

Russia as the Challenge of the 21st Century: How The Personalized System Survives in Post-Modern Times

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How long can a State-Civilization endure when it has lost the ability to adapt? According to Arnold Toynbee's "Challenge-and-Response" hypothesis, a civilization's destiny is determined by how it responds to the challenges it encounters; it either reorganizes itself or withers away. The Russian personalized power system has failed to transform itself and for the last 70 years since the end of Stalin's rule has been exhibiting signs of accelerating decay—namely, it is attempting to survive by rejecting modernity and reverting to the past.

No one would have noticed Russia's decline if it were a small country tucked away in some geopolitical nook. But the demise of a civilization that boasts 16,000 strategic nuclear warheads on 528 strategic nuclear delivery systems is impossible to ignore. There is no safe vantage point from which to sit quietly by and watch the trajectory of a civilization that is willing and able to shake the world for the sake of its own survival!

The Russian System's agony appears to acquire its own logic which manifests itself in several ways. Firstly, the ruling elite prefers to return to the anti-modernist instruments afraid that even limited liberalization would accelerate the collapse process. Secondly, the State-System has started to undermine itself by reverting to means that only deepen its conflict with the environment. Thirdly, the System tries to find life support by demoralizing the nation and preventing national revival.

The ultimate fate of the Russian State-System will have tremendous repercussions for the global order and its various aspects: European security; nuclear security; the governance of international institutions; energy security; stability of Russia's neighboring states; the paths chosen by certain global actors like China; and finally the moods of the liberal democracies and the way they see their future and that of the world. Indeed, Russia's moment of truth could close one chapter in world history and open a new one.

We can already identify a number of domestic and international challenges raised by the State-System's agony. But it's still unclear when the factors undermining the System will actually

lead to a point at which a change of rules becomes possible. Now is exactly the time to start thinking about the inevitable demise of a civilization, the price that Russia and the rest of the world will have to pay for it, and how to guarantee a peaceful transformation to a better future. Time to deliberate on what pushed Russia into its civilizational trap? Is Russian society capable of extracting itself from this suicidal path? Or is Russia doomed to follow it to the end? And what lies at the end of the path?