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## LEADERSHIP AND HEGEMONY IN GEOSTRATEGY OF INFORMAL NEO-EMPIRES

## ЛІДЕРСТВО ТА ГЕГЕМОНІЯ В ГЕОСТРАТЕГІЇ НЕФОРМАЛЬНИХ НЕОІМПЕРІЙ

## ЛИДЕРСТВО И ГЕГЕМОНИЯ В ГЕОСТРАТЕГИИ НЕФОРМАЛЬНЫХ НЕОИМПЕРИЙ

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**Abstract.** *The article analyzes the controversial issues of the relationship between leadership and hegemony in international relations, especially in the context of geostrategy of the informal neo-empires. Ideally, leadership of the certain actor means that other actors voluntarily accept its proposed values, norms and rules, recognize its authority to implement a policy for the realization of common goals. Hegemony is the dominance of a particular actor (hegemon) over other actors, establishing his controls over them, imposing its political, economic and cultural values. Hegemony in international relations is carried out usually covertly and often presented as a leadership. Leadership and hegemony are possible at various levels of the geopolitical organization in the world. We treat leadership and hegemony as mechanisms of implementation of a geostrategy of powerful actors of international relations, particularly of informal neo-empires. Each of the contemporary informal neo-empires develops and implements geostrategy, aimed at ensuring its hegemony, usually covert, within a certain geospace and realizes it as a means of a both “hard” and “soft” power. The USA, which is the main “center” of the Western macro-empire, tries to maintain its world leadership, and at the same time secure a covert hegemony over the strategically important regions of the world. The EU is a neo-imperial alliance and has geostrategy of “soft” hegemony. Russia opposes the hegemony of the West and advocates the formation of a multipolar world order with the “balance of power”. The RF carries in the international arena neo-imperial geostrategy in the international arena directed to increase its role in the world and ensure its hegemony in the post-Soviet space.*

**Key words:** *leadership, hegemony, covert hegemony, informal neo-empire, neo-imperial geostrategy, Western macro-empire.*

**Анотація.** *Аналізуються дискусійні питання співвідношення гегемонії та лідерства в міжнародних відносинах, зокрема в контексті геостратегії неформальних неоімперій. В ідеалі лідерство певного актора означає, що інші актори добровільно сприймають запропоновані ним цінності, норми та правила, визнають за ним повноваження проводити*

політику для реалізації спільних цілей. Гегемонія полягає у домінуванні певного актора (гегемона) над іншими акторами, встановленні контролю над ними, нав'язуванні своїх політичних, економічних, культурних цінностей. Гегемонія в міжнародних відносинах здійснюється, як правило, приховано і часто репрезентується в якості лідерства. Лідерство і гегемонія можливі на різних рівнях геополітичної організації світу. Ми розглядаємо лідерство та гегемонію як механізми реалізації геостратегій могутніх акторів міжнародних відносин, особливо неформальних неоімперій. Кожна із сучасних неформальних неоімперій розробляє та втілює в життя геостратегію, спрямовану на забезпечення своєї гегемонії, зазвичай прихованої, у межах певного геопростору і реалізує її засобами як “твердої”, так і “м'якої” сили. США, що є головним “центром” Західної макроімперії, намагається зберегти своє світове лідерство і водночас забезпечити собі приховану гегемонію в стратегічно важливих регіонах світу. ЄС є неоімперським об'єднанням і здійснює геостратегію “м'якої” гегемонії. Росія виступає проти гегемонії Заходу і за формування у світі багатопольярного порядку з “балансом сил”. РФ проводить на міжнародній арені неоімперську геостратегію, спрямовану зростання своєї ролі у світі і забезпечення гегемонії в пострадянському просторі.

**Ключові слова:** лідерство, гегемонія, прихована гегемонія, неформальна неоімперія, неоімперська геостратегія, Західна макроімперія.

