
NEW TRENDS IN SUBSYSTEM FORMATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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After period of the bipolar world order we have been watching trends causing dramatic changes in the international system. Among them there are the following:

(1) Enlargement of the group of world leading powers (great powers): new and old players have been trying to modify old institutional structure and international law to regulate new kind of relations and satisfy their interests as prominent actors in world politics.

(2) Territorial reconfiguration of the world as a result of the first trend: old and new centers of power have been trying to change the map of their influence, either to form new subsystems where they will be a core/center, or change the distribution of influence in the old ones. Within this trend the U.S. policy has been very distinct. The superpower is interested in global outstretch and influence, and is pursuing policy of creating intercontinental, transoceanic subsystems which can be only handled by the superpower.

(3) General fragmentation of the world, emergence of many smaller and weaker countries or territories that are becoming "the material" for building new subsystems, and/or creating new bigger federal states or non-federal states with complex administrative structures.

Great powers of the 21st century: a new "concert" or selective engagement relations

In the 20th century the Group of Seven (G7) plus the USSR as the second world superpower ("2+6 Club") exerted decisive influence on international relations. In the 21st century the group of influential countries is bigger: the Group of Twenty (G20) consists of players very different in their potential and

ability to world and macroregional regulation. G20 role and influence are not equal to the influence of "2+6 Club" (2 superpowers and other 6 great powers). It is still not quite clear what kind of hierarchy will be finally established within this group: whether they will at any point come to "concert" type relations with one superpower still having greater influence, or will be acting in highly competitive interaction.

Some authors in the United States, China, and Russia stated that G7 members had common strategy aimed at safeguarding their group interests, pursued policy to keep their beneficial/special positions in world politics, (especially in economic sphere). G7 policy was often defined as "egoistic and manipulating".

What will happen to G20? Will it substitute G7/G8, and become a new world regulating structure? The simplest answer is that it is hardly possible because it is not easy to come to agreement between 20 very different players. Besides, it is necessary to remember that great powers of G7 were countries with common Western culture, common strategic aims (during the cold war it was struggle against communism and the USSR), and economic and political tasks (dominating influence and control). Members of G20 are different culturally and politically, have different views of their specific roles in world politics and of the future world order, have different strategic and economic interests and plans.

In the 21st century nation states still remain determinant actors in world politics and power in all its manifestations (hard and soft, with evident prevalence of hard force) is not losing its significance in national strategies, especially of strong actors. Attitudes and

approaches of great powers to norms and institutions of contemporary world order and international relations remain not only diverse but controversial.

Traditional and growing powers to a great extent will have different views on the whole spectrum of global problems, will use selective approach and selective engagement in the world order formation and solving global and regional problems¹.

There are some scenarios of future evolution of great power relations.

Scenario 1. The United States and leading European countries (Great Britain, France and Germany) who are the strongest in the European Union and NATO, will manage to form a strong block within the group (G 20), and will pursue common policy that will neutralize or seriously constrain opportunities and initiatives of China, Brazil, and Russia. In this case G20 will be the structure for strengthening positions of the countries that constitute the *transatlantic core*.

Scenario 2. Brazil, China and Russia (India lacks clear vision of its role, and is still dependent on the U.S. policy) will come to agreement on the issues of world order formation and their influence at the subsystem level. It will lead to strengthening and institutionalization of the BRIC group, and this influential group will prevent the U.S. and its transatlantic allies from dominance within G20 and in world politics. However, at present BRIC countries are rather far from achieving real consensus and formulating common approach and policy towards global and some regional issues. They cannot form a monolithic group similar to transatlantic within global institutions.

Scenario 3. The US and China come to some kind of agreement on world and domestic problems, and China will support American and NATO approach to world regulation. In this case opportunities for Russia and Brazil as world and regional actors will be seriously cut.

It means that structural organization between great powers is one of the most impor-

tant trends, and its outcome might be crucial for the future development of the world system, and many smaller and less influential countries. World development might take the form of peaceful low range competition, aggressive competition within accepted international norms, or destructive competition which will bring more fragmentation of states and subsystems, more confrontational situations in relations between the United States, China, Russia, Turkey, and some other countries.

