

SOME GENERAL MANIFESTATIONS OF TRANSITION PERIODS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SYSTEMS

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During the period of operation of the international relations system (IRS), the main actors of international relations (superpowers) that formed that system, despite the deep contradictions that exist among themselves, have a common interest in maintaining the current system, because it provides them with a privileged position in world politics. Guided by this common interest, the superpowers restrain each other and, with joint efforts, restrain actions of other actors in international relations that could undermine the existing system.

During the transition period of the IRS, on the one hand, the deterrence mechanism ceases to function, and on the other hand, the superpowers seek to use or provoke processes that will strengthen themselves and weaken the positions of their opponents in the struggle for the new IRS. The expression of the transformation of the interests of the superpowers are the general manifestations of the transition periods of the IRS 1 - an increase in the number of local and regional armed conflicts and their intensity; 2 - increase of genocide and other crimes against humanity; 3 - disregard of international law by actors of international relations and non-state organizations; 4 - discrediting of universal structures of international cooperation and decline in effectiveness of activities; 5 - a world war in which the victorious superpowers establish a new IRS. The listed manifestations, so far with the exception of the world war, are also characteristic of the current transitional period from Yalta-Potsdam to the new IRS.

Key words: *system of international relations, world politics, armed conflicts, genocide, crimes against humanity, international legal system, structures of international cooperation, interests of superpowers*

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Շավարշ Կոչարյան – կենսաբանական գիտությունների թեկնածու, արտակարգ և լիազոր դեսպան, ԵՊՀ միջազգային հարաբերությունների և դիվանագիտության ամբիոնի դոցենտ

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Introduction

The period of operation of the international relations system ensures relative international peace, security and stability, as well as more favorable conditions for the economic, technical, scientific and cultural development of states. The first IRS, the Westphalian, outlined the architecture of modern international relations, but was limited mainly to the territory of Europe. As a result of the colonial policy of the European states, the Vienna system can be considered as the first universal IRS. The Vienna system laid the foundation for diplomatic and humanitarian law, as well as international cooperation structures, which got a modern look in the Yalta-Potsdam system.

The IRS ceases to function if and when the power balance established between the superpowers, which is the basis of the system's sustainability, is violated (Sheehan 2000¹). The Yalta-Potsdam bipolar system ceased to function in 1988-1991 as a result of the collapse of the communist camp led by the USSR in one of the poles. After the collapse, the processes unfolding in international relations and their possible or desirable future developments have become the subject of analyzes by various specialists (Brzezinski 1997²; Fukuyama 1992³; Hantington 1996⁴; Karaganov 2024⁵; Kissinger 2014⁶; Mearsheimer 2014⁷; Randall⁸ et al 2011; Sakwa 2024⁹; Wallerstein 2004¹⁰). Not opposing the approaches of these analyses, we find that insufficient attention has been paid to the common interest of the superpowers in the operation period of the IRS, on the one hand, and the transformation of this interest in the transition period of the IRS, on the other hand. Below we will study the influence of the superpowers' interests on the processes unfolding in the transition periods of the IRS.

The Duration of Transition Periods of the IRS

Experts' estimates of when the four pre-existing IRS ceased to function vary. Let us choose the most popular of these ratings. The Westphalian system ceased to function in 1674 as a result of the Great French Revolution, the Vienna one in 1853 with the Crimean War, the Yalta-Potsdam system in 1991 with the collapse of the USSR. The shortest was the Versailles-Washington system, which ended either in 1933, when Japan invaded Manchuria, or in 1935, when Italy invaded Ethiopia (see Table 1).

¹ Sheehan, Michael. 2000. "The Balance of Power: History and Theory." London and New York: Routledge.

² Brzezinski, Zbigniew. 1997. "The grand chessboard: American primacy and Its geostrategic imperatives." New York: Basic Books.

³ Fukuyama, Francis. 1992. "The end of history and the last man". New York: Free Press.

⁴ Hantington, Samuel. 1996. "The clash of civilizations and remarking of world order". New York: Simon and Schuster.

⁵ Karaganov, Sergej. 2024. "An age of wars? Article two. What is to be done." *Russia in Global Affairs* 22(2): 5-8.

⁶ Kissinger, Henry. 2014. "World order: Reflections on the character of nations and the course of history". London: Allen Lane.

