



Donald Trump and Radical Reconfiguration of the World-System in the Context of the World Order Transformation

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Abstract

The article analyzes the direction, mechanisms, and causes through which President Trump's actions contribute to the destruction of the foundations of U.S. influence in the world and to the transformation of the world order. For almost two decades we have been observing such an important phenomenon as the reconfiguration of the World-System, which means that the World-System is in a systemic crisis and in a state of deep transformation which is rapidly changing the political landscape – both domestic and international.

This crisis is expressed in the intensification of contradictions, the growth of conflicts, and the spread of other turbulent and destructive political processes that destabilize the global situation, even as the climate crisis deepens. These processes are closely connected with the weakening and destruction of the existing world order and with preparations for the formation of a new one.

The article shows the causes and stages of development of this process. It concludes that, with the new administration of Donald Trump, a new phase in the acceleration of World-System reconfiguration has begun under the influence of the chaotic actions of the United States. This phase can be described as radical reconfiguration. As a result, we are caught in a whirlpool of destabilizing events that indicate the fairly rapid erosion of the previous world order. The question being discussed is whether the activities of Trump and Trumpists can be viewed as a kind of revolution from above.

Keywords: Donald Trump, globalization, systemic crisis, transformation of world order, Trumpists, world order, World-System, World-System reconfiguration.



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Introduction

In this article, the authors pursue the following six objectives. We present them not in the order in which they appear in the article's structure, but according to the logic of the authors' approach, which seeks to connect the global world-system context with the actions of Trump and his administration and to integrate these elements into a unified conceptual analysis. The six objectives are as follows:

- 1) To analyze the direction, mechanisms, and causes through which President Trump's actions contribute to the erosion of the foundations of U.S. influence in the world and to the transformation of the world order.
- 2) To explain the meaning of the term "World-System reconfiguration" and to describe the phases of this process. We introduced this term to explain contemporary processes of World-System transformation (Grinin and Korotayev, 2012a). However, other researchers have also drawn attention to processes that can be typologically described by this term, including Karataşlı (2017).
- 3) To demonstrate the close connection and mutual influence between the reconfiguration of the World-System and the transformation of the world order¹.
- 4) To show that, under Donald Trump's new administration, a new phase of accelerated World-System reconfiguration has begun, driven by the chaotic actions of the United States. The article also explains why this phase can be described as a radical reconfiguration.
- 5) To show how and why the chaotic activities of the Trump administration contribute to the rapid erosion of the contemporary world order and open the way for the formation of a new world order.
- 6) To raise the question of whether the activities of Trump and Trumpists can be viewed as a form of revolution from above and to present the authors' approach to this issue.

¹ In general, we adhere to the version of the world-system approach of Andre Gunder Frank (e.g., Frank, 1990, 1993; Frank & Gills, 1993). According to him there was only one World System in world history. It emerged in the 3rd millennium BCE as a result of the merger of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations into one system. Since that time, the World-System went through a number of expansion-consolidation cycles until it engulfed the whole world. In fact, we contend that the World-System emerged even earlier, around the 10th – 8th millennia BCE, as a result of the Neolithic Revolution in the Fertile Crescent (Grinin & Korotayev, 2009; Korotayev, 2005, 2008; Korotayev et al., 2006). Within this approach we deal with "the World-System" (with uppercase W and S without hyphen). However, we speak about "world-system processes", or "world-system approach", that is we use "world-system" as an adjective. A similar phenomenon is observed with the Internet. We speak about "the Internet" when we mean the world-wide communication network, but we would rather speak about "internet appliances", or "internet cafes", using lowercase version as an adjective.

After the introduction, the first set of sections address theoretical issues. Section 2 examines the relationship between world-system theory and approaches to the transformation of the world order. Section 3 discusses perspectives on the structure of the World-System. This discussion is important because, without such a foundation, it is difficult to analyze the reconfiguration of the World-System. Section 4 analyzes World-System reconfiguration and the phases of its acceleration.

The next set of sections, Sections 5 through 7, focuses on Trump and his administration. Section 5 examines Trump's impact on reconfiguration in general and on the world order in particular. Section 6 discusses basic transformations. Section 7 discusses the weakening of Europe and asks whether Europe will leave the world-system core. Finally, the conclusion raises the question of whether Trump's policies can be understood as an attempt at revolution from above.

The World-System approach and world order transformations

World-systems theory, in its most important aspects, has always devoted significant attention to the analysis of world order (e.g., Wallerstein, 1989, 2003, 2011; Modelski, 1987; Thompson, 2020, 2022; Robinson, 2023; Hlovor & Mawuko-Yevugah, 2024; Mandle, 2025). Changes in world order have also signaled changes in the structure of the World-System. For this reason, the world-systems approach is especially relevant for analyzing the contemporary transformation of world order. It is particularly important for understanding interactions between the world-system core and periphery, as well as for analyzing globalization and deglobalization as outcomes of growing connectivity within the modern World-System. At the same time, this expanding connectivity has intensified serious complexities, conflicts, and disruptions in global relations, thereby generating growing contradictions (e.g., Chase-Dunn et al., 2023; Grinin A., 2025).

This is why IR realism theory has regained popularity. There have also been renewed reminders that, unfortunately, changes in world order have always been associated with war in the past (for this, see, e.g., Gilpin, 1981; Organski & Kugler, 1980; Grinin A., 2025). John Mearsheimer, one of the leading scholars of the balance of power and world order (see Mearsheimer, 2001), argues in his lecture "War and International Politics" (Mearsheimer, 2024a) that war is a dominant feature of international politics. He further suggests that, once states enter into war, there is a strong tendency for conflict to escalate toward extreme, absolute, or total war. In our view, such escalation is not inevitable, but it remains probable. Therefore, even now, it is necessary to be prepared for this possibility and to exercise extreme caution in order to avoid provoking a major war.