**Аннотация.** *Анализируются дискуссионные вопросы соотношения гегемонии и лидерства в международных отношениях, в частности в контексте геостратегии неформальных неоимперий. В идеале лидерство определенного актора означает, что другие акторы добровольно воспринимают предлагаемые им ценности, нормы и правила, признают за ним полномочия проводить политику для реализации общих целей. Гегемония заключается в доминировании определенного актора (гегемона) над другими акторами, установлении контроля над ними, навязывании своих политических, экономических, культурных ценностей. Гегемония в международных отношениях осуществляется, как правило, скрытно и часто репрезентируется в качестве лидерства. Лидерство и гегемония возможны на различных уровнях геополитической организации мира. Мы рассматриваем лидерство и гегемонию как механизмы реализации геостратегий могущественных акторов международных отношений, особенно неформальных неоимперий. Каждая из современных неформальных неоимперий разрабатывает и воплощает в жизнь геостратегию, направленную на обеспечение своего лидерства и гегемонии, обычно скрытой, в пределах определенного геопространства и реализует ее средствами как “твердой”, так и “мягкой” силы. США, которые являются главным “центром” Западной макроимперии, пытаются сохранить свое мировое лидерство и одновременно обеспечить себе скрытую гегемонию в стратегически важных регионах мира. ЕС является неоимперским объединением и осуществляет геостратегию “мягкой” гегемонии. Россия выступает против гегемонии Запада и за формирование в мире многополярного порядка с “балансом сил”. РФ проводит на международной арене неоимперскую геостратегию, направленную на возрастание своей роли в мире и обеспечение гегемонии в постсоветском пространстве.*

**Ключевые слова:** лидерство, гегемония, скрытая гегемония, неформальная неоимперия, неоимперская геостратегия, Западная макроимперия.

**Current problems.** The processes of international co-operation in various fields among the states develop rapidly in contemporary world. The importance of the transnational actors grows. However, the global geopolitical order undergoes significant destabilization not only because of the intensification of the terrorism, but also through the expansionism of some powerful actors

who seek to expand its sphere of influence. Therefore there is a problem of qualifying the modern geostrategy and geopolitical status of actor such as Russia. At this stage we should expect changes in the US geostrategy in the global arena and in some regions. The imperial discourse still remains popular now in political science on international relations. The determination of the nature of leadership and hegemony in the international affairs serves as the relevant scientific-theoretical and applied problem.

**Purpose of the article** – the identification the value of leadership and hegemony in the international relations in the context of the modern geopolitics of the informal neo-empires – the Western macro-empire and Russia.

**Analysis of the latest publications.** The issues of leadership, hegemony and contemporary empires retains considerable popularity in the Western science. We can point out the works of such scholars as Z. Brzezinski, N. Ferguson, D. Friedheim, J. Ikenberry, R. Kagan, R. Keohane, J. Mearsheimer, H Munkler, D. Nexon, J. Nye, N. Parker, A. Wendt, J. Wiener and others. Among the Russian scientists should be mentioned the following researchers: E. Batalov, A. Bogaturov, A. Bogdanov, S. Kaspe, T. Shakleina, D. Temnikov and others. In Ukraine, the mentioned problems were investigated by M. Doroshko, E. Kaminski, B. Kantselyaruk, V. Kopiika, D. Lashchyk, E. Makarenko, I. Pogorska, M. Ryzhkov and others. Despite solid scientific achievements, the numerous theoretical and applied aspects remain controversial and insufficiently clarified.

**Important research results.** The essence of leadership in the international relations has been and remains the subject of the lively debate in the scientific community. In the broader context this leadership in the international arena should serve as a legitimate mechanism for the regulation of relations among actors, based on the norms of international law. Ideally, leadership can be interpreted as a system of governance in international relations when a certain set of actors willingly give one of them the right to exercise certain powers on behalf of all them. The leader has the greatest potential, authority and applies mostly in its policy the tools of “soft power”. The rest of the mentioned actors voluntarily accept together the values, norms and rules proposed by the leader, recognize its authority to implement a policy of common goals. It is clear that a “democratic” leader should implement policies in the international arena, based on the norms of international law. Leadership can also be “collective”. Under the known approach of J. Ikenberry “leadership is the use of power” and means the ability of one actor directly or indirectly shape the interests and influence upon the other [Ikenberry, 1996: 388]. Thus, leadership can be undemocratic (even authoritarian) when a powerful actor, based on an authority and potential imposes its norms and values on other actors.