Great Powers and Subsystems

Another very important trend that involves great powers, and is to a great extent dependent on the outcome of great power structural organization and choices of the main players — the United States, China, Russia, India and Brazil, is *territorial reconfiguration of the world and establishment of the new subsystem world structure*.

Contemporary world is characterized by the tendency toward disintegration or dissolution of some nation states under the influence of internal and/or external factors, and *formation or emergence of new states or territories* (in case they are not recognized as independent states by the international community). New states and territories very often lack political institutions necessary for a sustainable nation state, are economically weak and socially turbulent (civil war). These new weak and unstable countries and territories can bring instability at macroregional and regional level, and cumulative effect of similar situations in different parts of the world can have destabilizing effect on the world situation. In the 21st century humanitarian intervention was introduced to solve situations of political instability in various countries. Category of “humanitarian intervention”, introduced and implemented by the United States and its NATO allies is still debatable as a norm for future international order. There is no international consensus on such questions as in what situations it should be used, and whether it is necessary to have the UN approval, and consent of

the official government of a particular country. It is also not clearly stated by the adherents of so called “humanitarian interference” how and in what scale military force can be used. There is no clear concept of post-intervention actions of foreign military forces to stabilize the situation and prevent civil war or other destructive tendencies. As events of 1990s, 2000s and 2010s show, “humanitarian” or military foreign interventions of NATO countries with the United States performing the role of the leader, results are different and disturbing.

Speaking about reconfiguration at the regional level, we can see that direct and indirect, military and non-military foreign interference into internal political situation of various countries not only destabilized domestic situation in many of them (countries of the Middle East, Northern Africa, Persian Gulf, Central Asia), but also strengthened tendencies for fragmentation or secession (in case there are distinct ethnic regions inside the country). At present controversial approach to handling the problem of fragmentation of nation states and recognition of new territories as independent countries (so called separatism or struggle for independence) makes situation in the regions potentially dangerous (Kosovo, Abkhazia, Southern Ossetia, Tibet, Kurds, Kashmir, etc.). Political situation in many newly emerged countries or countries-objects of “humanitarian (military) intervention” has been worsening. Some of new territorial units have been recognized by the international community; other territorial units are not recognized and continue struggling for independent nation state status. We cannot exclude that in perspective any of recognized or not recognized territorial units can become part of a bigger country with federal, confederate or unitary structure (either forcefully or on their own will). *We can speak about very serious and disturbing situation in Asia in general.*

The dissolution of the Soviet Union marked the end of the bipolar world order, and strengthened trend to fragmentation of federal states where its parts/subjects

were formed on principles of ethnicity (titular nations are cores of such entities and give names to them). The examples are: republics in the former USSR, in the former Yugoslavia, national republics in the Russian Federation, Republic of Abkhazia and Republic of Southern Ossetia in Georgia (recognized as independent states in 2008), in Moldova (Trans-Dniester republic). Territories with distinct ethnic nature striving for more independent status within the country or for secession are in China (Xingjian Uighur region, Inner Mongolia, Tibet who do not have the same status as national republics in the Russian Federation), in India (Kashmir), etc. Territories with explicit ethnic characteristics that are trying to get special, more independent status exist in Uzbekistan and Kirghizstan, Iraq, Turkey, Great Britain, Ukraine, etc.

It means that dissolution of some nation states or change in their political and territorial structures (from centralized to federal or confederate structures) that leads to emergence of new smaller countries and/or decomposition or reconfiguration of big states will determine international relations in the 21st century. It also means that we shall have more conflicts caused by aspirations for nation-state formation or consolidation of more independent status of certain territorial entities within big states.