The realist approach to world order dates back to the ideas of Hans Morgenthau (1955), for whom the military component was a central element of the balance of power. This approach

prevailed during the period of confrontation between the USSR and the United States. Contemporary proponents of realism, such as Robert Art (Art & Jervis, 2004), continue to argue that foreign policy cannot be separated from military power. The “law of force” has shaped the course of events from the earliest periods of history (e.g., Köchler, 2019; Mearsheimer, 2001, 2019, 2024a). Given the intensification of contemporary contradictions, one might expect this approach to gain further influence.

Since the 1990s, although mainstream political science has focused primarily on the unipolar American order, a number of leading world-systems scholars have identified a shift in the most important processes shaping the modern World-System. These processes have increasingly moved eastward, toward Asia, and, somewhat later, toward the development of the Global South (Frank, 1997, 1998; Amin, 2010; Amin et al., 2006; Arrighi, 1994, 2007; Arrighi & Silver, 1999, etc.).

Although scholars from various schools of thought, discussed below, have written about the decline of American power, representatives of the world-systems school have played a particularly significant role in this debate. Because of their theoretical orientation, world-systems scholars are especially attuned to subtle changes in the global balance and alignment of power.

In this article, drawing on modern world-systems theory, we seek to make several additions to this framework in order to apply it more productively to the current transformation of the modern World-System.

On the World-System Structure

Before moving to the next stage of the discussion, it is useful to provide several theoretical clarifications. The concepts of core, periphery, and semi-periphery are central to world-systems theory. According to Immanuel Wallerstein, this world-system structure is unified by the division of labor. It is a world-economy rooted in the capitalist economy (Wallerstein, 2004, pp. 23–24). Core countries are characterized by higher-skill, capital-intensive enterprises, while the rest of the world is associated with low-skill, labor-intensive industries and the extraction of raw materials. This structure continually reinforces the dominance of core countries.

Wallerstein explains that the axial division of labor in the capitalist world-economy also implies a division between production processes characteristic of the core and those characteristic of the periphery. The concept of “core-periphery” is relational. By the core-periphery relationship, we refer to differences in the profitability of production processes. Since profitability is directly related to the degree of monopoly, the core is characterized by production processes controlled by quasi-monopolies. The periphery, by contrast, is left with genuinely competitive processes. When exchange occurs, competitive goods are disadvantaged relative to the products of quasi-monopolies. As a result, there is a constant flow of surplus value from

peripheral producers to core producers, a process known as ‘unequal exchange’ (Wallerstein, 2004).

However, while this explanation is fundamentally correct, it does not account for all cases. Monopolization can also occur in the raw materials sector, which may lead to a reverse flow of profits from the core to the periphery. This occurred, for example, as a result of OPEC’s actions in the 1970s. However, the subsequent development of various oil fields reduced the oil market’s dependence on OPEC. Monopolization can also occur in semi-peripheral positions. For example, before the development of liquefied natural gas technology, Russia enjoyed significant advantages in supplying gas to Europe. China, a leader in the extraction and processing of rare earth metals, has only recently demonstrated its ability to block key technological processes².

A crucial point in Wallerstein’s argument is that unequal exchange is far from the only mechanism through which accumulated capital is transferred from politically weak regions to politically strong ones. Regrettably, he identifies only one such mechanism: plunder. Yet there are many such mechanisms, and they continue to develop. Trump, in particular, has begun to exploit the uniqueness, and to some extent the monopoly position, of the vast American market by imposing increased duties, or “tariffs,” in order to transfer resources, and not only from the periphery. Wallerstein speaks of politically weak and politically strong regions of the world, but he does not elaborate this point. In the long term, however, the transfer of profits and access to cheap resources can be maintained only through the active use of political power and, if necessary, military force, as we are seeing today, particularly in relation to Venezuela. The importance of military and political force in maintaining the position of the core is difficult to overstate.

Our concept of World-System reconfiguration is therefore closely linked to both the economic and political components of globalization. The economic weakening of the World-System’s core, driven by the rise of the semi-periphery, especially China but also other countries, is beginning to affect the military and political positions of the core. This is precisely what Trump is attempting to stop.

Thus, in our view, the definition of the World-System’s core and periphery requires clarification. We believe that the core is more accurately defined as those regions that possess advanced technological paradigms, which give them an advantage in exchange, as well as a stronger military-political system. Both characteristics must be present. Although the USSR achieved a degree of military parity with the United States, it had a weaker economy and a less flexible political system. For this reason, it cannot be designated as part of the World-System’s

² For a critique of traditional conceptualization of core-periphery as not covering monopolization in the raw materials sector see also Korzeniewicz & Payne (2019, 2020).

core, but at most as a counter-core. The periphery, accordingly, is characterized by less developed technological paradigms and a weaker military-political system.

In this regard, the Global North can be considered a synonym for the World-System's core. However, a technological slowdown has recently been observed in Europe, which threatens to shift this part of the Global North from the core toward a semi-peripheral position.

In our view, the Global South includes both the periphery and the semi-periphery of the World-System. Wallerstein defines the semi-periphery as countries or regions in which core-like and peripheral production processes are distributed roughly equally. The primary concern of semi-peripheral countries is to avoid slipping into the periphery. At the same time, it would be far more advantageous for them to move closer to the core, and they are doing everything possible to achieve this. Currently, the most active semi-peripheral countries are increasingly moving closer to the core; technologically, they are actively developing the most advanced sectors.

