S. relations will constantly be plagued with contradictions, conflicts, and struggle. There could be detente and cooperation, but strategic competition will be the main feature of the relationship in the long run. Some believe that this competition between China and the United States may be longer, broader and more intense than that in the Cold War. The subjective factors that create the new bipolarity will continue to increase.

In the future, the new bipolarity will exert an increasingly significant influence on international politics and become an important perspective from which to view today's world. In a sense, this means that international politics has returned to pre-Soviet times.

TOWARDS A NEW SYSTEM OF EAST–WEST RELATIONS

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the disappearance of the East–West system. More precisely, it was the Eastern system that disappeared, while the Western system survived, and even thrived triumphantly. Many countries of the former Eastern system turned to the West, accepted its values and political models, and entered West-dominated international and regional mechanisms and organizations. In other words, the Western system absorbed the Eastern system, and thus went global in a certain sense. However, what we see now is a reversal of the changes brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union, with a new East–West system emerging on the horizon.

Clearly, the concept of a new East–West system is not complete, nor is it accepted by all. Like the concepts of the New Cold War and the new bipolarity, it differs significantly from that of the previous Cold War in nature and form. At present, the new East–West system exists more in political consciousness, mainly as a divide in political identity. This is not a confrontation between two political and military blocs, nor is it an absolute opposition: the sides may be partners and cooperate with each other in some respects and areas. Nevertheless, according to a series of objective facts, it is clear that the world is being divided again, and the outlines of the two camps of worldwide significance are becoming more and more obvious, although it is not yet fully formed and finalized, and more importantly, the trend of this division is persisting.

The primary reason for the emergence of the new East–West system is that the United States and the West are consciously creating such a split. It can be observed that after the end of the Cold War, the strategic goal of the United States and the West was to dissolve the East in the Western system, and it implemented the policy of “pulling” China and Russia into the Western system. Naturally, it was assumed that China

and Russia would accept Western values and the West's dominant position in the world. Thus, in the early to mid-post-Cold War period, U.S. policy towards both China and Russia was that of "engagement." However, the subsequent development of China and Russia shows that they cannot be transformed by Western templates, nor will they give up their independent status or accept the unilateral hegemony of the U.S. After that, the U.S. strategic thinking changed, and the U.S. started to view China and Russia as strategic competitors and challengers to the United States, adopting the policy of strategic containment against both countries. The United States does not treat China and Russia as two isolated challenges but as one whole. The U.S. wants to rebuild the Western alliance against the East like in the previous Cold War. This is the way a new East–West system is being created.

Different from the previous Cold War, when the East–West system was divided between the socialist world and the capitalist world, the new East–West system is divided between the political Western world and the non-Western world. In this sense, the new East–West system can be said to be a non-West–West system. The foundation of the new West is the countries that belong to the Western political and cultural circle and are almost the original members of the old West. The composition of the new East system has changed greatly from that of the Cold War. It is a new combination of countries, whose domestic political system and religious culture may be very different, but they have one common feature, that is, they are non-Western countries.

The new East–West system is no less ideological than that during the previous Cold War, though its connotation is different. It is no longer communism versus capitalism, but what the West calls liberal democratic values versus totalitarianism and authoritarian institutions. The new West represents liberal democratic values and its institutions, while the new East embodies totalitarianism and its institutions. Therefore, now liberal democracy has become the symbol of this division. The alliance the United States is seeking to build against China and Russia is called "democratic alliance," the summit of non-Western countries it promotes is called "democratic summit," and its idea of international order is called "liberal international order." It can be seen

that the United States has given priority to ideology as the fundamental difference from China and Russia.

But while the difference in values is an important contradiction in the new East–West system, there are reasons to believe that it is more of a tool for the U.S. to mobilize the West in forming a united front against China and Russia, a theoretical source of justification for its own actions and a cloak for its more important strategic and geopolitical objectives: to maintain the hegemony of the United States and its dominant position in the international order.

There is no clear economic boundary in the new East–West system. The world economic ties are so intertwined, with China and the United States, Europe and Japan being the most important economic partners, that it is impossible to form parallel markets similar to those that existed during the previous Cold War. But some degree of separation, driven by political motives, is emerging. The United States attempts to “decouple” from China economically and technologically, and urges Europe to adopt the same policy, boycott China’s technology, impose economic sanctions against China and Russia, and promote an exclusive mechanism of regional economic integration. To a certain extent, the U.S. is redividing the world economically according to political divisions, although this divide is not yet profound.