This trend is especially important for Russia because it is in the center of the main territorial reconfiguration process. Russia has territories in its federation that demonstrated strive for secession or greater independence within the federation. During turbulent period in 1992-1996 some ethnic territories that were autonomous republics or regions in the USSR got status of national republics, and some privileges as compared to non-republican subjects of the federation (oblasty, okruga, kraya). Existing asymmetry creates potential instability and is fraught with problems for the Russian authorities in the center and at the local level. Though most of the republics recognized preference of remaining in the Russian Federation, Cau-

casian republics (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia) have a lot of economic, ethnic, religious problems, are under influence of foreign countries, and/or non-state groups that are supporting forces struggling for secession.

This problem is very acute not only for Russia. As we mentioned above, similar situations exist in other countries.

Different actors of international order support different principles and approaches to the problem of nation-state and its rights to defend its territorial and political integrity. Though no state openly declared absolute neglect and complete defiance of the UN Charter and principle of national sovereignty, many states support “selective approach” to national sovereignty issue. It is the United States and many European countries — members of EU and NATO. In some cases they support trend for secession and further dissolution or restructuring of federal states (the case of the former Yugoslavia, Chechnya in Russia, Tibet in China, etc.), and help militarily and/or politically, informationally, economically. In other cases (for instance, Southern Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia, Trans-Dniester republic in Moldova, Crimea in Ukraine) there is no support for secession. Russia, China, India, Brazil, Turkey and many other countries are against forceful change of nation states structures and borders.

There is visible ambivalence in estimation of secessionist movements in various countries. As contemporary cases show, many countries use terms “separatism” and “struggle for independence and democratic political system” selectively (case approach and issue approach). For instance, some American experts define struggle in Ossetia and Abkhazia as “separatism”, and actions in Kosovo, Chechnya, Tibet as “struggle for independence”. The United States and the European Union countries state that separatism is a phenomenon of democratic countries and should not be encouraged and supported (Spain, Great Britain, Canada, Ukraine, etc.), and struggle for independence takes place in countries with non-democratic re-

gimes (Russia, China, and former Yugoslavia) and should be supported.

However, in the majority of cases struggle for secession or more independent status in the federal or non-federal state is inspired not only (if any) by the desire to have Western-type democratic political system, but also (in many cases) by historic, ethnic, religious, economic and some other factors (for instance, by struggle for power among ruling elites and opposition).

One more thing. *There are disagreements among states, including great powers, on the issue of democracy and its imposition. It means that aspirations for democracy cannot be used as the main argument when we deal with cases of dissolution of federal states or secession.*

We live and act in accordance with ambivalent norms, violate the UN Charter when necessary, and remember its provisions also when it is considered proper or necessary for the situation and/or favorable (profitable) for national interests of the countries involved into conflict situations.

In 1990s Russia fought against separatism in the federation (Chechnya) and declared its complete adherence to the UN Charter and the principle of non-violation of national sovereignty. Russia did not take strong steps to oppose foreign military interference into political situation in Yugoslavia though. Only in 1999 Russia more resolutely acted to influence the situation in Serbia (Pristine), however its behavior was inconsistent and ill-planned. This action not only caused hot debates and opposition in the United States and Europe, but also in the Russian political and expert community. At that time, in 1999, it was the turning moment in the Russian strategy. The country was reverting to a more resolute policy, but it was too late to change the situation in Yugoslavia dramatically. However, Pristine operation and Russia’s disagreement with the concept of “humanitarian military interventions” attracted attention to the problem of norms and principles of international relations. Russia strongly opposed formation of the Kosovo republic and did not recognize it (neither China).

In the 2000s Russia continued to defend the principle of national sovereignty and its non-violation by foreign forces. However it had to adjust to the new international situation where the United States and the European Union tried to introduce new rules of the game. Gradually Russia accepted introduced by the United States and the EU “selective approach” to political and territorial conflicts in federal states. For instance, Russia supports the right of the people of Trans-Dniester republic for special status in Moldova, but does not approve political pressure or takes military measures to help Trans-Dniester republic to obtain this status. In 2008 Russia supported economically, politically and militarily Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia republics in their struggle for independence, though Russia does not exclude the possibility of positive solution of the conflict within the Georgian federal state (if participants manage to come to agreement). Russia also strongly guards its own federation, but after military events in Chechnya tries to prevent further conflicts by using economic and political measures (of different kind).