With respect to China, the discussion is no longer primarily about its semi-peripheral position, but rather about its claim to become an alternative center of the World-System. This is evident in China's increasing activity in the countries of the Global South. In this regard, we draw on the seminal work of Giovanni Arrighi and André Gunder Frank concerning the return of core activity from Europe and the United States to Asia. In other words, the dynamism of global development is returning to Asia after a long hiatus (Frank, 1997, 1998). This concept was further developed in the works of Arrighi (1994, 2007).

Thus, the modern semi-periphery is more likely to converge toward the core than to decline into the periphery. This tendency is one of the foundations of the reconfiguration of the World-System. As a result, the United States, especially under President Trump, is using increasingly harsh methods, including sanctions, blockades, exorbitant tariffs, and outright bans, in an effort to maintain technological leadership. As Trump discards ideological arguments, the trend toward *realpolitik* intensifies.

About the World-System reconfiguration and the phases of its acceleration

We have introduced the concept of "World-System reconfiguration" elsewhere (Grinin and Korotayev 2012a, 2016; Grinin 2022; Grinin A. 2025). This concept has already been developed in the pages of this journal (Grinin and Grinin 2025). Although it is gradually entering political science discourse, it has not yet received sufficient attention.

From the perspective of general systems analysis, World-System reconfiguration refers to the process by which the political component of globalization catches up with the economic component, which has far outpaced it. In general, this process is connected with the slowdown of

economic globalization, which is now being reversed in some important respects³, and with the activation of various political processes. These processes are often turbulent and destabilizing, altering both domestic political landscapes and international relations. They are closely connected with the weakening and destruction of the existing world order and with preparations for the formation of a new one (Grinin A. and Grinin L. 2023; Grinin 2022; Grinin and Korotayev 2023c; Grinin A. 2025).

Reconfiguration, that is, the catching up of the political component of globalization to its economic component, or, in other words, the movement of the World-System's political coherence toward the level of its economic coherence, is unfortunately not a smooth process. Nor does it immediately move the system forward. On the contrary, it requires rollbacks, ruptures, and restructuring. This process can occur in different modes and through several main mechanisms:

1. A slowdown in economic development and/or a rollback of economic globalization (see, e.g., Chase-Dunn et al., 2023). Donald Trump's return for a second term clearly contributes to the acceleration of deglobalization.
2. The destruction of the old Americentric world order and the creation of new alliances, principles, and systems that may support expanded international cooperation and facilitate the transition to a new world order.

At present, tendencies toward the destruction of the old world order prevail, and these tendencies are intensifying as a result of Trump's chaotic actions.

Under conditions of World-System reconfiguration, "fractures" tend to emerge in the system's most unstable and vulnerable points. As a rule, these are areas in which different interests and vectors of power confront one another. From this, we may conclude that processes of reconfiguration within the World-System will necessarily continue. They will proceed in several directions and include, among other things, major crises and revolutionary waves, the aggravation of contradictions, military conflicts and the threat of large-scale war, the rise of revolutionary movements across the world, and other significant transformations (Grinin A. and Grinin L. 2023; Goldstone et al. 2022, 2023).

Thus, destabilization may first occur in societies that are weakest in terms of their ability to withstand shocks. However, the reconfiguration processes that have already begun, with their

³ E.g., as regards de facto abolition of free trade and WTO rules, the creation of various difficult barriers in trade and technological cooperation, numerous sanctions, politicization of trade, investments, tariff levels etc. As regards trade globalization, one may say with Chase-Dunn et al. (2023) that it has stopped going up and is wobbling around.

characteristic instability, have affected not only semi-peripheral zones but also the world-system core. Brexit, for example, intensified instability not only in the United Kingdom itself but also in the European Union as a whole. In several European countries, Eurosceptic movements have gained strength, a trend further intensified by anti-Russian sanctions and their consequences. It has therefore become clear that even societies once regarded as fully prosperous are experiencing growing internal divisions, including those related to migration. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the catching up of the political component of globalization to the economic one, or conversely, the retreat of the economic component toward the level of the political one, occurs unevenly and in fits and starts. This process produces more or less acute political and geopolitical crises in particular regions.

The World-System reconfiguration as a systemic crisis

We define “World-System reconfiguration” as a systemic crisis associated with the gradual weakening of the world order, a shift in the balance of power, the decline of American dominance, and the rise of new powers whose political regimes, from the perspective of Western countries, are not democratic or not sufficiently democratic. This process leads to increasing tensions and contradictions, as well as to a slowdown in globalization, which has now begun to reverse rapidly. Thus, both the world order and the World-System as a whole are in a state of constant transformation. This transformation is expressed in global, regional, and local political crises, including revolutions, rising tensions, the collapse of political regimes, and other unexpected changes whose frequency is increasing. It is also reflected in a broader crisis of the world political and economic order.

Thus, reconfiguration is, unfortunately, far from a smooth process. Rather, it is a painful one that requires rollbacks and restructuring. It is expressed through the activation of various political processes, most of them turbulent and destabilizing, that alter both domestic political landscapes and international relations.

These processes are closely connected with the weakening and destruction of the old world order and with preparations for the formation of a new one (Grinin and Korotayev 2012a, 2012b, 2016; Grinin A. and Grinin L. 2023)⁴. At the same time, new alliances, principles, and systems are emerging that may eventually strengthen international cooperation and support the

⁴ The point that the world order transformations are very tightly connected with the World-System reconfigurations has already been noticed by Karataşlı (2017). Note, however, that his operationalization of the World-System reconfiguration is very different from ours; what is more, he does not use the very term “reconfiguration”. Yet, his finding, no doubt, is relevant for us.

transition to a new world order. For now, however, tendencies toward the destruction of the old world order prevail.

A new world order cannot be formed without the completion of World-System reconfiguration. Therefore, the phases of World-System reconfiguration are closely connected with the phases of change in the world order. In most cases, we assume that there is a time lag between new phases in World-System reconfiguration and new stages in the transformation of the world order. This occurred in connection with Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine. However, feedback effects are also possible. Trump and his activities demonstrate that the destruction of the world order may also outpace the process of World-System reconfiguration.

