

China - Russia: A Threat to Western Type Democracies or an Alternative Way of Governance

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Abstract: *The tectonic shifts in global economy, the emergence of the Internet, the refugee crisis have all contributed to the fuelling of populist labyrinths that reinforce authoritarian leaders. This raises the question of whether authoritarianism is viable in a post-modern world, with the emergence of authoritarianism in China and Russia. China is emerging as a new economic model: authoritarian modernization, state capitalism or socialism with Chinese features as an alternative to western liberal democracy. The Russian-like state monopolist capitalism, sovereign democracy and Eurasianism dominate the imperial power with the Soviet past. If rivalries eventually culminate in a war of the Great Powers is perhaps the key issue of 21st century geopolitics, highlighting a battle of beliefs and values.*

Keywords: *China, Russia, A Threat to Western type Democracies, An Alternative Way of Governance, Western Values*

1. INTRODUCTION

The dawn of the 21st century found the international society before dilemmas and challenges, corollary not only of the changes that resulted from the nature of the international system, but also of the internal, social, cultural, economic parameters that are directly associated with the future of the state-nation, of democratic values, of international law and order and of ideologies (Cheila 2006: 279). In the heart of the new era in geopolitical competition there is a race in progress for the role and influence of democracy in international order (Jones & Taussig 2019:1).

In 1989, Francis Fukuyama maintained that with the end of the Cold War, what came into existence was the “End of History”, because we reached the “conclusive point of ideological development of humanity and the globalisation of the western liberal democracy as the final form of human governance” (Gofas & Tzifakis 2017:88). Several sceptics regarded his utopic vision for a unipolar world as fallacious, directed by the domination of the USA and they expected that the differences between countries and nations would reemerge in other forms, such as the notorious “Clash of Cultures” by Samuel Huntington or in national and religious conflicts.

The main question that emerges is whether China- Russia pose a threat to western type democracies or an attractive governance model, reflecting a battle of values in a region that is key to worldwide sovereignty. “Politics is a war without bloodshed, whereas war is politics with bloodshed”, according to Mao Zedong. China is expected to be the largest economy on the planet between 2020 and 2030, replacing the United States as a world leader in power and gaining dimensions of power, such as political influence and regulatory power (Lo & Shevtsova 2012:31). According to widespread fears, Beijing is expected to shake the special interests of the once-unique superpower and overthrow international hegemony (Weiss 2019). China's continued economic success, and to a lesser extent Russia, seems to indicate a promising course of development, testing the historic law that requires stable democracies to achieve the highest economic performance, according to Mancur Olson (Brands 2018:91). The posts in our tracking will be: The global democratic recession, the rise of totalitarianism, the alternative proposal of the two countries and the possible ways of reversing the course.

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2. GLOBAL DEMOCRATIC RECESSION

A ghost is wandering in Europe and the United States; it's that of illiberal freedom (Isaac 2017). Global democratic recession is indicated in the fact that totalitarian regimes have increased to 33% of all countries, after the Cold War, in contrast to the 13% which they were in the past. Most of them are in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Eastern Europe and America (Carney 2019).

The period 2006 - 2016 has been characterized as a decade of decadence, according to the annual report on civil rights and civil liberties which was published by Freedom House and includes the erosion of political institutions (Puddington 2017).

The debate in the West is constituted in the fall of the western model. The regulatory leadership of the West in its lowest derogation as the corollary of "a perfect storm". The conduct of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the outbreak in Guantanamo and the extraordinary renditions, the global economic downturn and the crisis in Eurozone, the fragility of institutions by Bretton Woods. Austerity and the refugee crisis, the rise of China and other non-western powers (Lo & Shevtsova 2012:38).

The political stability, moral complacency, the selective approach to values, the alarming receptiveness of totalitarianism as an alternative model (Schiff, 2019) have led to the current crisis in western liberalism and have contributed to the creation of the myth of totalitarian modernisation (Lo & Shevtsova 2012 :66).

There is evident concern that we are undergoing the "darkest" phase in post-war history.

The first phase refers to the period 1945 - 1989 and is dominated by the Cold War.

The second phase between 1990 and 2016 represented a fragile victory for liberal democratic regimes. In the third phase nowadays looms Brexit in the United Kingdom² and the election of President Donald Trump in the USA (Moisi 2019). There is a key belief that the undermining of democracy may accelerate the decadence of western influence and promote the geopolitical goals of Russia and China (Kendall - Taylor, Shullman 2018).

