

## Social and Political Development Strategies: Global Pandemic Challenges (Covid-19)

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### Abstract

Even English historian A. Toynbee claimed that each new generation of the "creative minority" (elite) periodically faced challenges of the time, to which it had to seek and give an adequate response. In case of an unsatisfactory answer, this "creative minority" should leave the historical stage, giving way to the more competent elite. The coronavirus crisis experienced by the global community in 2020 has become such a global challenge of our time for many people. And the public can make conclusions about the professional training and level of competence of the ruling elite groups judging from how effectively they cope with this challenge. But even now it can already be stated that the crisis has revealed a number of significant systemic failures in the functioning of political elites - their slow reaction to the event, disunity, clip consciousness and underestimation of the degree of risk, resources and their own capabilities. This article is devoted to the analysis of all these problems.

**Keywords:** elite, identity, world crisis, coronavirus (Covid-19), shock, chaos, threats, conflicts, responsibility, solidarity, world leadership, globalism

### 1. Introduction

The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic that broke out in early 2020 posed a very serious challenge to all ruling political elites and their leaders, associated not only with the fight against the virus itself, but also with economic and political problems. The world financial and economic crisis of 2008 received a new wave, which became a logical continuation of those events. (Stiglitz, 2011; Stiglitz, 2016) It turned out that the world community has not overcome the 2008 crisis. Experts and politicians pretended that it had gone somewhere, disappeared. But in reality, the crisis was developing latently and gaining strength. And then the year 2020 came and all these carefully concealed ulcers of the unipolar world were exposed and aggravated to their extreme limits. The world was engulfed by a new wave of the global crisis.

At the same time, the position on the objectivity of globalization processes, or, more precisely, on the objectivity of the processes of global transformation of the state, law, and politics, was quite well-established in modern geopolitical practice. This point of view represented the fact that the world is moving towards universal value

orientations, towards political standardization, towards right-wing unification and socio-cultural typification. However, the period of the pandemic debunked this ideological myth. It showed that every society and state can rely only on itself and on the power and administrative competence of its governments, on the systems of its medical, public and other institutions. After the pandemic, if one can speak about the old perspective of globalism, he can do it only from the position of interstate cooperation, regional or global solutions of acute social, biological and other problems. However, this does not mean that the process of global unification of national legislation, the withering away of the sovereign quality of state power is objective. It is obvious that today the practice of state cooperation is becoming more relevant, the emergence of global or regional economic, environmental and political platforms focused on solving various problems, which objectively forces states to intensify cooperation, to search for the most effective forms and mechanisms of joint activities, support and difficult crisis situations. Of course, this is an objective pattern of modern reality. The political elite and the political process of modern societies, figuratively speaking, are being reoriented to national problems in the context of world and global challenges, and the management strategy includes new challenges associated with new regimes of self-isolation and with the reorientation of the political system to new challenges and threats. The agenda is changing rapidly.

In addition, the current crisis gives elite science an excellent opportunity to investigate the anatomy of political elites at the very moment when the crisis has suddenly worsened for them. Covid-19 is regarded by many analysts as a “black swan” because no one expected it and therefore they turned out to be unprepared for it. The elites had to look for an optimal strategy of behavior just in the course of the development of these events and not always they did it in the proper form. As you know, the “*black swan*” (TBS, *The Black Swan*) is always a factor of unpredictability; it is a surprise with significant consequences. (Nassim, 2007) The purpose of this work is to assess current events that are not yet completed and therefore are rationally extremely unpredictable. The object of this work will be a new wave of the global financial and economic crisis provoked by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the subject will be the reaction of the world's political elites to these events.

Politics tried to blame the coronavirus of the problem of the economy. Experts are confident that the pandemic will only exacerbate and expose the accumulated problems of the global economic crisis. Covid-19 has become a convenient pretext for attributing economic and political failures, failures of the globalization project and other unpopular decisions of the authorities. A pandemic-triggered crisis is most often defined as a shock that engenders the horror experienced by politics and economics in the first half of 2020.