This division is even more pronounced in the security area. There is a tendency for NATO to create a North-Atlantic–Indo-Pacific security mechanism. As warships and aircraft carriers from major NATO countries, including France, Britain, Germany, and Japan, enter the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, a grid and coordinated military partnership is emerging. At the same time, the militarization of the Quad mechanism of the United States, Japan, India, and Australia is increasing. A “containment line” is emerging from the Arctic, Baltic and Black Seas, and the Indian Ocean to the South and East China Seas. On the other hand, under the external strategic pressure, China and Russia are developing closer and deeper military and security cooperation.

Like it or no, this trend in international security can only lead the world to a new confrontation between two fronts. The latest

international political changes are strengthening the trend. In September 2021, the United States, Britain, and Australia announced the establishment of a new military alliance targeting the Indo-Pacific region. At the same time, the SCO started the process of admitting Iran as a full member. After the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the pro-U.S. government quickly collapsed, and Afghanistan is likely to move closer to China and Russia in the future. Thus, in the geopolitical sense, with the SCO as a link and framework, China, Russia, Central Asia, South Asia, and West Asia are truly connected into a complete regional combination. It is not an anti-Western group, but it is decidedly a “non-Western” group.

It is necessary to point out the special role of the Indo-Pacific strategy in the new East-West system, which is one of the most important comprehensive mechanisms of the new West. Although the Indo-Pacific strategy is named after the region, it is the grand strategy of the United States in a certain sense. If the United States had a European strategy, an African strategy, and a Latin American strategy, they would not have such overall strategic significance as the Indo-Pacific strategy. The Indo-Pacific strategy targets the most politically and economically active region in the world. It is aimed at the main strategic rivals of the United States—China and Russia. It has attracted almost all the U.S. allies to join in, especially the European Union and NATO. These factors make the Indo-Pacific strategy global.

In almost everything, the Indo-Pacific strategy bears the characteristics of the new Western system. Its members, the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, are all politically Western countries. It claims to represent the liberal international order ideologically, it excludes China from regional economic integration, and it shows signs of forming a Quad-based security mechanism against China and Russia. It can also be seen that the Indo-Pacific strategy dovetails with the East–West system even in terms of geographical features. Both the new East–West system and the Indo-Pacific strategy have similar geographical characteristics, that is, one side is mainly composed of Eurasian countries and the other is mainly consisted of maritime states. China and Russia are the largest countries in the Eurasian continent,

while the new Western system and the Indo-Pacific strategy states are mostly maritime states. Although this is not the reproduction of the traditional competition between land power and sea power systems, the differences in their geographical characteristics exist objectively.

LIBERALISM : FROM TRIUMPH TO FALL

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, liberalism entered perhaps its most glorious period in history. In terms of ideology and value system, liberalism is attractive and widely admired. In terms of national development model, the political model of liberalism has become the object of emulation by many countries. In international relations, the export liberal democracy model has proved its political correctness by breaking through the constraints of traditional international rules. In short, from the point of view of the West, this is the end of history. After liberalism, there is no higher human ideal, and no better state model than democracy.

But now, liberalism has suffered a major setback around the world, both in theory and in practice. Liberalism is still there and will be for a long time to come, and it will still be important as a value system and political model, but it has now undoubtedly turned from a rising tide to a falling tide. Its ideological appeal has waned, its political model is no longer universally imitated, the absoluteness of its truth has been questioned, its uniqueness has been challenged, and its ultimate nature has been denied in a philosophical sense.

The fundamental cause of this retreat lies in liberalism itself. On the one hand, in terms of national development and governance, Western countries are confronted with a large number of problems, such as the polarization of the rich and the poor, political division, accumulation of social problems, inability of institutions to revamp themselves and find effective solutions. At the same time, non-Western countries such as China have risen rapidly and shown greater efficiency in economic development and social governance. This provides a contrast in which the superiority of the liberal model of development is challenged, and it can no longer claim to be the best and the only right choice. The weaknesses of the Western model were particularly exposed after the

outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 when the United States, with the best medical resources, performed poorly in responding to the pandemic, allowing hundreds of thousands of people to die.