China declared that it will never let any country to interfere into its domestic situation, into so called “separatist territories”. It is more hesitant to officially recognize any new republic, like Abkhazia, but it can change its approach. China’s involvement into world politics has been growing through 2000s, PRC has realized its great opportunities, and this realization can lead to its more resolute behavior in the situations when national sovereignty and state territorial integrity are at issue in certain countries. China also can accept existing “selective approach” to the UN Charter principles. The main reason for China’s “silence” and inactivity was (as they explained) that European and Russian conflicts were far from its territory, but revolutions in Central Asian post-Soviet countries, American policy towards Iraq and Pakistan, events in the Northern Africa pushed China toward more active and resolute position in the questions of foreign interference into political situations of different countries.

India, like China, is ready to fight for its territorial integrity. However, it is less active than China when world community deals with ethnic or territorial conflicts. India is a strategic partner of the United States and supports “selective strategy”, assuming that the U.S. will not play against India in any territorial conflict.

The United States — the strongest country and the most creative world order constructor — is the locomotive in changing international landscape. By the end of 2000s they succeeded in modifying international norms, though these norms remain precedent. “Humanitarian military intervention” has been used to support secession and regime change, and in the majority of cases it led to instability and shaky territorial situation (Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Serbia). The obstacle to American policy emerged, as we mentioned above, when Russia and then China started to object, and when in 2008 Russia supported Southern Ossetia republic in the “struggle for independence” and then recognized Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia republics. Russia *did* demonstrate approach similar to American. The other reason for interference was that Trans-Caucasus (Southern Caucasus) is very close to Russia — is bordering Russia, and it is interested in its stability and predictability.

It is not clear how Turkey will behave when and if there emerge real Kurdish problem (it already exists, and Turkey is quite articulate on it — no changes on Turkey’s territory). At present Turkey does not oppose foreign interference into political situations (Northern Africa), dissolution of some states or consolidation of certain territories with Moslem population (Russia’s Caucasus, countries of Central Asia). But it will take time before Turkey not only declares its resolute position but also act resolutely. It is trying to consolidate its power (economic, military, and geopolitical) and influence to reach real great power status. When and if Turkey succeeds, its position on so called “separatism” can change, but will remain selective.

Table 1

	National sovereignty	Dissolution of federal states	Ethnic separatism or struggle for independence	Status quo
The United States	Offensive defense	Offensive selective approach	Offensive selective approach	Selective approach; introduction and use of precedent norms
Russia	defense	Defensive non-interference approach	Defensive selective approach	Acknowledge status quo — UN Charter
China	defense	Defensive non-interference approach	Defensive non-interference approach	Acknowledge status quo — UN Charter
India	defense	Defensive neutral approach	Defensive selective approach	Ambivalent position
Turkey	defense	Defensive/offensive approach	Defensive/offensive approach	Acknowledge status quo — UN Charter
European Union		Offensive selective approach	Offensive selective approach	Selective approach; introduction and use of precedent norms

As we see, ambivalence in conflict resolution suits major world players, maybe, to lesser extent the United States who would like to have no opposition to its global plans. European Union is not very much different in its policy.

Positions of six very important actors in world and regional politics can be presented in the following table.

As it was mentioned above, trend for deconstruction of many states will continue through the 21st century. The outcome will depend not only on inner factors of this or that country, but also on the position and actions of the most influential actors and organizations. As events in Northern Africa have shown, military, political and economic foreign support had decisive effect, however effective political and economic foreign control of the domestic situation is hardly possible. Trends for further decomposition or consolidation will be the domestic affair, or the affair of those countries that are very close territorially, culturally, ethnically, and

historically. The United States understand that and try to neutralize possible loss of its influence in the countries of their present involvement in Eurasia and Africa.

Great powers and subsystems

Great power politics are crucial when we speak about subsystems. Nowadays many scholars prefer not to mention spheres of influence. However, big regional powers, and the United States, as a superpower try to establish their influence in the territories close to them geographically and connected with them economically. And not only to territories close to their borders. They try to structure the subsystem around them, to organize it, to make it safe for their interests in every sphere (trade, security, migration, resources, etc.)