## 2. The Problem of the Crisis

The current generation of humanity has faced the largest and most serious political and economic crisis. The decisions that politicians and experts will make in the coming years are likely to shape the world for a lot of coming years. These decisions will affect not only national health systems, but also economics, politics and culture. Governments must act quickly and decisively, considering the long-term consequences of their actions. When choosing between alternatives, experts must ask themselves not only how to overcome the immediate threat, but also what kind of world humanity will live in after this coronavirus storm. Quarantine psychologically suppresses the civilian population - the economic crisis has aggravated the social position of the public majority. Life in self-isolation pulls a person out of society, deprives him of his usual comfort zone. Humanity, of course, will overcome this storm, but it will have to live in a completely different world.

The main thing that was struck by the coronavirus was not so much the people themselves, as the economy of specific states. In expert circles and in the highest political communities, the topic of losses with which a particular state will get out of the coronavirus idle economy is being discussed. The quality of the forecast leaves much to be desired, because in the models they describe, very often there is no analysis of causal relationships, but some abstract relationships are outlined.

The new wave of the global economic crisis being experienced in 2020 may become a prelude to a global catastrophe that may happen to the world within the next year. Moreover, this crisis will be of a global nature, i.e. it will affect not only the sphere of economic and financial relations, but also the areas of politics, culture, science. Many factors point to such a scenario of the development of the events, which individually characterize the present state of affairs as increasing chaos.

Economic problems due to the coronavirus pandemic have led not only to an increase in the number of unemployment, but also to inflation, a crisis of confidence and a decrease in the psychological stability of political elites. The crisis intensifies national egoism at the state level and elite egocentrism at the government level. The American futurist T. Frey believes that all this will inevitably affect politicians and the existing format of power. “It’s unthinkable to consider that after things have died down, leaders will not be severely criticized for bad decisions. We’ve gone from the ‘happiness in ignorance’ formula to the time when we know there is a problem, but

don't know what to do about it.” (Frey, 2020).

The only thing that can be worse than a war is global chaos, when everyone ceases to be themselves (as they were before) and become free radicals, destroying any security system (Vorontsov, 2013). The world economy is already beginning to collapse uncontrollably. The rules of the game are crumbling. The USA is no longer able to be the first one, China is ready to be only the second. The imbalance of power intensifies the threat of economic wars between the world's leading manufacturers. In the United States, coronavirus has become a political fact - elites have begun to use it actively, exploiting the fear of a pandemic.

The economic losses can become truly catastrophic. In the course of a new wave of the global financial and economic crisis, well-known brands may disappear, leading world currencies and exchanges, TNCs, etc. may lose their strength. And the reason for this will be bankruptcy. Bankruptcy epidemic. Bankruptcy of the entire financial and economic system built around the dollar. None of the economists know how the world economy will recover from this pandemic. Forecasts vary. The risk of chaos is increasing. The global system has become extremely unstable. Scientific diagnostics gives multidirectional forecasts. Numerous cracks and contradictions arise within the once allied elites (Mamychev, Okhottsky, Frolov, Ponedelkov, Vorontsov, 2019). As an illustration, we will cite just one case of their political reality in recent times.

During the epidemic of the coronavirus in the European Union, there was “a certain oddity” - the question of sanctions against Germany arose. Sanctions against “illiberal” Hungary were normal, the same actions against authoritarian Poland were also reasonable, but the sanctions procedures against the very center of the EU in the person of Germany are simply unprecedented. According to the Russian Senator A. Pushkov, in this way “the European bureaucracy asserts its priority over certain member states ... That is why Britain “made legs” from the EU: it was unbearable for the former empire to keep pace with the decisions of the Kafkaesque nameless bureaucrats.” (Corona virus, 2020). It all started with the fact that in May 2020, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, threatened to start proceedings against Germany in connection with the decision of the German Constitutional Court of May 5 on the partial inconsistency of the actions of the European Central Bank with the fundamental law of Germany. The decision of the Constitutional Court of the Federal Republic of Germany of May 5, 2020 became “epochal”, because the EU unity was dealt a “crushing blow” - the highest national judicial body of Germany condemned and called the European Central Bank's policy unconstitutional. The paradox of this dispute between Brussels and Berlin is that the former subordinate of A. Merkel, Ursula von der Leyen, came into conflict with the court of her own country.