Hegemony has a long history in the international relations. The hegemon traditionally had overwhelming power, which allowed him to dominate over other actors. This hegemony of the powerful actor could promote almost independent, peaceful and stable development of the dependent countries which maintained loyalty to the hegemon and if necessary took part in its projects, such as aggressive campaigns. Hegemony in the historical past was one of the most effective means of ensuring stability in the international arena. It is clear that the institution of the hegemony has never been perfect, and stability is relative.

The power of the hegemon can manifest itself in political dictatorship, economic domination, planting in dependent countries its political and cultural values etc. In most cases it is confirmed that “hegemony is necessarily coercive and based on the exercise of power” [Lake, 1993: 469]. At the hegemonic system the state-hegemon has enough power and will to protect the basic rules governing the international relations [Keohane, Nye, 1989: 44]. Ideally a certain balance between the responsibility of the hegemon and the consent of other actors with its political supremacy are achieved, and this could lead to the stabilization of the international system

as a whole. This conception of “hegemonic stability” justified the hegemonic policy and gave to hegemon *carte blanche* to use force for the “common good”.

“Coercive” hegemony in international relations causes a well-deserved criticism in many cases. In return, “benevolent” and “liberal” hegemony provides weaker actors with stronger protection of their safety and often brings them the economic benefits. The hegemon, in exchange for political loyalty from its dependent countries do not interfere in their internal affairs without a pressing need. The concept of “institutional hegemony”, known since the 1980s, has not lost its relevance and provides, in particular, a significant strengthening of the role of institutions of international cooperation. In regional studies scientists productively use for analytical and predictive intelligence the concepts of “consensual” and “cooperative” hegemony.

Hegemony and leadership have much in common, which is reflected in the works of G. Arrighi, Z. Brzezinski, Ch. Krauthammer and others. For example, hegemony can be positioned as a “system leadership” in which the predominant group expresses the common interests of participants in the system [Arrighi, Silver, 1999: 26]. The conception of “hegemonic leadership” served for a long time to justify the expansionist geostrategy of powerful states on the world stage. It contained even justification of imperial policy of state-leader [Wiener, 1995: 233].

During applied research of international relations it is quite difficult to find the line between, for example, the policy of “soft hegemony” and that of “rigid leadership”. Still, for an adequate analysis of certain geopolitical actors we distinguish between leadership and hegemony on the basis of the criteria of application of security tools that are inherent to the former.

It should be noted that “global leadership” and “global hegemony” can arise as ideal claims of the most powerful actors in international relations. In rare cases, the impact of a particular actor can cover very large areas of the Earth. Other powerful actors can either obey the leader (or the hegemon) or resist it. In many cases, the leadership (and hegemony) actually applies within the macro-, meso- or subregions of the world. At the regional level the ambitious contender for the leadership (and especially hegemony) often encounters resistance on the part of competitors. It should be noted that the sphere of influence of some powerful leader (or hegemon) may spread to the individual actors and their groups from different regions of the world. In this case, it acts as a transregional leader (or a hegemon).

In the second half of the XX century the interest of researchers to imperial issues concerned mainly the study of historical aspects of origin, development and decay of empires. The revival of the imperial discourse in science took place at the end of XX – beginning of XXI century, when there was a transformation of the world order and there was a need for an adequate interpretation of very large geopolitical systems not only of the past but of the present as well. Empires have been built primarily on the basis of the power factor in the past – “imperial domination ... is a necessary result of relations between powerful and weak states” [Doyle, 1986: 28]. The interpretation of empire as a hierarchical system was proposed by G. Lundestad: “empire simply means a hierarchical system of political relationships which one power being much stronger than any other” [Lundestad, 1990: 37]. For contemporary research remains topical the wording of M. Doyle: “Empire ... is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society” [Doyle, 1986: 45].

Author of this paper is an adherent of the neo-imperial conception, according to which in the modern world new polities emerge – neo-empires, whose role increasingly grows. Neo-empires differ from the classical empires primarily by their informal nature. They essentially are “structures of transnational political authority that combine an egalitarian principle of *de jure* sovereignty with a hierarchical principle of *de facto* control” [Wendt, Friedheim, 1995: 695]. In our view, neo-empire is a supranational polity in which the “center” is combined with diverse

actors using differentiated leadership, hegemonic or imperial relations. These relations are based on certain ideological principles and are implemented in the political, military, economic, cultural and other spheres. Thus, a concept of neo-empire combines traditional idea of empire (with its geopolitics), hegemony and leadership.