2.1. Contemporary Totalitarianism Features

The features of contemporary totalitarianism are an illusion of pluralism that conceals state control of basic political institutions or oligarchic control over key elements of the economy. It includes state or oligarchic control over information and the repression of non - governmental organisations (NGO). It involves legalised political repression, with sanctioning, performing limited, selective and usually obscure use of external violence. Opportunistic, non-ideological collaboration takes place with similar regimes and an exchange of expertise is implemented (Puddington 2017:6). For the first time since the end of the nineteenth century, the cumulative GDP of totalitarian regimes is now equal to or higher than that of western liberal democracies (Mounk 2019). Authoritarian governance constitutes a very realistic option for many governments worldwide, which are falling within it (Bremmer 2019). The incentive of contemporary authoritarianism is a dose of personal freedom, financial growth, preventing anarchy (Kaplan 2018). The two great authoritative powers are China and Russia³.

3. CHINA'S ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL

3.1. Socialist System with Chinese Features

The Socialist system with Chinese features constitutes a new option for developing countries which simultaneously pursue financial growth and independence (Brands 2018:61). An alternative solution to liberalism (Bernstein 2017), China's model focuses on the Party and is guided by the State, according to Xi Jinping (Taehwan 2018). The "Party above everyone and everything", as the Chinese leader declares. The history of the Soviet Union has taught him that the Party should never be "deprived" of control of the economy, the society and the army (Landver & Anastasopoulou, 2017).

The basic characteristics of authoritarian capitalism is the coexistence of economic modernisation and non-democratic politics, the state control over the higher levels of economy, which is gradually diffused by reforms from the top to the basis. China has turned to markets, but it does not copy the

² In the Washington Post, Fareed Zakaria had warned that if the United Kingdom collapses, it could be the beginning of the end for the West as a political and strategic entity (Thomas :2019).

³ Russia and China have been characterized as "black knights" (Tanja 2015:520), while there is doubt about the conflict between noble West and wisdom, promotion of democracy and illiberal regimes, promotion of authoritarianism (Tanja 2015:528).

practices of the West (Rodrick 2017). China's economic growth at a time when the West is in crisis results in its leaders showing greater confidence and unwillingness to accept western custody (Grant 2012: iv). A terrible challenge is constituted by the appeal of the idea that the United States and China have come into a New Cold War, since they advocate that the politics of the superpower towards China has become quite confrontational (Chhabra 2019:3).

The vision of "China's Dream" and China's traditional values focused on Confucianism. Getting over the historical injustice of "the century of humiliation" which had been forced by western imperialism and Japanese militarism, China would retrieve the "lawful place" of the past as the Middle Kingdom or the Central state, through a marathon from century to century (Taehwan 2018).

China's global domination is justified by the traditional notion of tianxia or "everything under heaven", in which the world is governed by the Chinese emperor around whom everything revolves and wherefrom China will be spreading harmony through civilisation, language and values - a sinocentered empire that appreciates order rather than freedom, ethics rather than law and elite governance rather than democracy and human rights (Taehwan 2018). The Chinese leadership is unleashing a charm attack to seduce the liberal West (Pabst 2019).

3.2. "Great Wall of Protection"

The "Great Wall of Protection" consists a service of censorship and filtering, aiming at the prevention of circulation of information which the authorities consider to be politically dangerous without affecting non-sensitive information, requiring huge economic, human and technological resources to be sustained (Puddington 2017 :7). "Time" and "The Economist" magazines were added to the list of blocked websites in 2016. The goal is for the Internet to "become clear and bright" according to Xi Jinping (Puddington 2017:19) and for China to become a "cyber-superpower" (Segal 2018).

3.3. "System of Social Credit"

In China, governance based on algorithms has been a reality long since (Cypionka 2019). The Orwellian⁴ System of Social Credit constitutes a form of digital totalitarianism (Pelevani 2019) which allows the state to collect information about citizens from several sources and use it to justify scores or classifications based on the individual's true reliability, even in political matters⁵. The citizen could get a negative score by reporting the government, participating in protests or circulating prohibited ideas on social media (Puddington 2017:58).