Since the onset of the coronavirus crisis, the ECB has been buying up debts from public and private enterprises across Europe and then printing money to counterbalance the situation. The Constitutional Court of Germany blamed The European Central Bank of reducing the cost of the common currency and thereby creating a situation of social injustice, since it hit the pocket of ordinary citizens of Germany. (Coronavirus, 2020). The disintegration of the EU was predicted by the American billionaire D. Soros, whose “dramatic” predictions often do not come true. In the European Union, everyone is accustomed to the fact that Germany always pays for everyone, since it is considered the informal leader of the EU and is most interested in its preservation. The conflict has shown that the Germans do not want to take responsibility for the populist and ill-considered decisions of other countries. Germany itself is least of all interested in the collapse of the EU, since it is the main exporter of products to the European market and the main beneficiary of the single currency in the form of the euro. Berlin receives from the union much more than other countries. Therefore, FRG has to reckon with the European bureaucracy, which it itself imposed on Europe, while receiving enormous benefits from this. The position of the FRG again turned out to be diametrically opposite to that of Great Britain, which went to an open break with the EU. Brexit appeared to be a tangible blow to the entire European unity.

### **3. The Problem of Overcoming the Crisis**

The problem of overcoming the crisis has become the most discussed in the scientific and expert community lately. In assessing the “new wave” of the global crisis in 2020, at least two positional approaches have formed: 1) the position of concern about the problem of returning to the pre-crisis model of development (with high speculative incomes and the hegemony of a monopolar world) and 2) the position asserting that there will be no return to the old system and the world must radically change, throwing off unnecessary and burdening obligations. The struggle between these two positions predetermines the general course of the discussion ongoing in the highest echelons of power and in the scientific expert community (Kapto, Uvarova, Mamychev, Ponedelkov, Vorontsov, 2019).

In the speeches of many political leaders their clip thinking and the inability to objectively perceive and adequately assess the situation as a whole could be felt. The threat was simply underestimated by many, and economic and political considerations prevailed over security. At the same time, their own resources and capabilities to overcome

this crisis were also incorrectly assessed. The forecasts of scientists, too, were either late, or so approximate that they did not bring clarity to the assessment of the situation.

As the world mass media testify, for most Western political analysts, the way out of the crisis is not going into the future, but into the past - the desire to return to the status quo. In fact, there is a struggle for the preservation of the system. At the same time, its disadvantages are not noticed, which in itself leads to its destruction. According to the WHO, the pandemic has locked up about a third of the world's population in homes. Speaking about the coronavirus pandemic, many scientists note that its consequences can touch the very foundations of society. (Frey, 2020). And this can lead to fundamental changes in the social order. The restoration will take place. The main question is - at what cost?

Back in March 2020, German Chancellor A. Merkel said that in the context of the coronavirus, the country needs solidarity comparable to that which was shown during the Second World War. "The coronavirus is dramatically changing life in our country. Our understanding of normality, social life, social interaction are all being tested like never before. Millions of you cannot go to work, your children cannot go to school or attend kindergartens, theaters, cinemas and shops are closed, and perhaps most difficult thing is that we all lack the meetings that are usually taken for granted." (Merkel, 2020). The politician believed that the effectiveness of the authorities' actions would directly depend on the solidarity and responsibility of citizens. In such critical conditions, it turned out to be important to prevent the spread of false information and panic rumors.

The authorities of many countries have faced unfounded criticism concerning their chosen strategy to combat the coronavirus. So, the Swedish government did not introduce strict quarantine, deciding that the country's population should get sick with the coronavirus so that the Swedes "develop collective immunity" to the virus. The authorities believed that if people get sick with the coronavirus, the virus will lose its strength and lose its danger. As a result, her strategy was sharply criticized both within Sweden itself and by its closest neighbors, who were in no hurry to open their borders with the "dangerous neighbor."

