

PROBLEM OF RUSSIA'S GEO-STRATEGIC CHOICE

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Russia is one of the potential power source bearers in the configuration of the perspective geopolitics in the world. The following important statistical indicators may serve for improvement of the geopolitical status of Russia (1):

Its territory is 17 million km². For comparison, the same figure in the USA is 9,4 million, Canada– 10 million, China– 9,6 million km². Russia's potential of the natural reserves is 21 % out of the correspondent world potential. Cost of the discovered mineral resources is 28,6 trillion dollars. Total capacity of the forecasted reserves is evaluated at the sum of 140 trillion dollars. Russia owns 10 % of the produced oil in the world, 30 % of gas, 10% of coal, and 10–15 % of the less–common non–ferrous metals. The country takes 4th place in the world in the cast iron production (40,1 million tons), 5th place in the steel production (51,5 million tons) and 5th place in the coal production (249 million tons).

Russia takes the 2nd place after the USA by its railway length, the 1st place by their electrification in the world. It takes the 2nd place by the ship quantity and 4th place by the indicator of their cargo–loading capacity in the world.

Russia has saved nearly 60% of the military potential of the USSR. It is in the 1st place by the nuclear potential (55% of the nuclear potential; 40% is in the USA). 20–25% of the ordinary weapons of the world is maintained namely in Russia.

As it can be seen, Russia has large opportunities in the view of economic and military potential to keep its "big power" status. However, familiarization with the local situation confirms the existence of the complicated problems that put under the question the perspectives of realization of this potential.

It is the deputy chairman of the Education and Science Committee of State Duma of Russia, member of the Agro–industrial deputy group Oleg Nicolayevich Smolin's opinion that not only reforms but also revolution has been carried out in Russia. Any attribute of the social–political revolution is calamity. In his opinion, in the view of the term, scale and quantity, the calamity Russia has been facing in the last ten years left behind not only "Great depression" in the USA, but even fixed an absolute record for the 20th century in the peaceful period. (2) The author demonstrates the contemporary situation of Russia with the facts as follows:

Economic Crisis. According to the scientists from Siberian department of Academy of Sciences of Russia, agricultural production in the country in the years of 1985–1995 had decreased 3,6 times, industrial production – 5,3 times, as well as production of the light industry and defense complex – 10 times. As a result of this, according to the information of the World Bank, in 2000 Russia took the place among under–developed countries by the production of goods per capita, as well as was 20–30 % lower in comparison with such states as Algeria, Syria and Tunis. Federal budget of Russia was 2 times lower than the budget of Sweden and 3,5 times – than the budge of Holland. It is the experts' opinion that Russia has 12–year term discovered oil and 60–year term gas reserves.

Financial Crisis. Foreign debt of Russia has increased from 70 billion to 150 billion dollars in ten years. So, each citizen in Russia is in the state of being a debtor to the foreign countries at the sum of over 1000 dollars. In order to reimburse the debt fully, funds of 4 federal budgets are required. One of the numerous paradoxes of the country policy is that left opponents of the globalization speak in favor of removal of debts (including Russia's debts); Russia is against the globalization opponents.

Demographic Crisis. Country population has decreased from 148 to 143 million people in ten years (1992–2002). According to the most optimistic forecasts, Russian population will decrease by 10–15 million people in the next 25 years. It is forecasted that this figure will reach the level of 75 million in 2050 and 55 million in 2075. It cannot be ignored that according to UN forecasts, in 2025 China's population will reach 1,5 billion, India – 1,6 billion, USA – 325 million people. In such a condition, Russia might repeat the fate of the antique civilization: the nation might die out and the culture remains.

Social Crisis. Process of the society criminalization is proceeding at a high speed. Nearly 3 million criminal acts are registered in Russia every year. Actually, this figure is much higher. Significant and dangerous special crimes consist over 60 % of all the crimes. In the year of 1999 180 thousand teenagers who are actually potential criminals, were registered.