The Chinese leadership's point of view is captured in the phrase: "If trust is lost in one place, restrictions are imposed everywhere. Those deemed untrustworthy, will not even be able to take one step". The internet and advanced facial identification technology with the countless cameras monitor human behaviour, "enriching" the black list of the dissident. "Those deemed untrustworthy, will not even be able to take one step". China already has a spy programme that competes with Stasi in Eastern Germany⁶. The main counter-argument in the West, this practice is already used thanks to the Silicon Valley. In China, they are formalising and systematising whatever is already taking place in the West.

⁴ In George Orwell's dystopian novel, "1984", the Ministry of Truth moved under a narrative regime, on an account of endless conflicts abroad and treacherous enemies internally (Puddington 2017:17). Orwell and the other enemies of totalitarian domination tried to describe the danger that propaganda and censorship pose on knowledge, reality and independent thinking (Puddington 2017:18).

⁵ Technological integration among public institutions allows the Chinese regime a greater accuracy in controlling access to government services, so that it can grade by granting or denial from reservations of tickets for buses and passports to job positions and access to education. Citizens with a good "Social Credit" scoring benefit from an array of privileges, including travel applications abroad, discounting energy bills and less frequent audits. In the "Social Credit" penalties are included individuals or companies that are considered "unreliable"; they may find themselves excluded from state granted benefits, such as renting apartments with no deposits or forbidden flight and railway tickets (Kendall- Taylor Andrea, Frantz Erica, Wright Joseph 2020).

⁶ Stasi, East Germany's State security service, may have been one of the most prevalent secret police institutions ever known. They were noted for their ability to watch people and monitor the flows of information, using repression to maintain control. Headed by China, today's digital empires take advantage of technology, the internet, social media, artificial intelligence in order to overpower long-term tactics of imperial survival (Kendall- Taylor Andrea, Frantz Erica, Wright Joseph 2020).

3.4. “The Seven are Not Mentioned”

“The Seven are not mentioned”⁷, as “disclosed” by the General Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party in 2013, the Central Committee issued a secret instruction that forbids Universities to allow discussion about seven topics⁸ (Puddington 2017: 32). Banned catholic values, freedom of the press⁹, citizen society, rights, hereditary elite, judicial independence and previous errors of the Communist Party (Great Leap Forward¹⁰ (Jakobson & Pursiainen 2001), the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution¹¹, events on Tiananmen Square¹²), (Document Number 9). It harshly criticises parliamentary democracy (failures - errors), their alleged wastefulness, the chaos it creates, its inevitable fall (Bernstein 2017). It requires the members of the Communist Party to reinforce their resistance to “infiltrations” from the external environment, to renew their commitment to work within the ideological sphere and to handle all the ideas, institutions that people regard as threatening to the Party with renewed vigilance. At the same time, it focuses on defending scientific development as a main issue, the acceleration of financial transformation for progress, the increase of the quality and effectiveness of the economy as a main core of action. (ChinaFile 2013).

China’s ascent is particularly attractive to Arab emperors, because it seems to justify their hopes for achievement of development without giving up on any of their powers, though they are more than happy to sacrifice growth, if they believe it will lead to requests for democratisation. It represents the rise of a new alliance of global absolutisms united under a common conviction that democracy is dangerous and that ultimate power ought to be given to states for them to manage social and political change within their borders, without the hassle of accountability to their people or the perception that individual rights may stand in the way of their plans (Fadel 2019: Middle East Eye).

4. RUSSIA’S ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL

The “Russian bear” is waking out of its hibernation, after a long Winter (Fakiolas 2012: 159). The three basic principles of the Russian model: Personalised power, merge of power and property, it is claiming a great status of authority and spheres of influence in the “post-soviet space” and further. (Lo & Shevtsova 2012: I3). The construction of the complex Russian mechanism relies on the imitation of western institutions, the replacement of any coherent ideology, out of non - ideological pragmatism, bribing society with the aid of oil. It invests in the participation of important representatives from various social strata and political groups in the regime’s course, with broadened individual liberties and selective repression (Lo & Shevtsova 2012 : I4). Russia’s economic model is based on four pillars: State control, monopolistic establishment, trade structure and militaristic aspect (Lo & Shevtsova 2012:I7).

⁷ Document Number 9. It outlines a gloomy picture of what the Party perceives as a threat by liberal thinking (M.J 2013).