⁷ Mearsheimer, John. 2014. "The tragedy of great power politics. Updated." New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

⁸ Randall, L. Schweller and Xiaoyu, Pu. 2011. "After unipolarity: China's visions of international order in an era of U.S. decline." *International Security* 36(1): 41-72.

⁹ Sakwa, Richard. 2024. "The international system and the clash of world orders." *China Int Strategy Rev.* 6: 39-57.

¹⁰ Wallerstein, Immanuel. 2004. "World-systems analysis: An introduction." Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Table 1

Duration of operation and transition periods of the IRS

System	Established, date	Ceased to function, date	Duration of activity period, year	Duration of the transition period to the next system, year
Westphalian	1648	1674	26	141
Vienna	1815	1853	38	68-69
Versailles-Washington	1921-1922	1933-1935	11-14	10-12
Yalta-Potsdam	1945	1991	46	still 33

Based on the objectives of our research, what is important is not the exact date of the termination of the activity of the IRS, but the existence of the transition period itself. Moreover, that period can be quite long. Thus, the transition from the Westphalian system to the Vienna system took about 140 years, and from the Vienna system to the Versailles-Washington system, about 70 years. A simple calculation based on the data in Table 1 shows that from 1648 to the present, the total duration of the transition periods of the IRS (252-255 years) exceeds the total duration of the periods of operation of the IRS (121-124 years) by about 2 times.

A full-fledged and in-depth assessment of the international processes taking place in recent decades becomes almost impossible or incomplete if we ignore the fact that at least 33 years have passed since the cessation of the Yalta-Potsdam system. This means that since at least beginning with 1991, the world has been in a transition period for the formation of a new IRS. Assessments that a unipolar system was established after the collapse of the USSR (Fukuyama 1992) were premature.

The Characteristics of the Transition Periods of the IRS

Based on the goals of our analysis, let us give the following working definition of the IRS. *The system of international relations is the universal structures of international cooperation and the normative framework of international law (international legal system) created or modified by the main actors of international relations (superpowers) who won another world war in order to manage international politics.*

The common interest of the superpowers in the operation period of the IRS. In the operation period of the IRS the superpowers that formed that system, despite the deep contradictions that exist among themselves, have a common interest in maintaining the existing system that gave them a privileged position. An action by any state against the international legal system can expand uncontrollably and undermine the existing system, calling into question the privileged positions of the superpowers that formed the system. Therefore, the superpowers that formed the system, with joint efforts, using also international structures and international law, strive to prevent the implementation of similar actions or their expansion.

In order to preserve the IRS, the superpowers also try to restrain each other's actions aimed at violating the fundamental principles of international law and discrediting international cooperation structures, because such actions can also undermine the existing system and violate the established power balance.

The interests of the superpowers in the transition periods of the IRS. In the transition periods of the IRS, the common interest of the superpowers to deter each other and other entities from acting against the international legal system is no longer present. The primary

goal of their foreign policy is their decisive role in forming a new IRS. Mutually exclusive views on the future of the IRS deepen the conflict between the superpowers. Contributing to the deepening of the conflict is the continuous struggle to replace the hegemonic state with a new hegemon, as at present China's challenge to the USA (see Mearsheimer 2010¹¹; Modelski 1995¹²). The superpowers are trying to strengthen themselves and allies and to weaken the opponents and their allies positions in the struggle for the new IRS. They try to use international law and international structures, as well as armed conflicts, including those provoked by them, to serve this purpose.

As a result of the superpowers' policy of supporting their own allies and weakening their opponents in the transition periods of the IRS, there is a lack of adequate response to cases of genocide and other crimes against humanity, which creates an atmosphere of impunity and creates fertile ground for new crimes. Even in the case of an obvious violation of the fundamental norm of international law, the making of an adequate decision in the structures of international cooperation is hindered by individual superpowers. And in the event of a decision being made, the tools set by international law to compel the violator to comply with the decision do not work. Actors in international relations, including the superpowers that formed the previous system, invoke international law to blame the adversary, including unjustifiably, but ignore international law in the actions of their own or allied states. As a result, the universal structures of international cooperation turn into a platform for mostly fruitless discussions and endless mutual recriminations.

General manifestations characteristic of the transition periods of the IRS. The foreign policy resulting from the transformed interests of the superpowers leads to the general manifestations typical of the transition periods of the IRS: the increase in the number of armed conflicts and their severity, the increase in the number of crimes of genocide and other crimes against humanity, the neglect of international law, the ineffectiveness and discrediting of the universal structures of international cooperation, and the world war, as a result of which the victorious superpowers establish a new IRS.