Reconfiguration Phases

The beginning of reconfiguration marked the weakening of the established Pax Americana and the beginning of the transformation of this world order⁵. We believe that the global financial and economic crisis of 2008–2009 served as a powerful impetus for the onset of reconfiguration. The next phase was the Arab Spring (Grinin and Korotayev, 2012a). Over the following decade, the process of World-System reconfiguration passed through several additional phases. The most important milestones included the Ukrainian crisis of 2014, which marked a transition from the previously declared unity between the West and Russia to open confrontation, and President Trump's introduction of trade tariffs in 2018. The latter marked the beginning of the destruction of the principle of open trade and the maximum use of competitive advantages in the global economy (see below). Trump's new presidency will probably finally bury this principle.

With the start of the "special military operation" in 2022, the reconfiguration of the World-System entered a phase of acceleration. This phase has involved the intensification of conflicts, attempts to resolve contentious issues by force, the artificial curtailment of financial and trade-economic relations, and, finally, the imposition of enormous trade duties. Naturally, all

⁵ Since the early 1990s, the United States has entered the apogee of its power. But unexpectedly, it was precisely since the early 1990s that the flow of academic and journalistic literature began to intensify, in which they began to increasingly actively discuss the topic of the decline of this power and, at the same time, the impending emergence of Asia as a leading position (see, for example, Colson and Eckerd 1991; Arrighi 1994, 2007; Frank 1997). And this flow continued and continues (Wallerstein 2003; Buchanan 2002; Kupchan 2003; Todd, 2003; Mandelbaum 2005, 2016; National Intelligence Council 2008, 2012, 2017, 2021; Bell 2012; Chase-Dunn, 2013; Reich and Lebow 2014; Olsen 2021; Lee and Thompson 2018; Thompson 2022; Moyn 2024; see also Grinin L. and Korotayev 2010, 2015, 2020; for a good overview of this literature, see Thompson 2022). There are now a huge number of journalist articles similar to Byers and Schweller 2024, or Hedges 2024; see also Mahrane 2024.

of this undermines the foundations of economic globalization, destroying any possibility of expanding and strengthening ties between the United States and China. On the contrary, sanctions have intensified and expanded friction and conflict between the United States, a weakening hegemon, and China, a rising competitor (see, e.g., Colby, 2021; Burrows and Manning 2022; Mearsheimer 2024a, 2024b).

It appears that, with Donald Trump's new administration, a new stage in the acceleration of World-System reconfiguration has begun under the influence of the chaotic actions of the United States. This stage can be called radical reconfiguration. As a result, we are now caught in a whirlpool of destabilizing events that signal the fairly rapid erosion of the previous world order and could accelerate the end of the "Long American Century," to use the expression of Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (2025).

In recent years, reconfiguration processes have begun to move into the world-system core in the form of various protest actions among the populations of developed countries. Even more importantly, internal political conflicts in the United States have intensified. At the same time, attempts by regional powers to change the American world order have intensified against the backdrop of the internal political split in the United States. In addition, peripheral processes of destabilization within the World-System have also intensified, including Islamist revolutionary movements. Abrupt changes have also shaken a large part of the World-System, especially as a result of COVID-19 (see Grinin L. et al. 2021, 2024a, 2024b).

Trump and his impact on the reconfiguration in general and on the world order

Trump's policy amounts to relinquishing control over the world order. Trump appears to believe that the inherent strength of the United States, including its technological, financial, and economic power, is sufficient to consolidate U.S. leadership in the world, especially if that power is further strengthened, without excessive effort or expense. In this sense, it seems logical that Trump has set the goal of strengthening technological leadership and increasing military spending (Vought 2025; White House 2025).

He also appears to believe that the United States can withdraw from world organizations, or reduce its activity within them, ignore the interests of allies, strengthen isolationism, and reduce its international engagement. At present, apart from support for Israel⁶, the following major lines of Trump's international strategy can be distinguished.

First, Trump has intensified the struggle against so-called globalists in the United States and Europe. By "globalists," Trump and his supporters appear to mean an alliance of left-wing

⁶ Note that, as a result of the unsuccessful Iranian war, this support has begun to weaken noticeably.

and supranational financial groups that generally support global projects and movements, including green initiatives, LGBTQ rights, policies supporting migration, various minority groups, strong social policies, anti-Israeli sentiments, and the promotion of democracy, including through the CIA and other agencies. Of course, left-wing forces and globalist forces have different interests and are far from synonymous. In this case, however, we proceed from Trump's own position, according to which he sees such a coalition within the Democratic Party. This represents a fundamentally new line in U.S. foreign policy⁷.

Second, Trump has attempted to reduce the scope of active U.S. engagement in the Middle East and Europe in order to focus more directly on the Asia-Pacific region. With regard to Europe, this marks a departure from the policy of the Biden administration. With regard to the Middle East, at first glance, it appears to continue the trajectory of U.S. policy since 2012. Yet it now takes a different form. Moreover, the declared intention to lessen U.S. attention to this region remains largely a declaration and has not yet been translated into concrete action⁸.

Third, whereas the United States previously tried to compensate for its weaknesses with the help of allies, Trump now ignores or humiliates those allies. Fourth, he has strengthened the anti-Chinese orientation of U.S. policy. Fifth, he has advanced claims regarding foreign territories, a line of action that the United States has not pursued for more than a century.

In fact, Trump's belief that the United States can reduce its foreign policy activity and expenditures without damaging its global position is fundamentally mistaken. In international politics, geopolitics, and struggles over world order, the logic of the zero-sum game often prevails. In other words, any weakening of U.S. activity creates opportunities for other actors to strengthen their own positions. This marks a new stage in the reconfiguration of the World-System, in which a wider variety of actors will begin to exert influence.