Considering themselves Cold War winners, the United States and the West tried to transform non-Western states along liberal lines, but suffered an almost total failure to export liberal political systems to countries outside the Western world.

There are two main ways to export the liberal model: one is “color revolution,” the other is the direct use of force and war. But neither brought real democracy and freedom to the target countries or facilitated significant economic and social development. The forcible export of the liberal model brought about more disastrous consequences. The war and military intervention by the United States in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Libya plunged these countries into long-term wars and chaos: their national economies collapsed, their social and economic achievements of many years were instantly destroyed, countless civilians were killed and injured, and a large number of people were displaced and have become refugees, creating an extremely serious problem for European countries.

The war in Afghanistan is the latest and most typical example. America’s 20-year war in Afghanistan ended in complete defeat in August 2021, when the Taliban retook power after a hasty withdrawal of the U.S. troops from the country. America’s defeat is not just a defeat in the war; it is a defeat in the export of liberalism as well. It is safe to believe that the United States did not plan for a long war when it launched Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, which initially was primarily retaliatory and punitive, and for that reason was widely understood and supported by the international community at the time. But after the defeat of al-Qaeda and the overthrow of the Taliban, the objectives of the American war began to shift quietly, and geopolitical goals turned into an American *idée fixe*. At the same time, the United States moved from retaliation against al-Qaeda and the Taliban to democratic transformation in Afghanistan, trying to build a Western-style Afghan state consistent with liberal values. This is the main reason the war in Afghanistan dragged on for twenty years.

From the perspective of historical progressivism, liberalism has important values, especially when compared with extreme religious thought and politics, and many non-Western countries, including China and Russia, also subscribe to the idea of democracy and freedom, although they interpreted it differently. But the problem is that imposing one's ideas and model on another country by force is not democracy and runs counter to the principles of democracy. It cannot but provoke opposition from other people. Moreover, no institutional model can work without proper ideological and cultural preparedness, and it must reach a certain balance with the local historical and cultural traditions before it can blossom and bear fruit. Seeds sown on unsuitable soil will not bear the desired fruit. Historical progressiveness and backward traditions are often contradictory. Maintaining dynamic balance is the best way to achieve positive results. America's defeat in Afghanistan is a milestone event that marks the historic failure of liberal salvation. Countries, including Western ones, have realized that liberalism is not a universally welcome value, nor is it an institution that can be transplanted at will. This is not necessarily a collapse of American hegemony, but it has spurred negative conclusions about the historical experiment of the United States and the West to transform non-Western countries with liberalism by force.

The heavy blow to liberalism also came from the hegemonic performance of the United States in world politics. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. lost all checks and balances as the sole superpower, acting without restraint and fearing no punishment. But instead of rational restraint, the United States has moved towards unilateralism, ignoring the interests of other countries and the constraints of international law, arbitrarily interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, withdrawing from international mechanisms, implementing sanction policies, and frequently using force against other countries. In particular, the U.S. used false evidence to launch a war against Iraq. The picture of the U.S. lying was shown to the world, which not only greatly harmed the moral credibility of the United States, but also caused immeasurable damage to the image of liberalism.

Now, even the author of the end of history has to admit that history does not end here. In a sense, it is a new beginning.

FROM HOPES TO BUILD A NEW EUROPE TO ITS SPLIT

The collapse of hopes to build Greater Europe is another major setback in international politics after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The idea of Greater Europe between Russia and Europe is an age-old topic, which was floated even in the Soviet times: Charles de Gaulle put forward the idea of Greater Europe stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals, and Mikhail Gorbachev proposed a “common European home.” But it was only with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the closing of the Cold War and the end of confrontation between the two blocs that the blueprint for a Greater Europe became possible for the first time.

For some time after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia and Europe did move towards each other, driven by great enthusiasm and expectations for the realization of the Greater Europe concept. In terms of political relations, Russia and the EU signed a ten-year Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in 1994, and created a mechanism of Russia-EU summits, which were held twice a year since 1998. In 2003, the Russia-EU St. Petersburg Summit proposed a plan to create four common spaces from Lisbon to Vladivostok, namely, the Common Economic Space, the Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice, the Common Space of External Security, and the Common Space on Research, Education and Culture. In terms of security relations, in 1996, Russia announced its formal accession to the Partnership for Peace program, the NATO-Russia Founding Act was signed, and a Permanent Joint Council (PJC) was established in 1997, which was replaced by the NATO-Russia Council in 2002.