Neo-empire as a geospatial political system has a hierarchical-network structure. Ideally neo-imperial “center” should be presented by especially powerful state. At the international level, the network structure of neo-empire beside the “center” includes its allies in respect to whom it is a leader. Hidden hegemony of the “center” in relation to the allies is quite possible. Neo-empires have not rigid hierarchical organization. Classic “periphery” largely withdraws to the past. Some Western states still have small dependent countries and territories. Imperial hierarchy may also manifest itself through the relationship between “center” and satellite countries (“patron” and its “clients”). In neo-empire non-state actors play an important role and the most powerful of them have widely branched networks in the world. Thus, neo-empires are formed as a result of close cooperation between powerful states with large network actors.

We think that the Western macro-empire (informal union of Western states) actually exists as a neo-imperial polity. Modern Russia as the “centre” develops neo-empire in the post-Soviet space. We can assume that China wants to create a kind of neo-imperial transregional system on the geoeconomic foundation. India is appropriate to be considered as a potential neo-imperial “center”. Thus, our analysis concerns neo-empires of the West and that of Russia.

Currently, none of the Western states and even Russia are not marking their imperial ambitions. The concept of empire traditionally causes negative connotations in many countries. Hypocrisy traditionally serves as an essential attribute of international relations. Nowadays the leading actors especially persistently manifest officially their commitment to high ideals, principles and norms of international law. Analysis of neo-imperial geostrategy of actors provides material to identify the essential features and real interests of actors in the international arena.

Geostrategy is a set of key goals, objectives, directions, principles and policy tools of the actor in the world as a whole, in certain regions and toward particular countries. It involves the elaboration of general plans for government actions, determination of means and methods of implementation of policies in the international arena. Provision of own safety, combined with the protection of “vital interests” are the main incentives for the elaboration of a geostrategy by the neo-imperial “centers”. It turns out that the areas of “vital interests” of neo-empire are located even in the remote regions of the world, while security protection can be interpreted as the right to aggression against a sovereign state.

Foremost, geostrategy of a neo-empire can be expansionary. It was a main feature of classic empires. Contemporary neo-imperial expansion is targeted primarily at establishing hegemony (usually hidden) in a certain geospace. “Defensive” geostrategy is also quite common, and strategic defense can be both active and passive. For example, active defense is embodied in “containment” geostrategy against a powerful competitor. Under the expansion of the powerful enemy a neo-empire can use even “retreatful” geostrategy. Costs of expansion may be excessive, while the results are not attainable. In this situation, neo-empires resorted to a strategic retreat in order to retain its hegemony hidden. Combinations of different types of geostrategy are possible.

It is advisable to distinguish the following levels of geostrategy of actors in geographical space: world (global); macroregional; mesoregional (simply regional); subregional. Especially powerful actors can perform a transregional geostrategy. The content of neo-imperial geostrategy must be comprehensive in nature and involve the use of interrelated political, military, economic, informational and other means.

To achieve its geostrategic goals the “centers” use such traditional tools of imperial geopolitics as military intervention, direct political pressure, intimidation, economic blockade, etc., that means “hard power”. However, they prefer the wide application of “soft power” to provide voluntary adoption by other countries of their ideals, values, norms, rules etc. Ideally geostrategy of neo-empires should be based on “smart power”, which involves the rational application of “hard power” and “soft power” means. In modern conditions neo-empires actively use indirect means of action through network of their “agents of influence” in the political, economic, cultural and information spheres of life of the countries of the world. Informal neo-empire can manifest itself in the international arena both as a leader and as a hegemon. In addition, it is able to conduct itself as a traditional empire as well. If necessary, neo-empire can dynamically change its certain “roles” in the international arena.

Neo-imperial geostrategy of “center” is of a differentiated character, in particular: in relation to valuable allies it implements projects of mostly equal cooperation (hegemony is carefully masked); on smaller allies “center” imposes its “rules”; against weak states, it allows himself to violate their sovereignty and to change their political regimes; against the opponents even military force can be applied. Neo-imperial “center” actively forms alliances under its covert hegemony, it makes the allies to share the costs of joint projects, stimulate their participation in the fight against its enemies.