We suggest the following definition of a subsystem. A *regional subsystem*:

(1) includes states united by geography, common interests and institutions in economy, trade, security, and sometimes in political

sphere, including common desire to establish a monolithic and strong subsystem as a collective center of power;

(2) is based on common history and culture (religion as well) that can play a unifying role, but are not decisive, and often might not have any influence;

(3) has a strong core — a state that is the strongest (according to parameters of a great power²) and more advanced and creative among other countries, or institution (institutions) acting on a strong consensus principles and play the role of a core.

However, as practice shows, it is a strong state that can organize and consolidate a subsystem.

The core-country in the majority of cases is a determinant factor for a subsystem, for the development of the countries constituting it. Lack of a strong leader (or hegemon) can bring regional disorder, and intrusion of a non-regional player. At present, for instance, we are watching destabilized situation in the Middle East and close to it Northern African region where there is no regional leaders capable of becoming cores of one big or two subsystems. Actually, the U.S. and the EU are playing the roles of outside actors trying to control the situation in different countries and regions. We cannot speak about any kind of a stable and perspective subsystem in the Middle East or Persian Gulf region. There is *space* — territories that in perspective can be structured either by regional players, or by non-regional actors, maybe in cooperation with regional leaders.

This tendency to reconfigure *regional spaces* manifested itself in emergence of new terms like: Great Middle East, Great Central Asia, Great East Asia, Arctic space, post-Soviet space, etc. These new spaces were viewed as the material for construction according to interests of Western countries. They are not subsystems, do not have regulating cores, and countries within these spaces though connected geographically are often in severe competition or conflict. Such not structured situation implies emergence of a non-regional leader - a strong country or organization

able of establishing control over the region and countries within it, and over the distribution of influence between different outside players (spheres of interest).

This view of the world as a combination of spaces, not only of territorial spaces, but also of virtual spaces (Internet, informational space, cyberspace, etc.) will exist together with subsystem approach. The United States and other Western countries will continue to develop supranational structures because it is a long perspective aim. Besides they are not very much interested in the formation of subsystems in Asia, Africa, and Latin America with strong great power leaders which might prevent Western players from fulfilling their plans in full, or block there trade, resources or other economic interests.

At present the United States remains the core country in the *Northern American subsystem*. They are trying to enlarge it by introducing multilateral and bilateral initiatives: North American Free Trade Agreement, Free Trade Area of Americas. Success of these projects will bring enlargement of the Northern American subsystem (it actually happened with Mexico joining NAFTA), and establishment of All American subsystem where the United States still will be the core country.

The US initiatives confront plans of Brazil that is trying to consolidate Southern American (Latin American) subsystem, not to oppose the United States, but to have greater independence in inner structuring and interaction, and in constructing relations with the rest of the world. There are a lot of obstacles, disagreements, problems that prevent Brazil from achieving quick success, but its growing stance to be one of the leading world powers, and global aspirations of the United States that distract them from Latin America, might make Latin American subsystem a reality.

European subsystem has a double track perspective. It can remain a substantial part of huge transatlantic (transoceanic) subsystem because the majority of European countries belong to NATO or try to become its

members. However European subsystem still exists, and demonstrates tendency to enlargement to the Black sea region and East Europe, Mediterranean Sea region, North Africa. It has all the characteristics of a subsystem, and its core is both — great European countries + European institutions. Very ambitious program and its outcome cannot be predicted.

Turkey is trying to consolidate both its great power status and regional leadership. It would like to build up its own subsystem, but has serious rivals in the Middle East, Central Asia, in the Caucasus, in the Persian Gulf. China, Russia, the United States, European countries, India are working in these regions. Their activities and opportunities are constrained not only by their economic, financial, military, ideological, cultural potentials. These regions are seriously destabilized, disorganized, lack regional leaders, strong enough to consolidate the subsystem around them.