The world order established since the 1990s has rested on several mechanisms. These include, above all, the unconditional hegemony of the United States and the advantages enjoyed by the United States and its allies among world-system core countries; the ability of the United States to prevent border changes and the emergence of regional conflicts; a certain balance of power and some limitation of rivalry in the arms race; a trend toward democratization and respect for human rights (see, for example, Huntington 1993); a system of international organizations that generally supported U.S. dominance; the effort to expand and strengthen

⁷ Accordingly, the State Department is now acting in the exact opposite direction than before. If earlier, for example, the State Department demanded support for diversity policies, including LGBT in a variety of countries, now, on the contrary, it demands a refusal of this support.

⁸ Actually, it is difficult for the USA to leave the Middle East because the United States has an ally there that does not let the US leave it. This is Israel. And it will try to keep the US there (see below for detail).

globalization; and the development of the principle of maximizing competitive advantages in specific areas of economic specialization. This last principle included the expansion of free trade, the freedom of capital movement, compliance with international trade rules, and the imposition of rules that limited the issuance of national currencies, essentially in favor of the United States and its allies.

Much of this order has already weakened, but Trump is deliberately eroding or abandoning many of its remaining foundations. The use of U.S. soft power had already been declining over the past decade, but Trump has effectively abandoned it altogether⁹. Instead, he has embraced power politics.

Trump weakens the Western alliance, reduces U.S. activity, particularly by ignoring global forums¹⁰, and transfers domestic political confrontations onto the international stage. We have repeatedly argued that U.S. foreign policy is excessively subordinated to domestic politics and that foreign policy actions often become the result of domestic political struggle (e.g., Grinin and Korotayev, 2020; Grinin 2023; Grinin A. 2025). However, during Trump's second term, this tendency appears to be acquiring even more hypertrophied features.

Trump, Musk, and others view foreign policy agencies and organizations such as USAID, Voice of America, Radio Liberty, and others, along with institutions designed primarily for domestic policy, as the financial, personnel, and ideological base of their political opponents. In fact, these instruments have historically been used by both Democratic and Republican administrations. They have been just as much instruments of Republican administrations as of Democratic ones. Nevertheless, Trump believes that these organizations have come under the control of Democrats, who, in his view, have used their resources for partisan purposes. This belief has led to the closure of many such centers.

Yet the closure of these institutions also means a reduction in U.S. influence. The rejection of instruments and channels of influence will inevitably entail a decline in that influence.

⁹ It is especially worth noting here the attempt to destroy the American international development agency USAID, as well as the reform and reduction of the staff of the National Security Council, which has been in operation since 1947, and the subordination of this body to the State Department headed by Marco Rubio.

¹⁰ Thus, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio refused to travel to South Africa for the G20 summit in February 2025 (see below) and Trump left G-7 forum on the 16th of June, 2025.

Basic transformations in the World-System

There are three subsections here where we address the weakening of the Western alliance, destroying the Paris world climate agreement, and strengthening potential alternative power centers, as well as rising anti-Americanism.

Weakening of the Western alliance and the world-system core

First, Trump's policy contributes to the weakening of the Western alliance, which had strengthened noticeably under Biden. Russia's "special operation" in Ukraine contributed to greater cohesion among Western countries. This was beneficial to the United States, since it allowed Washington to use pooled resources, weaken the European economy through sanctions, and tie Germany and other countries more closely to the United States. In addition, two further tendencies emerged: first, the consolidation of the Anglo-Saxon world in a number of areas; and second, attempts to expand the military alliance beyond NATO.

The expansion of the Western military alliance was initiated through Anglo-Saxon ties. At the same time, the military alliance among Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, known as AUKUS, was created in September 2021, even before the start of the "special military operation." This alliance is directed against China, which is understandable, since, from the U.S. perspective, the Chinese threat is felt most acutely in the Indo-Pacific region (National Intelligence Council, 2021). To expand the anti-China coalition, the United States is attempting to involve South Korea and Japan in AUKUS, or possibly in a broader NATO+ alliance. Chinese media are correct in pointing out that the United States is seeking to turn Japan into an "Asian Ukraine" (Song Zhongping, 2023). There have already been some successes in this regard. In particular, Japan plans to double its military budget over five years, spending \$320 billion during this period (Chellaney, 2023). This is a very important step because, after World War II, Japan had maintained a ceiling on defense spending of approximately 1 percent of GDP and had no offensive capabilities. That tradition is now being broken.

Of course, this raises the question of whether the Western alliance will remain strong. In the medium term, roughly three to seven years, such an alliance would almost inevitably have cracked, even if the Democrats had remained in power. However, with the return of Donald Trump, the Western alliance has begun to weaken and will likely continue to weaken significantly. Thus, the world-system core, which had already shown signs of fatigue, is weakening noticeably. Moreover, the conflict between the American and European parts of this core is intensifying.

It is also unclear how much progress will be made in strengthening military ties with Japan. Japan is now extremely concerned about the newly introduced tariffs, to such an extent

that it has even begun negotiations with China on joint action. Thus, even in relation to an obvious geopolitical tension, Trump's policy hinders the concentration of resources.

Trump appears to dislike multilateral alliances in general. He seems to believe that they do not strengthen U.S. capabilities but instead weaken them. It is worth recalling that, at the end of Obama's second term, the United States planned to create two major alliances: the Transatlantic and Trans-Pacific partnerships (White House, 2017). Their creation would have allowed the United States to strengthen its influence. However, after Donald Trump came to power in 2017, both projects were abandoned.