The Western macro-empire has a very sophisticated geospatial structure. Its main “center” (the leader and the covert hegemon) are the United States: “... the center of the empire of the West – America, although empire is not confined in America” [Kачнэ, 2007: 275]. Another “center” is the EU, which in turn is a neo-imperial polycentric formation. Macro-empire of the West also includes Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, European micro-states, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Israel. In general, the model of “group leadership” for the West seems to be perfect as it involves consensus among Western powers in politics in the world. The West has many foreign allies, which include, for example, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan etc. North Atlantic Alliance is the leading military and political structure of the macro-empire. Therefore, as a member of NATO, Turkey can also be considered as a strategic ally of the West, though it has its own geopolitical interests.

We consider that the head of the Western macro-empire are “centers of decision-making” (CDM), both state and non-governmental, including multinational. As a result of their interaction the power over the Western world is realized, and from them informally depend a large part of the world. According to the “network theory of power” of M. Castells, some actors (“programmers”) adopt strategic decisions about networking while others (“switchers”) – provide network management [Castells, 2011: 777]. Some major “programmers” (CDM) have their own geopolitical interests, between them competition can occur in different areas, but relations of co-operation prevail, though co-operation is not always constructive.

Informal neo-empire of the West has many attractive features for many non-Western countries and peoples. Under the growing instability in international relations neo-empire may appear to the weak countries of the world as a guarantor of peace, security and order, because: “Empire in its ideal form – ordered space of law and justice, social space that occurs to oppose chaos, lawlessness and arbitrariness” [Kачнэ, 2007: 280]. Therefore, claims of the Western macro-empire to hegemony, even use of its military forces could be seen as a defense of freedom and security globally.

During the Cold War the world order is defined as bipolar confrontation between the capitalist West (with US hegemony) and the socialist East (with the hegemony of the USSR). For Western European countries hegemony of the US was needed for their defense against the “Soviet threat” which was not illusory. Except NATO allies informal hegemony of the US spread

to many countries. However, France (especially during President Ch. de Gaulle) was not part of the scope of the US hegemonic influence and tried to play an independent geopolitical role in the world. The hegemony of the United States (and the West in general) or that of the Soviet Union did not extend to China, India and some other countries. Therefore J. Nye subsequently offered to qualify the US role in the Cold War as a “half-hegemony” [13].

After the victory of the West in the Cold War and the “Desert Storm” the USA turned out on top of the world power. “New World Order” meant the formation of unipolar world with a sole hegemony of the US. During the presidency of B. Clinton the US committed geostrategy of the “engagement and enlargement”, which essentially meant the expansion of American hegemony in the world. In these circumstances, the imperial discourse has become quite popular among scientists, politicians and publicists. Z. Brzezinski even formulated the essence and main objectives of imperial geostrategy of the USA in the world. He proposed to use for that the experience of the Roman Empire [Brzezinski, 1997: 39-40]. After September 11, 2001 the US considered the international terrorism as the main threat to themselves and the world. Under these conditions, President G. Bush Jr. called to restore in foreign policy the legacy of H. Truman and R. Reagan [Рижков, 2011: 7] and began to implement interventionism in the US strategy in the world. In 2003 the United States, along with allies made an intervention in Iraq on the basis of neo-imperial doctrine of “preemptive war”. They gained a quick military victory, but their coalition was unable to ensure peace and security in that country. “New imperialism” of the US met resistance on the part of even some NATO allies.

Attempts by the US to ensure its sole hegemony in the world led to excessive expenditure of resources. Much of the American society has a negative attitude to the imperial foreign policy of the US. Even the comparatively judicious conceptions of “benevolent empire” and “empire by invitation”, was subjected to harsh criticism in the US and other countries. Obviously, the US needed a more flexible geostrategy. Even before his election as president, B. Obama formulated in 2007 the credo of foreign policy: “The mission of the United States is to provide global leadership grounded in the understanding that the world shares a common security and a common humanity” [14]. This line of foreign policy was officially conducted during both cadences B. Obama in the White House. At this time the US tried to carry out its geostrategy of world leadership based on the growth of military power, economic competitiveness, active participation in international political processes on a global scale [22]. It is noteworthy that the United States in November 2013 formally renounced odious Monroe Doctrine and declared priority an equal partnership with all the countries of the Latin America and the Caribbean. R. Haass offered to identify the US role in the world as “global preeminence” [6]. But informally, geostrategy of the US was actually aimed at preserving its liberal hegemony in many regions of the world.