⁸ It is mentioned as an internal warning memo regarding the “seven false ideological movements, attitudes and activities” in (2013) Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation, <http://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>. There will be loss of power if the Chinese Communist Party does not eliminate seven subversive currents before they move into Chinese society (Buckley: 2013). <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/20/world/asia/chinas-new-leadership-takes-hard-line-in-secret-memo.html>.

⁹ The western understanding of journalism is focused on the revelation of events and problems, aiming at averting political pressures and with a stronger effect on social development (Repnikova :2018:47). Constructive journalism absolutely ties in with the journalists’ relationship with the central state on the one side, which reflects the Party’s vision for well-intentioned criticism that is consistently promoted, while on the other side self-censorship is cited as the proper attitude and identifies with the Party line (Repnikova :2018:48).

¹⁰ The beginning of 1958 saw the starting point of the Great Leap Forward. It is a program based on mass mobilization which forced almost every citizen to participate in industrial production. In fact, Leap Forward turned out to be one of the first – even if they were destructive – steps in the creation of a grand illusion by Mao.

¹¹ The Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution in China (1966 – 1976) was Mao’s desperate attempt to grip on his post of supreme leader and eliminate those of his associates who fostered a more realistic economic reform program. The Cultural Revolution precipitated a decade of frantic political activism, political indoctrination, class struggle and militarization of Chinese politics.

¹² In China, in the late 1980s, students at Tiananmen square, as well as reform groups within bureaucracy advocated political reforms, seeking change through the CCP as the right recipe for restructuring the Chinese political system, with an inglorious ending, since the revolt was put down with bloodshed. “Harsh repression ” terminated all attempts for democratisation.

4.1. Eurasianism

Eurasianism, glorifying the virtues of Russian civilisation, “catapults” Russia as a citadel of traditional conservative values (family, nation, christianity) which serve as a source of national attractiveness in contrast to the decadent morality of the West (Taehwan 2018). It ties in with Russia’s great ambitions, of the one part, and with traditional and conservative values, of the other part. It originates from Russian intellectuals who had immigrated to Europe in 1920 and 1930. It has bounced back from the 1990s as a reaction to the break-up of the Soviet Union, Alexander Dugin¹³ being its main exponent (Taehwan 2018). Perception of the Eurasian region as an independent culture, different from the West and Asia.

4.2. Sovereign Democracy

There is also faith in sovereign democracy - politics which was developed in Russia under Vladimir Putin (Puddington 2017:47), who is noted for his ideological flexibility (Ragozin 2019). It constitutes a mixture of postmodern authoritarianism and dynamic nationalism (Clark: 2016). It is a form of administration which aims at ensuring a higher level of governance and self-regulation in society and the state (Kokoshin: 2006). Sovereign democracy is a Kremlin currency which conveys two messages: First of all, that Russia’s regime is democratic and secondly, that this claim must be accepted. Any attempt of verification will be deemed hostile and an intervention in its affairs (Lipman 2006). The reborn Russia (Grotsky 2018) is a country which cannot exist without protecting its sovereignty: it will either be independent and sovereign or it will probably not exist at all (Polyakov 2007). Sovereign democracy just means that Russia “is entitled to defining the term democracy at will and to deviate - under national sovereignty and tradition - from basic democratic standards and practices” (Svetlichnaja & Hearfield 2010). These politics contributed to improvement in respect of the political chaos, the impoverishment and geopolitical weakness of 1990 (Brands 2018:66). The idea of conquest is its secret ambition (Kimmage 2018).

The Russian means of influence include the Society of Citizens and traditional values, propaganda attack¹⁴ (Crimea), the use of energy as a means of negotiation¹⁵, trade weapon, cyber attacks (Estonia, 2007, Sharp power¹⁶), military threats and military invasions (in Georgia¹⁷, Ukraine, Syria), frozen

¹³ All political systems in modern times originate from three different ideologies: Liberal Democracy, Marxism and Fascism. The last two have long ago failed and withdrawn from History’s cartouche, whereas the first one no longer functions as an ideology, being taken for granted. According to Alexander Dugin, to solve the quagmire we need a Fourth ideology, which though it will use elements drawn from the rubble of the first three ideologies, it will remain innovative and unique. The nation is its quintessence (Dugin 2013:54). Social justice, national sovereignty and traditional values are its three basic principles (Dugin 2013:237).