If Atlantic unity is now being questioned, or at least if its significance is declining, the role of the Asia-Pacific region in U.S. policy is only growing. Since 2022, NATO has experienced a revival, with Sweden and Finland joining the organization. Yet this may prove to have been the last major expansion of the military alliance. Trump's nihilistic attitude toward NATO will most likely weaken it, despite his demands for increased military spending and despite the commitments made in The Hague in June 2025.

Destroying the Paris world climate agreement

Donald Trump denies the concept and facts surrounding global warming. In 2017, he withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement. One of the main pillars of his campaign and second term was his promise to eliminate all incentives and subsidies related to green energy and electric vehicles. He fulfilled these commitments (unlike several others), thereby breaking the established climate alliance with Europe and other OECD countries. Trump views energy, particularly carbon-based energy, as the foundation not only of the US economy but also of its technological leadership, given the sharp increase in energy demand for AI development. Accordingly, all US commitments to limit carbon emissions are currently not fulfilled. Naturally, this greatly discourages other countries, especially those in the Global South, from fulfilling their climate commitments. Worse, he once again withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement, making it significantly less significant. We have already examined the relationship between the processes of destabilization of the World-System and the growth of their negative impact on the environment on the pages of this journal (Grinin L. & Grinin A. 2025), therefore, with regard to the climate crisis, we will limit ourselves to only these brief remarks, which, naturally, does not mean diminishing the importance of taking into account the crisis associated with climate change.

Strengthening potential alternative power centers and rising anti-Americanism

In parallel with the weakening of the world-system core, centers of power associated with so-called revisionist states, including China, Russia, Turkey, Iran, North Korea, and others, as well as BRICS, have strengthened. In effect, the former world-system semi-periphery is shifting closer to the core.

Anti-Americanism has also been growing in recent years. With Trump's arrival, however, this process has accelerated. Given the growing importance of the Global South, this represents an increasingly negative factor for the United States and its global influence¹¹. This negative effect will likely intensify further as a result of reductions in foreign aid, much of which has gone to countries in the Global South. This is aside from the impact of Trump's tariffs on anti-American sentiment.

Below, we will discuss the weakening of Europe in greater detail.

In this article, we will not discuss the history, outcomes, or possible future trajectory of the war with Iran, since this topic requires a separate article, or even a series of articles. However, it is important to emphasize that Trump has undermined the perception of U.S. invincibility. In doing so, he has further accelerated the disintegration of the contemporary world order, discouraged American's allies in the Gulf, and opened new opportunities for powers that challenge the U.S.-centric world order. The main question is now: can the U.S disentangle from Hormuz trap and move from the MENA to ATR? This will be the hardest task for both Trump and America and maybe for the next president.

The weakening of Europe: will Europe leave the world-system core?

Zbigniew Brzezinski devoted the chapter "The U.S. Core Objective" in his famous book *The Grand Chessboard* (1997) entirely to U.S.–Europe relations. He argued that the United States needed to promote a united Europe that would be not merely a junior ally, but a true partner. This meant sharing both decision-making and responsibility. In his view, American support for these aspirations would give new impetus to the transatlantic dialogue and encourage Europeans to think more seriously about the role Europe could play in the world (Brzezinski, 1997).

In 2013, when U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland was reminded of the need to coordinate U.S. actions in Ukraine with the European Union, she responded rudely:

¹¹ Let us recall that US Secretary of State Marco Rubio refused to go to South Africa for the G20 summit in February 2025. What is important is that he refused to do this under the pretext of anti-Americanism in South Africa (Savage 2025). With this approach, anti-Americanism will only intensify.

“F**k the EU.” In 2024, Andreas Kluth compared Europe and America to two tectonic plates of geopolitics that had long been moving in opposite directions. Washington, he argued, was drifting away from the strategic transatlanticism of the Cold War era and toward the Asia-Pacific region. As a result, weakening U.S. attention to Europe appeared inevitable (Kluth, 2024). In 2025, U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance stated directly that Europe would receive reduced attention in U.S. geostrategy, a point discussed in greater detail below. This suggests that Europe is now of only limited strategic interest to the United States.

The United States is no longer capable of being strong everywhere, despite what its doctrine had previously claimed (see Kluth, 2024; Hedges, 2024; Byers and Schweller, 2024). Beginning with Barack Obama, the United States attempted, though not very successfully, to regroup its forces by withdrawing from the Middle East and proclaiming “America’s Pacific Century” (Clinton, 2011). However, leaving the Middle East proved difficult. The United States still maintains a tenacious hold on the region. Moreover, it has contributed to chaos in a number of Near and Middle Eastern countries, from Libya to Afghanistan and, more recently, together with Turkey, in Syria, while continuing to hope undermining regimes in other countries, especially in Iran. It is difficult for the United States to leave the Middle East because it has an ally that will not allow it to do so: Israel. Israel will try to keep the United States engaged in the region (note that just as a result of such excessive influence anti-Israeli moods at the moment are strengthening). Indeed, although Trump, both personally and through Vance, has announced that the United States will focus on the Asia-Pacific region, he is also actively courting the Gulf monarchies.

The United States, now experiencing a shortage of various resources, is trying to free itself from the burden of hegemony by leaving Europe to provide more of its own military and strategic support. At the end of Obama’s second term, the United States planned to create two major alliances: the Transatlantic and Trans-Pacific partnerships. Their creation would have allowed the United States to strengthen its influence. However, after Donald Trump came to power, both projects became unnecessary. If Atlantic unity is now being questioned, or at least if its significance is declining, the role of the Asia-Pacific region in U.S. policy is only growing.

Shifting its focus toward the Asia-Pacific region, where conflict and tension are likely to increase in the coming decades and where various alliances and strategic combinations will be formed. In this regard, more and more analysts believe that, as the United States concentrates on Asia, it will push Europe into the background and treat it as a secondary direction in American strategy (Russtrat, 2023). While we generally agree with this assessment, we would nevertheless emphasize that leaving Europe will not be easy for the United States. It will be no easier than leaving the Middle East and, most likely, even more difficult.