Conceptual framework and strategic directions of the US foreign policy were defined in its National Security Strategy of 2015. The main idea of the Strategy is US leadership in the world: “America must lead. Strong and sustained American leadership is essential to a rules-based international order” [1]. The basis of its leadership should remain power factor: “We will lead with strength” [1]. The Strategy notes that the United States reserves the right to unilateral action on the international scene when there are threats to their “core interests”, although they prefer to mobilize other countries to collective actions [1]. In relations with China, as the main competitor, the current US geostrategy directed at its “containment” and simultaneous “engagement”.

It is expected that US leadership has to undergo a significant transformation soon. The US geostrategy, aimed at providing global leadership (with a hidden hegemony), was very expen-

sive. However, its antipode – geostrategy of “neo-isolationism”, according to experts, can lead to deepening of problems in the US economy and growth of threats to its national security. Geostrategy of “offshore balancing” is imagined as a “happy medium”. According to it, the US should abandon its “ambitious efforts” to transform society in other countries and focus on such key directions as preservation of its dominance in the Western Hemisphere as well as to counteract potential hegemonies in Europe, North-East Asia and the Persian Gulf [12]. Successful implementation of this geostrategy will enable the US to ensure its covert hegemony in very important regions of the world.

Application of the potential of “soft power” has created an opportunity for the US to become a political and even moral leader for many countries. However, a categorical position: “American leadership is a global force for good” [1] – raises serious doubts. Moral leadership is often converted in American politics in moral hegemony – planting their moral standards and values. Some countries of the world are dissatisfied with the fact that the US and its allies took the monopoly on the use of “hard power”, especially the armed force. However, many experts have expressed well-founded fear that without the American leadership in the world the chaos will prevail. According to J. Nye, “the era of US primacy is not over, it is set to change in important ways” [13]. The support by the US of its global leadership and preservation of the current world order will remain in the future as core of their foreign policy strategy [21].

The second main “center” of the West is the European Union, which has democratic “neo-imperial” supranational authorities. Effectiveness of the current EU model is inadequate, many problems arise in relations between the member states. Among them the leading countries are distinguished that have the greatest political and economic influence in the European model of “group leadership”. European values, norms and rules are very attractive to the population of post-socialist countries. In the accession process the candidate countries actually voluntarily recognize hegemony of the EU, and eventually they incorporate the neo-imperial structures of the Union. It is particularly important that: “the EU’s ‘imperial’ instruments are chiefly economic and bureaucratic rather than military and political. Its territorial acquisitions take place by invitation rather than conquest” [Zielonka, 2008: 475]. It should be noted that the “normative power” of the EU plays a crucial role in the institutional transformation of the candidate countries [Manners, 2002: 235-8]. The “Eastern Partnership”, launched in 2009, was an important component of “buffer” geostrategy of the EU towards Russia. In contemporary conditions the association with the EU means that in the country “soft” hegemony of the Union’s institutions is set on.

Nowadays, the need for informal macro-empire is caused primarily by threats to the Western countries on the part of transnational extremist actors. Contemporary neo-imperial geostrategy of the West in the Middle East countries is characterized as insufficiently effective. Among Western countries (and their DMC), there are many contradictions, and it reveals, especially in the debates on draft of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). However, the need for implementation of geostrategy of “containment” toward Russia contributes now to the consolidation of the Western macro-empire. Economic sanctions imposed by the West against Russia, are very effective means of “hard power”. Military and political structures of NATO have been strengthened and expanded due to geopolitical confrontation with Russia.

In the Cold War, the Soviet Union (which Reagan called the “evil empire”) was quite specific empire. At its “periphery”, particularly in the Central Europe, it sometimes used coercive power tools (according to the “Brezhnev doctrine”). Moreover, the Soviet Union was the leader for the countries of “socialist orientation” (trying to play the role of latent hegemon) and sought to expand its sphere of informal influence in the world. The destruction of the “socialist camp” and the Soviet Union led to the disappearance of that empire on the international arena. In 1990s

geopolitics of the Russian Federation distributed in a very small space compare with the former Soviet Union.