Much will depend on the ability of BRIC countries to formulate a coherent common approach to the world order formation, on the desire of great powers to build up stable and well controlled subsystems where each country will be economically better, and feel safe from traditional threats (wars, conflicts, interventions, etc.), and non-state threats (terrorism, criminal networks, cyber espionage, epidemics, illegal migration, etc.). We can say quite definitely that Russia, Brazil, Europe; the United States will continue to sustain subsystems around them. China did not say its final word about any subsystem interest; India is also not ready to be the core country of a separate subsystem.

Trend to subsystem reconstruction will continue, and we can speak about several types of territorial organizational structures:

*subsystems mostly of bigger size around regional great powers (leader or hegemon). We can define them as *traditional type subsystems* with the characteristics suggested in the definition;

**transcontinental or transoceanic subsystems* constructed by the superpower - the

United States which is and remain the primary organizer and leader in them. We can define transatlantic community as a huge transcontinental subsystem united by economic, military (security), political (Western democracy), ideological (Western values), and cultural factors. Countries of this subsystem have common strategic aims and common policy, including world order construction. Though they sometimes disagree on certain issues, methods and actions, basically they have consensus. Active American policy in Asia-Pacific region and US perspective plans testify to the fact that concept of another transoceanic subsystem exists. A lot depends on the success of neutralizing China's plans to remain an independent player with its own subsystem in East and South-East Asia.

*so called *spaces* (prostranstva) where countries will have to establish some normative base of their relations and agree on regulations of their policies (for instance, the Arctic region or space). Such spaces will not necessarily have a one-country leader who will dominate in controlling the situation and dictating the rules.

"Small Eurasia" and Russia

Though practically nobody in the United States, Europe, and even Russia views Russia and territories around it as a subsystem, we suggest that Russia *does* have a subsystem that possesses all the characteristics of the subsystem. We define this subsystem - "*Small Eurasia*". It unites the majority of post-Soviet countries and has the core-country — the Russian Federation³. Very often territory of the former USSR is still referred as post-Soviet space. Such reference means that it is a space that is not organized, does not have a core or a great power leader, and can be the object for organization by any outside player. Actually, there are various players, and they are trying to include post-Soviet countries into their existing or future subsystems: Eastern Initiative of the EU for Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Trans-Caucasian countries; efforts of Turkey, Afghanistan, and other Arab

countries in Central Asia, and Chinese policy in Central Asia that can finally make them parts of some subsystems.

However, so far, efforts of various players in so called post-Soviet space did not result in the dissolution of Small Eurasia subsystem. In perspective we cannot exclude its weakening but there still remain rather strong factors keeping many countries inside it, under the protection and provisions of a number of agreements. They also rely and depend on Russia that remains the richest and economically advanced country willing to support them, and is doing a lot to help the countries of Small Eurasia to overcome their political and socio-economic difficulties, to say nothing about security dilemmas. There is a possibility for Eastern European and Trans-Caucasian countries to join a European subsystem, or even a transatlantic subsystem, but it is not clear whether they will be more prosperous inside them, seeing the fate of Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Cyprus. For Central Asian countries the situation is worse because close to them there is not any stable and well organized subsystem, and it is better to belong to an existing one.

For all new states emerged after the USSR dissolution one of the most important problems was to “organize” their new statehood and formulate strategy toward different members of international community. Russia after a short period of debates returned to historic tradition of the Russian State: to act as a great power at global and regional levels, and be the center of integration for post-Soviet countries. For other new states the choice was different. The Baltic States, who never considered themselves part of the Soviet Union, turned to the West; Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia were also Europe oriented but could not realize their plans quickly; Azerbaijan was inclined to keep both Russian and EU vector in its policy. Belarus and Armenia gave preference to close relations with Russia due to historic tradition and special terms of relations with Russia. Central Asian countries who realized complexity of the situation in the region, and acuteness of

domestic problems, preferred to stay closer to Russia.

Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan together with Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Moldova constitute a new geopolitical community — “Malaya Evrazia” — “Small Eurasia” (Russia + CIS country-members), though Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Moldova and Ukraine are members with very changeable positions, and do not participate in all CIS structures.