#### **4. Political Elites and World Leadership Strategies**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, collective paralysis gripped the international community. For a long time the governors of the leading countries could not concentrate on solving this problem and they remained inactive. It took the leaders of the G7 and G20 too long to decide what to do. Politicians clearly lacked the manifestation of leadership qualities. They lost time, which turned out to be the most important value. The mortality rate from Covid-19 of the countries of the leaders of the Anglo-Saxon world (USA and Great Britain) is also not in their favor. (Harris, 2020)

The United States have dominated the world political Olympus in recent decades. But in 2020 Olympus has become empty. The hegemon has gone away. It has simply pulled itself away. During the previous global crises, such as the 2008 financial crisis and the 2014 Ebola epidemic, the United States took on a global leadership role. But the current US administration has abdicated the leadership position by itself. It made it clear that it cares about America's greatness much more than about the future of humanity. (Harari, 2020) All allied agreements were violated. Consensus among Western political elites began to break down. In the fight against Covid-19, everyone began to manifest their national egocentrism quite actively.

D. Trump's administration has abandoned even its closest allies. When it banned all travel from the EU, it did not even give the EU advance notice - let alone consult with the EU about this drastic measure. The scandal with Germany became more famous around the world, when the US authorities offered a German pharmaceutical company \$ 1 billion to acquire monopoly rights for a new vaccine against Covid-19. (Harari, 2020) Even if the current administration eventually changes the course and develops a global roadmap, a leader who never takes responsibility, who never admits mistakes and who usually takes full responsibility for himself leaving all the blame to others will have very few followers.

Experts fear that in case the void left by the United States is not filled by other countries, not only it will be much more difficult to stop the current epidemic, but also its legacy will continue to poison international relations for years to come. Nevertheless, every crisis is also an opportunity. We must hope that the current epidemic will help humanity to recognize the acute danger posed by global disunity. (Harari, 2020) The main initiators and beneficiaries of US globalization have used it for the prosperity of their multinational corporations. The schemes worked out over many decades brought the profit necessary for prosperity. (Stiglitz, 2011) Their speculative practice largely provoked the global crisis in 2008, and became the reason for its prolongation.

The withdrawal of the United States from the political Olympus means the end of the history of their world domination. Another end of history being experienced by the world community negatively affects the psyche of

former political leaders, whose behavior is becoming more nervous and less predictable.

### 5. A New End of History

For some, the coronavirus epidemic appeared as a socio-political apocalypse. Numerous statements have appeared that we are currently experiencing the death of the old world and the birth of a new one. That the world is rapidly changing and will never be the same as it was before. G. Kissinger once remarked: "If you are an ordinary person, you can prepare for war having moved to the countryside, but you must take your weapon with you, as hordes of hungry will be roaming everywhere. Although the elite will have their own havens and shelters for specialists, they must be just as careful during the war as ordinary citizens, as their shelters will also be threatened." (Kissinger, 2012)

*The history "before" and the history "after" the coronavirus may turn into two completely different histories. And there are good reasons for this. Supporters of liberal values fear that the digital control over citizens introduced during the quarantine may persist even after it is canceled. Even the most liberal countries of the Western world (Great Britain, USA, Japan) have tightened such control. As noted by Russian experts, "every new crisis requires a response and, as a rule, the most effective response is possible through centralization."* (Kaveshnikov, 2017: 22)

There is no unity in the expert scientific community. The disunity of scientists is akin to the disunity of politicians. Experts admit that the problem is that none of them know exactly how to deal with Covid-19 and what the coming years might bring. Video surveillance technology is developing at a breakneck pace, and what seemed like science fiction 10 years ago is old news today. The strengthening of state control over citizens is perceived by many people as a restriction of their civil rights and freedoms. Numerous speculations on this topic only increase uncertainty and stir up panic around the fight against coronavirus. The data obtained by the authorities is accumulated and analyzed by government algorithms. The algorithms will know that you are sick even before you become aware of it, and they will also know where you were and who you met. The chains of infection can be drastically shortened, or even reduced altogether. Such a system can stop an epidemic within a few days. (Harari, 2020)