Table 2

Examples of general manifestations of previous and current transition periods of the IRS

General Manifestation	Previous transition periods of the IRS	Current transition periods of the IRS
Armed conflicts	1877-78 Russian-Turkish, 1894-95 Japanese-Chinese, 1897 Turkish-Greek, 1904-05 Russian-Japanese and 1911-12 Turkish-Italian wars. Spanish Civil War of 1936-39. Defense of Van in 1896, Zeytuun Rebellions of 1895-96 and Sasun Rebellions of 1904.	The armed conflicts of the former federal Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union from 1991, in the Middle East: Iraq, Libya, Syria, Gaza from 2011 and Russia-Ukraine from 2014. Aggressions of Azerbaijan in 1992, 2016, 2020 and 2023 against self-determined Nagorno Karabakh Republic.

¹¹ Mearsheimer, John. 2010. "The gathering storm: China's challenge to US power in Asia." *Chinese Journal of International Relations* 3(4): 381–96.

¹² Modelski, George. 1995. "The evolution of global politics." *Journal of World-Systems Research* 1(7): 424–467.

Genocide and other crimes against humanity	Genocides of Armenians of 1894-96 and of Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians and Yazidis beginning with 1915 in the Ottoman Empire. Genocide of Jews in Nazi Germany 1939-1945.	Rwanda in 1994, Darfur in 2003-05, in Iraq and Syria 2015 Yazidi genocides. Since 1988, Azerbaijan's policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing against Armenians and the forced deportation of Nagorno Karabakh population in 2023.
Ignoring international law and ineffectiveness of international structures	The inability of the League of Nations to counter the Japanese invasions of Manchuria in 1933 and China in 1937, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, and the Turkish occupation of Hatay in 1939.	Ineffective discussions of Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas armed conflicts at the UN. In 2023 Azerbaijan ignores the decision of the International Court of Justice to end blockade of Nagorno Karabakh.
Wars that resulted in the establishment of a new IRS	30-year war - Westphalian, Napoleonic wars - Vienna, World War I - Versailles-Washington, World War II - Yalta-Potsdam.	?

Discussion

Thus, wars, mass crimes against humanity, non-fulfillment of obligations assumed by international law and inefficiency of the universal structures of international cooperation are more characteristic of the transition periods of the IRS.

It is obvious that the same negative manifestations have been characteristic of the entire history of mankind. Therefore, the operation periods of the IRS can be evaluated as the achievement of the last centuries of humanity, because that period provides relative peace for states and peoples and more favorable conditions for development.

Moreover, during the period of establishment and operation of the IRS, international law develops and makes progress, as well as general and specialized structures of international cooperation are formed and improved to protect international law. As a result, each subsequent IRS surpasses the previous one from that point of view, and the most advanced was the Yalta-Potsdam system. Examples of progress in international law are: the prohibition of the right of force that has existed for thousands of years, the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, the principle of territorial integrity of states and the norms establishing fundamental human rights (UN Charter, 1945¹³; Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948¹⁴; Convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide, 1948¹⁵). An example of the improvement of international cooperation structures is the United Nations and its specialized structures. The

¹³ UN Charter. 1945. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>

¹⁴ Universal declaration of human rights. 1948. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

¹⁵ Convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide. 1948. [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1 Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1%20Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf)

United Nations Charter (Chapter VII) established for the first time in history the possibility of imposing peace on an aggressor state by military force, with the consensus of the five permanent members of the Security Council.

However, if we look at the transition periods of the IRS in their historical sequence, then the uncivilized manifestations described in this article do not decrease over time, if they do not increase. In other words, the gap between the goals set by the international legal system and international cooperation structures, on the one hand, and the actual processes contradicting them, on the other hand, is deepening.

To explain this discontinuity, we start with the common interest of the superpowers that formed the IRS to maintain a privileged position in the world politics. Guided by that common interest, they, also using international law and international structures, restrain each other and suppress the actions of other entities that undermine the existing system. Such a common interest and therefore a deterrent factor is absent in the transition periods of the IRS. In the transitional periods, the superpowers strive to use international law and international structures in the struggle for a new IRS, to strengthen their own positions and those of their allies, and to weaken the positions of their opponents. Therefore, states and non-state entities, in the absence of unified opposition, and in some cases direction, of superpowers, get the opportunity to act more freely and with impunity. The foreign policy of the states in transition periods of the IRS also has other features, which is the subject of a separate analysis.