According to the results of an international survey, Russia takes 7th – 6th place by the level of criminality among 85 countries.

Russia that has always been adherent to the alcoholic beverages was in the 1st place by this figure in the 1990s. The most dangerous is that mass alcoholism has wrapped up the drug addiction. Over 4 million people use narcotic drugs. In the years of 1990–1998, number of AIDS deceased in Russia had increased 20 times, in the next years this figure is expected to increase not less than 2 times each year.

Geopolitical Crisis. The Soviet Union (Great Russia) has already been removed from the political arena. Russia that is a bearer of number of the abovementioned crises has appeared instead of it.

As the President of "Politics" Fund, doctor of the historical sciences Vyacheslav Alexeyevich Nikonov, stated that Russia has been in its weakest period since the period of Mongol–Tatars. (3) In his opinion, as a result of the Soviet and post–Soviet experiments, Russia has been thrown back to the frontiers of Ivan Grozny.

So, Russia that has been choosing any of the geo–strategic options in the course of the history has faced the same problem repeatedly many times. Correctness of this choice has an impact on the development of not only Russia, but also neighboring countries, as well as Azerbaijan. In this case, taking into account topicality of this problem nowadays, let's get familiar with Russian public and scientific opinion that is forming around this issue.

Basically, in the issue of setting a line of the perspective development of Russia three main approaches should be considered: (4)

1. Western approach;
2. Eurasian approach;
3. Anti-western approach.

In accordance with these approaches, three models of the geopolitical choices are offered:

1. Russia is a Western country;
2. Russia has its own and isolated civilization;
3. Russia is the leader of the anti-western world.

First of all, let's start with the Western direction. According to this approach, Russia's interests should be brought to conformity with the interests of the West. Membership in NATO and European Union should be achieved.

Russia should not resist the expansion process of these organizations and not react the interventions such as bombing of Iraq and "rogue states". (5) According to the position of the bearers of this approach, high economical, military and technological potential of the West should be effective in Russia's decision-making process. In other words, Russia should be on the side of the powerful ones.

The supporters of the Eurasian approach think that it is incorrect to learn two simplified prisms of the world (west and anti-west). According to them, Asia should not be ignored that contains half of the world economy and population. In case of an accompaniment of the adequate step from Russia to this region, the required result might be achieved. According to the Eurasian approach, NATO and European Union are unreal choices and in such a condition unsuccessfulness of the foreign political activity is inevitable.

Representatives of the anti-western approach claim that close relations with China, India and other perspective Asian countries should be established and the ties with the Western world should be terminated, as well as close ties with the powers that are considered "rogue states" by the USA should be established. They consider namely Western world as a main culprit of Russia's weakening. However, in the view of the unreality of this goal, this approach is non-perspective and perhaps even the most dangerous one.

Leadership of Russia is an issue far from the reality in the anti-western camp. Strategic cooperation of Russia and China does not mean an alliance yet. Though the administration of Peking that is very cautious is disappointed with some movements of the US, it does not intend to contradict the USA in the name of bigger interests. Even after coincide of Chinese embassy to Belgrade to NATO's rocket attacks, Peking demonstrated its devotion to the traditional careful behavior. (6)

Russia may suffer from the contradiction to the West even much more. In particular, contradiction appeared in the background of the financial dependence on the West; it might be a factor that would break the stability in the periphery of Russia and inside the country. As a result of the contradiction to the West, actually, Russia might be put it in the state of not only weak economics, but even paralysis.

Eurasian direction provides development of the country at the expense of its own opportunities; includes maintenance and development ties with those that want to be in a good friendly relations with Russia; considers important promotion of the modernization line at the expense of the mobilization and strengthening of the government.

In our opinion, it is hard to believe that the hopes for the development in the background of real lag of Russia (it was considered above), population's tiredness of the communist experiments and reforms for decade would be realized. Basing on the development at the expense of its own opportunities, the gap between Russia and the West will increase. The reason is that the oil, gas, metal, wood and others that are considered the main natural resources of Russia are cheap-sold goods. These goods are much cheaper than the computer programs and other high technologies.