The reason is that European powers, unlike those in the Middle East, have become so accustomed to American direction that they can hardly imagine life without it. In other words, Europe's loss of sovereignty, combined with its reluctance to regain it, makes it insufficiently active. This greatly distinguishes Europe from the rising countries of Asia and even Africa, where the desire for sovereignty is growing. The most the United States can achieve is an increase in military spending by European countries and an imitation of attempts to create some form of pan-European military structure. Perhaps, under American pressure, Europe will also adopt additional measures that are economically disadvantageous to itself. Some industrial enterprises may relocate to the United States, but if industry leaves Europe, especially Germany, it will likely move primarily to Asia.

The new U.S. administration has expressed its position on Europe quite clearly in Vice President J.D. Vance's speech. In short, European countries should play a much larger role in the future of their own continent. This means that Europe should increase its military spending and solve European problems independently (including the military help to Ukraine) so that the United States can focus on other regions and threats (Lu, 2025). In any case, all of this will weaken Europe. It will transform Europe from a geopolitical center of the World-System into a semi-core and, eventually, into a semi-periphery. It will also aggravate the actual isolation of the West from the global majority, unless radical changes occur, such as the arrival of right-wing nationalists to real power. Incidentally, Elon Musk, apparently on behalf of Donald Trump, has begun actively declaring support for such forces though after the falling of Trump's prestige such a support rather harms the right-wing European leaders than helps them (as Orban example showed).

Accordingly, the role of the G7 will also decline, as is already becoming visible. Trump's idea of inviting Russia back into the G7 may make sense from the standpoint of reducing global tensions, but it would clearly weaken the Western alliance.

Some European leaders have already begun to sound the alarm even before Thrump's second administarion. Mario Draghi, the former president of the European Central Bank, former prime minister of Italy, and unofficial leader of European technocrats, published a 400-page report on competitiveness commissioned by the European Commission in 2023 (Draghi, 2024). The report's conclusions are bleak for Europe. Europe is lagging technologically, stagnating economically, and has effectively lost its driving forces of development. It is also ceasing to function as an independent subject of international relations. It is especially striking that, after many European elites had recently denied, and in some cases still deny, the need for economic growth, they are now beginning to sound the alarm over its absence.

At the press conference accompanying the report's publication, Draghi stated that only "unprecedented" reform could stop Europe's decline. If EU members ignore his report, Draghi predicted a bleak future (Geopolitique, 2024).

Commentators on Draghi's report and speech have been quite pessimistic about the prospects for implementing the reforms he proposed. Without such reforms, Europe will continue to move from being part of the First World toward becoming part of the Third World (Mortimer, 2024). One cannot but agree with Draghi's conclusions. However, it may also be assumed that Draghi, like other top European bureaucrats, is concerned not only about the serious threats and risks facing Europe but also about the possibility of strengthening his own power. After all, who would carry out these "unprecedented" reforms? Brussels.

Draghi stated that Europe needs additional annual investment of at least 750 billion euros, or about 5 percent of the EU's total GDP, if it wants to catch up with the United States and avoid losing ground to China. This is an enormous amount of money, much of which would likely be managed by European bureaucrats. Therefore, the keen interest of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in the report is understandable (Mortimer, 2024).

However, we would not be surprised if an overseas ally stood behind these proposals, especially given that the United States has recently been looking increasingly for opportunities to use the resources of its satellites for its own purposes. Recently, European countries have become more active, with France and Germany setting the tone, in seeking to strengthen Europe's military-technical and military-industrial self-sufficiency. This is especially true in light of Trump's desire to end the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and his threats either to charge Europe for the presence of American military bases or to leave NATO altogether.

The decline of Europe, like that of the United States, did not begin today; it has been unfolding for decades. In this regard, the statement that "the decline of the West is by no means unexpected" (Darbon, 2019) is entirely correct. Unfortunately, there are not yet any visible forces or trends capable of stopping the "decline of Europe" or the "self-liquidation" of the cultural identity of some of its countries.

Oswald Spengler ends the second volume of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Spengler, 1922) by arguing that the task set by historical necessity will be resolved in any case, whether with the participation of each individual or in spite of it. Beginning with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, many thinkers believed that historical necessity, or, in the words of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "iron necessity," is realized in any case. Is Europe's loss of cultural identity a historical necessity in this sense? We do not believe that the future is predetermined. Unfortunately, however, we do not yet see forces capable of stopping this process.

We have repeatedly argued that the Great Convergence is reducing the gap between the levels of development of the West and the developing world (e.g., Grinin and Korotayev, 2015; Grinin A., 2025; Grinin et al., 2025). At the same time, this gap is being reduced not only because less developed countries are catching up with more developed ones, but also because the level of development in more developed countries is declining. This is what we are now seeing in Europe. It is therefore possible that the “task” set before Europe by historical necessity is to pull the previously backward world up to a higher level at the cost of its own decline. But this is a sad task for Europe.

Trump’s arrival, however, unexpectedly gives Europe a chance to find the strength to rise. Europe therefore faces a fateful dilemma. Either it will find the strength to begin strengthening its own geopolitical position, or it will begin to slide inexorably from the world-system core toward the semi-periphery, at least in terms of its geopolitical significance.

Conclusion: Can Trump’s policies be seen as an attempt at revolution from above?

Trump’s return to power has dramatically altered many trends in world politics and economics that previously seemed unshakable. Although the new Trump administration has been in power for a relatively short time, it has already produced many changes and consequences. We believe that Trump and his team are attempting to transform the American administrative and ideological systems through essentially revolutionary methods. However, this is a revolution from above¹², and therefore it differs from an ordinary revolution while also sharing many similarities with classical revolutions. We discuss this below.