In the early 2000s the regime of “sovereign democracy” was set in Russia with the personified higher power. In fact, the main DMC (the Kremlin) took control of all public authorities, as well as strategic branches of economy, cultural and information space of Russia. During this period, some of the Russia’s “right” politicians have proposed the concept of “liberal empire” that has long been known in the West. The development of the RF as a “liberal empire” provided its economic expansion primarily in the post-Soviet countries, active co-operation with the Western countries, the respect for international law [24]. Russia implemented the geostrategy directed at partnership with the West, strengthening of its influence in the world, transformation into “energy superpower”. The government of the RF recognized the de facto leadership of the West in the world and it wanted yet to get for itself a regional hegemony in the post-Soviet space. However hegemonic geopolitics of Russia led to resistance in the partner countries. The “pro-western” political forces came to power in Georgia and Ukraine as a result of “color revolutions”. NATO’s eastward expansion was seen by the Kremlin as a threat to national security of the RF [18]. The EU enlargement to the East meant the invasion the field of “vital interests” of Russia as well. Under these conditions, the Kremlin has de facto abandoned the “liberal” principles, introduced neo-imperial geostrategy and used means of “hard power” to secure hegemony in the post-Soviet space. Russia’s war with Georgia in August 2008 can be regarded as imperial. Soon the US strategy of “reset” gave the RF an opportunity to strengthen its hegemony in the post-Soviet countries [Дорошко, 2012: 101].

At the global level geostrategy of Russia is targeted to increase its role in the world, creating a “balance of power” to curb the US hegemony. Russia develops a strategic partnership with China, initiates enhanced cooperation within BRICS, SCO and other organizations. In the 2015-2016 years Russia has used its armed forces in the Syrian conflict on the side of B. Assad government. Obviously, Russia is seeking to establish hegemony on Syria and increase its influence in the Middle East.

In the post-Soviet space Russia’s geostrategy is directed at creating of informal neo-empire, for it the most suitable name is “Eurasian”. The Russian government cultivates a specific (and very eclectic) ideology and takes steps to root it in the public consciousness. Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), established in 2015, is to become the geoeconomic foundation of the neo-empire. In the former USSR, Russia together with its allies formed a political-military structure – the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), where Russia plays a leading role and aims to become an informal hegemon. But the Kremlin’s attempts to implement even the hidden hegemony cause the resistance on the part of the ruling elites in the post-Soviet sovereign countries.

Contemporary Russian geostrategy essentially provides for the use of military force for annexation of territories in other countries. In 2014 Russia informally occupied and soon annexed the Crimea and started latent expansion in the Donbass region of Ukraine. The imperial geostrategy of Russia is manifested in the creation and support of the small “satellites” that are dependent on it in virtually all spheres. Officially, Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as sovereign states and signed international agreements with them on cooperation in various spheres. However, Russia does not officially recognize Transnistria, Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and Lugansk People’s Republic (LPR), but keeps them under imperial control. Thus, the current geostrategy of Russia is de facto hegemonic and involves the use of imperial methods for control over individual countries and territories.

**Conclusions.** Legitimate leadership in international affairs is essential for their progressive development. However, leadership of powerful actors often means their covert hegemony in the

international arena. Informal neo-empires may appear as the main actors of the future world order.

Geostrategy of neo-empires actually aims to expand or maintain their spheres of influence. It is of differentiated character and can provide gaining of leadership or hegemony in respect of certain countries or regions. The neo-empires use a wide variety of “hard power” and “soft power” means. Contemporary neo-imperial geostrategy also involves creating of alliances and ensuring their efficient operation.

The Western macro-empire (led by the US) remains a leader for many countries of the modern world. Leadership of the West is a political, economic, ideological, moral and cultural, but in all these spheres leadership is often a covert hegemony. In the short term the US will remain the main leader of the world and its geostrategy is aimed at ensuring hegemony in the regions, where it has “vital interests”. Today the Western macro-empire has been consolidating by the fight against terrorism and confrontation with Russia.

At the global level, Russia seeks to play the role of one of several leaders – the “poles” of the world. Russia’s geostrategy in the post-Soviet space aims to achieve its informal hegemony with respect to the partner countries. Contemporary geostrategy of Russia involves the application of the imperial means, become clearly evident in its expansionism of 2014-2016 years.

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