The variant of mobilization might provide short-term yields but the problems that might appear later are deepening; Russia remains beyond the world's financial sources; the most important is that feeling of the initiative in the part of the population that leads active life would be ruined (in particular, it will have a negative impact on the next generation).

The states that intend to establish close relations with Russia would like to gain more benefits than the others. In other words, Russia isn't a perspective partner; only the "buyer states" that watch it with the eyes of the "donor-states" might benefit from it. For example, the same as "Russia-Belarus Union", which has been forming up-to-now. Eurasian approach together with all negative seditions might roll Russia in the anti-western direction in the end.

Finally, there are enough supporters of this model that would serve the development perspectives of Russia. According to its position, Russia cannot become a part of the West, but it should not be anti-western as well. Russia cannot compete at the expense of its own resources in the world market. Isolation and confrontation elements cannot be allowed in the foreign policy. Russia should integrate into the world economy at the maximum possible level, achieve attraction of large amounts of the investments and increase competition coefficient in the world market. Russia has the potential to implement these obligations.

According to the supporters of this model, the issue of membership in the European Union and NATO should be set as a goal. As a whole, unsuccessful activity in the name of the obligations and goals that do not relate to the reality and pragmatic consideration should not be admitted.

In the issues, which relate to the interests of both the West and Russia, the cooperation might be established and actually, it is necessary. In the issues of contradiction Russia should not compromise its national interests to the West.

As it can be seen, in spite of the fact that strategic goal in all considered models is to provide Russia with the exceptional position in the hierarchy of the leading states of 21st century, tactical measures to be carried out in this direction vary considerably. Actually, the problem Russia faces is so complicated because it embraces the necessity of softening contradictions with the West as much as possible, which might assist with its abilities, such as restoration

of the economic power of the state and development of the goals on the one hand, and investment, credit and other opportunities with the purpose of the achievement of this goal on the other hand. So, in this condition Russia's relations with the West are possibly at the level of the cooperation. The relations between Moscow and Washington cannot be considered as an equal cooperation, at least because of the fact that one of the parties (Russia) lost the "Cold War" and another (USA) won it. The history has not observed and kept any fact of equal cooperation relations between the winners and losers yet. (7) If we approach to the issue in this context, we can only speak about the possibility of establishment of the cooperation ties between Russia and the USA. Coincidence of the pragmatic interests for cooperation is enough. For example, in the years of the "Cold War" the USSR and the USA were cooperating in such issues as prevention from danger of the nuclear war, control over the weapon, non-distribution of the weapons of mass destruction etc. Cooperation is characterized with wider features. Fundamental principles determining internal and foreign policy between the parties in order to cooperate should be brought into agreement. This means coincidence or closeness of the strategic interests of the geopolitical and economic feature. It means formation of the general politics with regard to the third party (parties) by the strategic allies. However, such model of relations between Russia and the USA has not formed yet.

In the view of it, an attempt of Z. Bjezinsky to answer to this question is still topical: "Who is Russia – ally, customer or enemy encountered to the losing?" (8)

The real condition of Russia–US relations is characterized with non-coincidence of lots of the interests. Already in 1996–1997 (in the period of discussion of the issue of NATO expansion), in the period of November 1997 – March 1998 (crisis with regard to Iraq) and spring–summer of 1999 (during Kosovo crisis) Russia's interests were colliding with US interests but had to admit the settlement of the problems in the scenario determined by the US plans. (9) In the next years this approach has continued. In particular, Washington decree on December 13, 2001 concerning the unilateral withdrawal from the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty dated on 1972 between Russia and the US has increased tension between the parties.