¹⁴ The Russian intervention in the Internet is about Kremlin flooding the Internet with stories that support the regime, distracting the network’s users’ attention from negative news and creating confusion and uncertainty by spreading alternative narratives (Kendall- Taylor Andrea, Frantz Erica, Wright Joseph (2020). Russia is extending its investments in networks, such as RT cable television and Sputnik, a news platform and radio service, in order to promote propaganda and conspiracy theories (Kenney & Bergmann & Lamond 2019). Russia’s intervention (alleged or true) in the USA elections constitutes the most notable case of a state making use of sensitive policies and social information to turn against another (Rosenbach & Mansted 2019).

¹⁵ Russia can take advantage of its position as a growing “energy superpower”, whose energy resources are critical for all main “power centers” in global economy, such as the USA, the European Union, Japan, China and India (Kokoshin :2006).

¹⁶ Amid the recent decline of liberalism, authoritarian states like China and Russia are trying to extend their influence worldwide using every available means of authority of hard, soft or average power. The capacity to influence others to gain desirable results not via attraction, like in the case of soft power, but by means of distracting attention and manipulating information. The target is direction or “enforced acquisition” of political influence to control the discussion of sensitive issues globally. It is usually performed by using means that are un-transparent and questionable, if not totally illegal. Moscow combines cyber-attacks and military operations with intense power within the meaning of hybrid war, intervening in the American presidential elections and the Ukrainian crisis (Taehwan 2018). There is also a relevant mention in (Puddington 2017 :55).

¹⁷ The War in Georgia was not the beginning of a new Russian imperialism, but the ending of twenty years of geopolitical retreat. Consequently, it was important at a psychological level (Grant 2012 :103). Putin started the invasion in Georgia with a small scale action in 2008, then he escalated by getting Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and after his army’s modernization had preceded ; meanwhile, he moved globally with a large-scale intervention in Syria in 2015 (Grotsky :2018).

conflicts¹⁸) (Puddington 2017 :48). Since 2014, against the conflict with Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, the regime seems to be moving from hybrid to hegemonic authoritarianism by accelerating attacks against members of the opposition, imposing greater restrictions to critique and autonomous mass media and by replacing the capitalist model of modernisation which is found in the beginning of the decade in the administrations of Putin and Medvedev with the increasing militarisation of the economy, society and political agenda (Chaguaceda Armando 2016 :86).

4.3. Runet: Monitored Russian Internet

The monitored Russian domestic internet coincides with the official version of the “great wall of protection” and aims at the state’s control of cyberspace. Its philosophy requires to cease Russia’s connections with the World Wide Web and to replace them with its own monitored “domestic internet”. Runet, Russia’s envisaged autonomous Internet, intends to repel attacks abroad, reviving “the Iron Curtain on the Internet”. The requirement is the protection of its national security as a nuclear power (Rondeaux 2019). Putin’s fire against western-style liberalism focuses on the decadent and morally corrupted philosophy that would lead Russia to degeneration and upheaval (Brands 2018:68).

The Former President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, attacked the Russian President in an unusual diplomatic language, mentioning that he strongly disagrees with him about his statement that “liberalism is not relevant and that it has clashed with the interests of the vast majority of the population” (Hurriyet Daily News :2019). “The Cold War was a negative incident, but at least there were rules, which all protagonists of international affairs had to respect, in one way or another”, Putin reminded. “Today the world is too segmented, unpredictable and the total lack of rules is dominant”, reminding of “the tragedy of the Soviet Union’s collapse”¹⁹ (Rozanskij 2019). “Whoever claims that liberal democracy is outdated, they also claim that liberties are irrelevant and that human rights are obsolete”, Tusk pointed out (Helier 2019). “What I find really outdated is authoritarianism, personality worshippings, the rule of oligarchy, even if it sometimes seems effective”, he himself added. (Hartley Parkinson 2019).

Putin’s greatest success is spreading upheaval in western democracies themselves. The Russian President’s interpretation of History is that a sovereign state has the right to “reveal” its history in any way it itself wishes (Puddington 2017: 29).

The weaknesses of Putin’s regime include: untransparent decision making, a weak rule of law, rampant government corruption and abuse of military power (Repnikova 2018:50). The stereotypical Russian alibis for Putin’s oppressive rule and his western apologists are founded on the statement that the President is especially popular among his citizens and that Russians are generally against democracy and crave “guidance” (Kara - Murza 2017: 115).