But the main one turns out to be another crisis, which began at the end of the 20th century. This is a crisis of ideas. The political elites found themselves in an acute shortage of new ideas. They practically do not have them. "There is a strong demand of new ideas for a fundamentally changing world, where after the exit of communism and now, apparently, of democratic liberalism, a dangerous but promising vacuum has formed, the filling of which will largely determine the future of mankind and the positions of countries in it. The correlation of factors that in the future will determine the aggregate power of states, their ability to defend their interests is not completely understood yet. Revealing such a balance is the most important task facing the science of international relations. But it is already obvious that this will not be primarily economic power, as it was believed a decade or two ago. To a much greater extent this will be military, as well as ideological power. The quality of political leadership and elites is inextricably linked to the latter." (Karaganov, 2020) The crisis of globalism is a consequence of the crisis of the dogmas of liberalism, which has lost confidence in itself, degenerating into frank authoritarianism. In this sense, *the new end of history is the end of the history of the dominance of liberalism as a global value system.*

It is the elites that are fully responsible for the formation of new conceptual ideas. In this case, we are talking not only about political, but also about scientific elites. "It is believed that great national ideas should appear from below, from society. This is a protection for intellectual laziness or unwillingness to go forward. Ideas have always been produced by leaders or elites, sometimes by international groups of elites. Another thing is that they must correspond to the real needs and demands of societies. Otherwise, they will not "take off", they will be rejected." (Karaganov, 2020)

Some politicians try to portray criticism of their opponents as "new" ideas. So in May 2020, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi called the coronavirus "the greatest disaster in the history of the country." She said the \$ 3 trillion new aid package proposed by the Democrats is "mostly" built on four previous bills aimed to support the economy. She warned that "inaction is the most costly route." Pelosi criticized the Republicans, who are skeptical about the need to spend such a huge amount of money, taking into account the fact that three trillion dollars were already allocated to support the economy in the past, and the Federal Reserve continues to lend to businesses. (Pelosi, 2020) It is natural that the main culprit for the outbreak of the pandemic among Democrats in the United States became President D. Trump, who by his incompetence inflicted tangible harm on the American nation. According to Trump himself, Democrats engage in outright populism in an attempt to hide the miscalculations of their previous administrations and the corruption crimes of individual Democratic Party leaders.

The pessimistic scenarios include the statements of the French politician Marine Le Pen, who back in February 2020 demanded that France leave the EU (so called "Frexit") following the example of Great Britain (so called "Brexit"). (Garach, 2020) In May 2020, she announced that the coronavirus heralds the collapse of the European

Union in the USSR scenario. (Coronavirus, 2020) The European bureaucracy has surrounded itself on all sides with various kinds of declarations and protocols, which make it extremely clumsy and inert. Hence, the strengthening of mutual accusations of the wrong strategy chosen by the elites to combat Covid-19 and the shifting of personal responsibility onto some abstract collective communities appear. Apparently, the current ruling elites do not even have the strength to relinquish responsibility and once again get out of the wave of the global crisis remaining dry.

## 6. Conclusions

The reactions of political elites to the 2020 coronavirus crisis were various and ambiguous in the assessments of experts and the public. In fact, we are talking about the ability to survive in new conditions and to respond to new challenges of history adequately. The political thinking of the ruling elites revealed inertness of thinking and blind faith in the old "proven political formulas." The leading Western political elites, even in the face of a new wave of the global crisis, have decided not to change anything - everything should remain as before. The crisis was accompanied by the growth of chaos and the splitting of the political consciousness of the ruling elites. The fight against coronavirus should unite, not divide, the global community. (Des futurologues, 2020) But in practice we see the opposite so far.

There was uncertainty in the statements of many national leaders, which was caused by ignorance of the real state of affairs. The crisis revealed a number of significant systemic failures in the structure of elite communities, their inability to agree fundamentally on the most important problems. The general reaction to the events was inhibited. Leaders lacked solidarity not only with other leaders, but even within their own elite.

The coronavirus crisis is, first of all, a crisis of the elites, which led to an increase in psychosis and chaos of political thinking. Western elites are burnt-out systems. All the mechanisms of elite formation turned out to be ineffective in practice. All this points to a systemic crisis within the elites themselves point to the loss of their elite identity. They not only cease to fulfill their elite functions, but also cease to feel themselves elites. Many pretend that they are fighting to preserve the system, but in fact, everyone's selfishness is intensifying the crisis itself. Quarantine has become a kind of test for the responsibility of both states and citizens themselves. But not everyone succeeded in passing this test.

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