The relations between these states have not complicated only due to the ABM Treaty, the American and Russian interests confront in 6 geopolitical regions:

First of all, **Baltic Countries**. USA continuously supports the integration of the former Soviet republics, such as Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia into NATO and in Prague Summit of the organization held in November 2002, it played a decisive role in the provision of the positive answer of their admittance into this organization. However, Russia considers NATO expansion (especially at the expense of the former Soviet republics) as a key threat of its national security.

Near Foreign Countries. Russia is interested in the maximal closeness with Belarus and neutral Ukraine at least from the political point of view. The USA is interested in the independence of Ukraine from Russia. US State Department also stated its negative attitude towards the perspective of unification of Russia and Byelorussia. Washington is beware of the fact that those integration steps would increase the threat of the reintegration process in the framework of the former Soviet arena.

Balkans. As a result of bombing of Yugoslavia by NATO in 1999 and overthrow of Miloshević regime, Russia was deprived out of this region as a matter of fact. Russia that traditionally had its influence opportunities in Balkans, watches the events taking place in the intensive region as a passive observer at the present. Settlement of Kosovo crisis by the use of force created such opinion in some Russian circles that in definite conditions Russia might face NATO military–political pressures headed by the USA.

South Caucasus and Caspian Region. Struggle between the USA and Russia concerned with the oil and gas reserves of the region and the routes of their transportation to the world market is obvious. In connection with well–known reasons, Moscow defends the idea of transportation of oil to the West passing Russian territory; Washington is interested in realization of the multi–variant routes. The USA confirmed its interest in the transportation of the oil from Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian via Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan Main Export Pipeline (MEP) to the Mediterranean Sea by the appropriate legal–normative documents. Russia's "Lukoil" company did not join the sponsor group realizing the construction of MEP, as well as stated its intention to sell 10 %–share participation in the "Contract of the Century" in November 2002 to Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC).

Middle East. USA and Russia do not just cooperate here but also act as potential competitors. First of all, Russia's energy interests were based in Iraq. Baghdad had the debt to Russia at the sum of 7 billion dollars. USA overthrew the existing regime in Iraq, while new regime that is being formed is very far from the payment of old debts. In addition, no special proof is required to observe the existing contradictions of the USA and Russia with regard to Iran.

Far East. Russia is trying to establish long–term cooperation relations with China. China's Taiwan problem is esteemed as an internal problem by Russia. USA acts from a completely contradictory position. Military cooperation of Russia with China is compensated with the appropriate ties of the USA with Taiwan. Attempts of China to settle Taiwan problem at the expense of "use of force" might put it in front of the USA.

So, there are a lot of reasons that may increase the existing contradictions between Russia and the USA. Just collection of those reasons determines definite limits of Russia's integration to the West, in particular to the USA. A fully integration seems impossible. If we approach to the issue from this logic, it is possible to give a pessimistic forecast to the perspectives of Russia's entrance to NATO, as well as to the European Union.

Of course, some opinions were sounded with regard to the entrance of Russia into above–said organizations. In March 2000 after the statements of President V. Putin with regard to readiness of Russia to join NATO that led to the bustle, US ex–president B. Clinton said in US–European Union Summit held in Portugal that "Doors for Russia's introduction to NATO, as well as to European Union should not be closed", no real measure was carried out in this direction. It is not random that in a while V. Putin had to confess the reality of "Russia is not waited in NATO".

In May 2000 chairman of the European Union Romano Prodi confirmed that the issue of introduction of Russia – whose territories are mostly in Asia and culture is different from theirs, and has its own traditions – into the Union was a very complicated issue (actually, impossible).

Limits of Russia's relations with NATO are provided with the agreements signed in May 1997 in Paris, as well as in

May 2000 in Roma. (10) In the first case Joint Permanent Council (JPC) was established, in the second agreement basis of the "Committee of 20" was laid. However, in both cases Russia does not have real opportunities of affecting any of the processes in NATO. At least, Russia does not have any right to interpose a veto on any of decisions of this organization.

So, Russia that is the modern heir of the former state of great importance is much more an Asian state and has parameters that do not coincide with the interests of number of leader states of the Western alliance.

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