However, thirty years on, the reality is that Russia remains Russia, and Europe remains Europe. More than that, Russian-European relations are now at their worst since the end of the Cold War, with the two sides even further apart than in the late Soviet era. Russian-European relations have been suffering from successive disputes, conflicts, and crises. Now both view each other as a political alien and a security challenger rather than a friend with whom to create a

common family. Military confrontation between them has unfolded in parts of Eastern Europe, the Baltics, and the Black Sea. Economic relations between the two sides have also declined. Although the EU remains Russia's largest trading partner, its share in Russia's foreign trade has dropped from more than 50 percent to less than 40 percent due to EU sanctions and the pandemic. The picture of Greater Europe has darkened and become increasingly blurred. The topic of Greater Europe is off the bilateral agenda, the four common spaces are no longer mentioned, and the main theme of bilateral relations is not cooperation but mutual dissatisfaction.

It is safe to say that the hope of Greater Europe, which seemed close after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has now been shattered. This is not because Russia or Europe is against it. In fact, both Russia and Europe support the idea of Greater Europe. Since Peter the Great, Russia has had an emotional and historical complex of integration into Europe. Despite many setbacks, Russia has never really and completely given up, and it cannot but try again whenever new hopes arise.

Russia's "Turn to the East" after the Ukraine crisis in 2014 was a widely discussed topic. There are people who believe that Russia has replaced the idea of Greater Europe with the concept of Greater Eurasia, which was put forward by President Putin in 2016. However, while this represents Russia's pivot towards Eurasia, it does not mean Russia is abandoning Europe. Russia's turning to the East is not leaving Europe, nor replacing Europe with Asia. It merely intensifies its eastward orientation, with a more balanced European and Asian relations and greater diversification in economic ties, technical cooperation, sources of investment, and energy markets. The concept of Greater Eurasia does not negate the concept of Greater Europe. They are not mutually antagonistic or exclusive. Theoretically, Greater Eurasia could include or dock with Greater Europe, and if that were possible, Russia would not reject this option.

The Turn to the East is a realignment of Russian diplomatic priorities, or a diplomatic shift, but it does not change the nature of Russia's civilization and culture, which still sees itself as a part of Europe. As an ideology and a thought, Westernism has deep roots

in Russian society and will continue to exist in the future. For many Russians, Europe is Russia's spiritual home, and Asia never has been and never can be. Of course, this does not mean that Russia's relations with Europe are any better than those with Asia.

The deterioration of relations between Russia and Europe, as well as their changed nature are the real reason why the idea of Greater Europe is so difficult to achieve. With NATO's expansion, the Kosovo war, the Russia-Georgia war, the Ukraine crisis, and many other problems, Russia-EU relations have deteriorated so deeply that the basis for building a Greater Europe no longer exists.

There is another important obstacle to the realization of the Greater Europe concept: Russia and the EU have fundamental differences on how this concept should be implemented and what roles the two sides should play in it.

Russia's understanding is that it will be building, jointly with Europe, a common community, while Europe's vision of a Greater Europe implies that Russia will accept Europe's political, security, and value systems. In other words, Greater Europe is tantamount to the extension of European political and security institutions to Russia, and the inclusion of Russia in the Europe-dominated frameworks.

Russia and Europe also have radically different understandings of their identities in Greater Europe. Russia positions itself as an independent actor in Greater Europe, with identity equal to Europe's, and rejects integration into Europe as its vassal. However, Europe does not accept Russia's equal identity. The EU and NATO, as organizations with collective identities, regard Russia as a stranger rather than an equal partner. Russia's equal status in the EU and NATO in Greater Europe will mean that it will have veto power over EU and NATO decisions, which is not acceptable to them. The EU and NATO also oppose an equal status for the EEU and the CSTO proposed by Russia. In other words, Russia and Europe disagree over what Greater Europe should be like and what roles they should play in it. It seems that the Greater Europe plan has intrinsic and insurmountable defects.

Perhaps the idea of Greater Europe is not dead. It may reappear at some point in the future, but it is dead at least for the time being.