This revolution, however, is not confined to the United States. Because of the special, leading, and central position of the United States in the World-System, and because of the course pursued by the Trump administration, we must in fact speak of a revolution in the World-System itself. This revolution is not taking place in competing centers of power, but in the very core of

¹² The theory of “revolution from above” was formulated by Ellen Trimberger (1978). Trimberger’s approach to studying “revolutions from above” stems from her dissatisfaction with the theory of revolution. She studies so-called “unusual” attempts at revolution across several countries, in which military bureaucrats played the main role in regime transformation. Such transformations differ from both coups and mass revolutions. Trimberger defines a revolution as an “extralegal takeover of the central state apparatus which destroys the economic and political power of the dominant social group” (Trimberger 1978: 3). Note that many of Trump’s actions, executive orders, and interpretations are extralegal or can be considered so. This is evidenced by numerous court cases challenging and reversing his executive orders and actions. These include, in particular, the expulsion of immigrants, the deployment of the National Guard as a police force, the dismissal of government employees, the closure of agencies, and the imposition of tariffs. This applies even more so to the Trump administration’s actions in relation to international law, as well as to the abuse of presidential authority over the authority of Congress (in particular, Trump’s authority to conduct military action in Venezuela is being challenged).

the World-System¹³. This is a rather unexpected turn and an atypical form of transition from one type of world order to another.

The word “revolution” has many connotations, both positive and negative. We have written extensively on this issue elsewhere (see, for example, Grinin 2022a; Grinin and Grinin 2022b; Grinin and Korotayev 2022; Goldstone et al. 2022; Korotayev, Grinin et al. 2022, 2025).

If we consider revolution in a neutral sense, it can be characterized by several features. First, revolution entails drastic changes in basic institutions and relations, usually carried out through the destruction of these institutions with the use of legitimate or illegitimate violence. In the activities of the forces supporting Trump, both forms of violence are mixed. Given the peculiarities of the American system of power, it is not surprising that the main struggle against him is taking place in the legal sphere within the United States, as well as in the sphere of international agreements and norms that have functioned as international rules. Second, this restructuring occurs within a relatively short period. Third, it is associated with a particular ideology of the “revolutionaries”¹⁴. All of these characteristics are clearly visible in Trump’s activities. It is therefore not surprising that the question of whether Trump is a revolutionary is being actively debated in global political journalism and political science (*The Economist* Editors, 2025; Walt, 2025; Trenin, 2025).

Using this understanding of revolution and revolutionary methods, it is worth noting that all major transformations of the modern World-System since the late eighteenth century have been, to a greater or lesser extent, associated with revolutions. Revolutions usually arise during periods of crisis connected with major economic and political phenomena, including world-systemic or global economic crises, major wars, and political upheavals. In this regard, world-systems theory allows for more accurate forecasting. Some forms of sociopolitical revolution on a world-system scale are highly likely to occur in the relatively near future. For one such forecast, see Chase-Dunn and Nagy (2022).

In relation to the World-System, what is now occurring is the destruction of very important, albeit already unstable, foundations of the American order. The arrival of the Donald Trump administration appears to mark a new stage in the destabilization and dismantling of the American world order. The actions of this administration are expressed in the conscious dismantling of many structures necessary for maintaining that order. If U.S. policy continues in

¹³ In connection with the strong opposition in American society during the 2020 election campaign, we have already noted many signs similar to the revolutionary situation in the United States during this period. See Grinin 2020.

¹⁴ For Trumpists, it is the ideology of great-power nationalism “Make America great again” instead of the ideology of America as an example for other countries.

this direction, we can forecast that the destruction of the modern world order will proceed more rapidly. At the same time, after some period, and despite Trump's declarations that he would like to reduce the severity of military-political contradictions, relations may become more aggravated in certain respects. Although it is still early to draw conclusions, it is likely that Donald Trump will begin to return to previous methods, perhaps in different and may be even more aggressive forms. The kidnapping of president Maduro, Iranian war as well as de facto end to mediation in ending the Russian-Ukrainian conflict confirm this conclusion of ours.

On the other hand, much of what Trump destroyed or canceled will very likely be restored in some form over time. To illustrate this last point, consider the attempt to dismantle the U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID. As noted above, this substantially reduces U.S. "soft power." After some time, the effects of this reduction will likely become more acutely felt, since the State Department, the CIA, and other government structures will come to recognize the need for such an instrument. Therefore, we believe that sooner or later, and probably sooner rather than later, the United States will be forced to return to the practice of USAID in some form.

The outcomes of revolutions can vary greatly. They may be positive, negative, or even sharply negative. Quite often, revolutionary cycles and attempts to transform institutions end with a return to older relations (see Grinin and Korotayev 2022). Naturally, the assessment of revolutionary consequences depends on the analytical perspective adopted; what appears positive from one point of view may appear negative from another. It is still too early to assess the results of Trump's "revolution." However, it can be assumed that, in general, they will be rather negative for the United States and positive for those powers that seek to improve their positions in the world, or "revisionist" powers in American terminology. For the World-System as a whole, however, the consequences will likely be negative in the short term, and possibly in the medium term as well, if assessed from the perspective of increasing conflict, turbulence, and instability.

The transformation of the world order in the context of World-System reconfiguration has recently become increasingly visible. The period we are experiencing is acquiring clear features of a transition from one system of world order to another. History suggests that such periods are characterized by turbulence, the destruction of familiar institutions, increased conflict, and deterioration in the economic situation. Trump's attempt to carry out a revolution from above, both in the United States and in the World-System, may sharply strengthen all these negative characteristics.

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