ՇԱՎԱՐՇ ՔՈՉԱՐՅԱՆ – Միջազգային հարաբերությունների համակարգերի անցումային ժամանակահատվածների որոշ ընդհանուր դրսևորումներ – Միջազգային հարաբերությունների համակարգի (ՄՀՀ) հիմնական դերակատարները (գերտերությունները), չնայած միմյանց միջև առկա խորը հակասություններին, ունեն ընդհանուր շահ՝ պահպանել գործող համակարգը, քանի որ այն իրենց տրամադրում է արտոնյալ դիրք համաշխարհային քաղաքականությունում: Առաջնորդվելով այդ ընդհանուր շահով՝ գերտերությունները զսպում են միմյանց, իսկ համատեղ ուժերով՝ միջազգային հարաբերությունների այլ դերակատարների այնպիսի գործողությունները, որոնք կարող են խաթլել գործող համակարգը:

ՄՀՀ-ի անցումային ժամանակահատվածում մի կողմից դադարում է գործել զսպման մեխանիզմը, և մյուս կողմից գերտերությունները ձգտում են օգտագործել կամ հրահրել գործընթացներ, որոնք կամրապնդեն իրենց և կթուլացնեն հակառակորդների դիրքերը նոր ՄՀՀ-ի համար պայքարում: Գերտերությունների շահերի փոխակերպման արտահայտությունն են ՄՀՀ անցումային ժամանակահատվածների ընդհանուր դրսևորումները. 1) լուկա և տարածաշրջանային զինված հակամարտությունների քանակի և դրանց սաստկության աճ; 2) ցեղասպանության և մարդկության դեմ այլ հանցագործությունների աճ; 3) միջազգային հարաբերությունների դերակատարների և ոչ պետական կազմավորումների կողմից միջազգային իրավունքի անտեսում; 4) միջազգային համագործակցության համընդհանուր կառույցների հեղինակազրկում և գործունեության արդյունավետության անկում; 5) համաշխարհային պատերազմ, որի արդյունքում հաղթած գերտերությունները հաստատում են նոր ՄՀՀ: Թվարկված դրսևորումները, դեռևս բացառությամբ համաշխարհային պատերազմի, բնորոշ են նաև ներկայիս անցումային՝ Յալթա-պոտսդամյանից դեպի նոր ՄՀՀ ժամանակահատվածին:

Բանալի բառեր – միջազգային հարաբերությունների համակարգ, համաշխարհային քաղաքականություն, զինված հակամարտություններ, ցեղասպանություն, մարդկության դեմ հանցագործություններ, միջազգային իրավակարգ, միջազգային համագործակցության կառույցներ, գերտերությունների շահեր

ШАВАРШ КОЧАРЯН – Некоторые общие проявления переходных периодов систем международных отношений. – В период функционирования системы международных отношений (СМО) основные акторы международных отношений (сверхдержавы), сформировавшие эту систему, несмотря на существующие между ними глубокие противоречия, имеют общий интерес в сохранении действующей системы, поскольку она обеспечивает им привилегированное положение в мировой политике. Руководствуясь этим общим интересом, сверхдержавы сдерживают друг друга и совместными усилиями сдерживают действия других акторов международных отношений, которые могут подорвать существующую систему.

В переходный период СМО, с одной стороны, перестает действовать механизм сдерживания, а с другой стороны, сверхдержавы стремятся использовать или спровоцировать процессы, которые укрепят их собственные позиции и ослабят позиции их противников в борьбе за новую СМО. Выражением трансформации интересов сверхдержав являются общие проявления переходных периодов СМО: 1) увеличение количества локальных и региональных вооруженных конфликтов и их интенсивности; 2) увеличение актов геноцида и других преступлений против человечества; 3) игнорирование международного права субъектами международных отношений и негосударственными образованиями; 4) падение авторитета универсальных структур международного сотрудничества и снижение эффективности их деятельности; 5) мировая война, по результатам которой победившие сверхдержавы устанавливают новую СМО. Перечисленные проявления, пока что за исключением мировой войны, характерны и для нынешнего переходного периода от Ялта-Потсдамской к новой СМО.

Ключевые слова: *система международных отношений, мировая политика, вооруженные конфликты, геноцид, преступления против человечности, международная правовая система, структуры международного сотрудничества, интересы супердержав*