What is common for the majority of states in Small Eurasia is that they are so called “transit states” situated between Russia and other rather powerful actors, or countries that are in trouble and are close to a failed state status. This transit or uncertain position is often used for getting certain political and economic dividends from maneuvering between various countries, playing on contradictions to get political and economic support, investments, credits, etc. Though Russia is still considered the center of integration and of the subsystem, post-Soviet countries often play against it. In case of Ukraine, Moldova, partially Belarus, this “transit anti-Russian card” was (and is) successfully used in energy sphere. Trans-Caucasian countries are also interested in using their transit position for their economic benefits, and support plans to build pipelines and establish sea roots outside of Russia. Central Asian states do not play this transit card against Russia too actively and too evidently, because their Southern neighbors are ambivalent in their actions: future plans of some big players are not quite clear and are often considered not profitable for them or even aggressive (China, India, Turkey); in some of them economic and political situation is unstable (Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan).

Russia has to take into account aspirations and attitudes of its neighbor states. Their policies often hamper Russia’s actions and initiatives however these states remain very important to its interests. Russia depends on the actions and plans of its neighbors in the North, in the West and in

the South. It is learning to play by the rules suggested (or dictated) by neighbor countries and find compromise. For these countries Russia is viewed as one but not the strongest among other active players. Russia tries to neutralize actions of other players in order to keep the subsystem and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Russia uses its stronger economic potential, tries to overplay European and Asian countries; undertakes steps to make the CIS and other regional structures more functional and interesting to its members; put a lot of efforts to successfully fulfill its own modernization program to become a stronger player and more attractive partner to its neighbors as compared to other countries.

There are still a number of factors that strengthen Russia's position as the center of Small Eurasia: Russia is still the biggest and the richest country in the subsystem; it is an open and profitable market of natural and technological resources for other countries; it is a huge market for goods from these countries; is an open market for their labor force; suggests special terms in trade and customs, establishing special low prices for CIS partners (energy). Russia remains major military power giving security guarantees to its neighbors. Formally it is a "nuclear umbrella" to members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (ODKB) while other post-Soviet states either can get such guarantees from NATO (for instance, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, if and when they become its members), or have an independent course negotiating with both sides (for instance, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan).

There are some weak points too. Russia has less financial resources for direct investments into economies of post-Soviet countries, as compared to China, EU or the United States. However these countries are not very eager to give much, and their terms are not always accepted by recipients. Post-Soviet countries need money to improve political and economic situation, and investments to build working economic system, to conquer poverty and unemployment. They

also need support to control or fight criminal structures. As more than twenty years of post-Soviet existence show, the United States and EU often provide money to support opposition tendencies and new revolutionary elites, but they are not very much concerned with real economic recovery and development. Russia is also not completely altruistic in its policy but very often it becomes a donor for post-Soviet countries, supports weak economies by selling resources cheap, buying a lot from these countries, and opening its labor market. It opens its university education for young people (it is free for citizens of the CIS countries). And gives security guarantees. China is more concerned with domestic problems, and influence in the East and South Eastern Asia. Besides, culturally it is too different from Central Asian countries.

We can say that potential for mutual support and interconnection has not exhausted yet. In the situation *when the wave of "revolutions" continues in the Northern Africa and Persian Gulf Region, situation remains dangerous in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, unstable political and economic situation after "orange revolutions" is in Kirghizstan, Georgia and Ukraine, Russia looks more attractive to Central Asian and Trans-Caucasian countries as close and not aggressive partner.*

Years of independent existence showed that money is important, but it does not solve all the problems. Besides, many CIS countries realized that it is safer and cheaper to develop macro-economic system with a strong, understandable, and not too aggressive country, when there is much of common positive experience left from mutual past. At present we can speak about certain consensus (despite existing disagreements) and understanding among countries of Small Eurasia that post-Soviet space is the biggest arena of severe competition for resources and influence, and for all states of this subsystem it will be more pragmatic and profitable to stay together.

Realization of this fact (though not always pronounced) plays for the benefit of Russia. Security and stability are also great