5. CHINA - RUSSIA CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES

The points of convergence between China and Russia are that the two countries have a long tradition of despotism and live under authoritarian rule (Lo & Shevtsova 2012:43). Their countries’ governing elites are based primarily on civilisation, in order to reinforce their political monopoly (White, McAllister, Munro 2017:4). Nowadays, the end of the liberal world order and the rise of the cultural state is marked. They give meaning to their countries as separate cultures, with their own unique values and political institutions. The rejection of Western ecumenism by the elites in Russia and China suggests the idea of the nation-state as an international rule for political organization. The ruling classes reject western liberalism and the expansion of a global market society (Pabst 2019). The Chinese and the Russian regime are connected by the common contempt for democracy and the Rule of law (Kilgour: 2018).

As for politics, both are authoritarian systems, in which the authority of decision making is on the hands of a small ruling elite, uncontrolled by free elections, autonomous legislative structures or

¹⁸ The term “frozen conflict” suggests a situation in which active battles have ceased or retreated, but there is no peace treaty other besides a thin ceasefire (Puddington 2017 :48).

¹⁹ The decade of impoverishment and disorder that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union was the source of humiliation and resentment particularly to the extent that these calamities can be blamed as erroneous or deliberately failing advice by the western experts. Moscow’s incapability of preventing due east expansion of NATO and the European Union, the role of the West in inciting Colour Revolutions and then the severe sanctions with the annexation of Crimea are added to the “offences” against the former superpower (Friedberg 2017:33).

independent judicial authorities. It is deprived of protection for political liberties and fundamental human rights; in contrast, it imposes strict inspections on freedom of speech, the press, the opposition, the society of the citizens and non-governmental organisations (NGO) (Friedberg Aaron 2017:12). The common denominator is that both the Russian regime of individualized power and the Chinese Communist Party have sought legitimacy, taking advantage of “ mythology” from the top to the bottom of state modernization (Lo & Shevtsova 2012 :11). The image of the wise paternalist state that is guiding reform is dominant. Following the destruction of the Cultural Revolution and governance reform, the idea that was promoted was that rulers should be held accountable compared with the past, with a view to upholding transparency in the form of governance. In contrast to the elite in Russia which functions as a driving force (Jakobson & Pursiainen 2001:26). The erstwhile superpower still has a long way to go towards becoming a participatory, representative democracy (Jakobson & Pursiainen 2001:21).

The two countries seek to improve the global perspective for authoritarianism, via the strategy: building regional spheres of influence in which totalitarianism is privileged and protected (Brands 2018:75). The reasons for support of authoritarian regimes are that they have an interest in obstructing democratisation procedures in their regional surroundings, in fear of a widespread instability (Gravingholt 2011:2). Besides, Russia and China are aware of the efforts to uphold democracy - especially by the USA - in order to extend America’s influence and to undermine their regimes (Kendall-Taylor & Shullman, Foreign Affairs).

Politically, Russia is semi-authoritarian and not a totalitarian system, with substantive liberties and restrictions (Lo & Shevtsova 2012:44). On the other hand, Chinese economy is much more open and liberal than Russia (Lo & Shevtsova 2012:45). In Goldman - Sachs predictions, by 2050, China will probably be the largest economy in the world and Russia will be the sixth (White, McAllister, Munro 2017:1). Russia’s emphasis was on ad hoc political reforms, China focuses on economic modernisation, maintaining its political system under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, with a counselling dimension, which governs it, binding the state and society (Jakobson & Pursiainen 2001:30).

Under the influence of Confucianism, there is encouragement by the leader (prince) with some kind of a higher moral purpose and which mitigated his individual tyranny. In Russia, neither religion nor tradition have had such retentive influence (Lo & Shevtsova 2012: 43).

The Chinese principle of meritocracy as it is incorporated in an effective public service is another variable that lacks from Russian history. China has replaced the Party’s oppressive hand under Mao with a much gentler touch which allowed private business to flourish.

It has a very decentralised system compared to modern Russia (Lo & Shevtsova 2012: 34). China is willing to participate in global economic governance, but Russia is not (Grant 2012). China as a country has benefitted from the globalisation directed by the West, in Russia it is the elite (and not the society) that is rewarded by it through personal integration in western society (Lo & Shevtsova 2012: 57).

5.1. Shift to USA Politics and Ways to Address the Threat to the Western Liberal Class

“Pax Americana is coming to an end”, according to Roger Cohen (Tzifakis 2012:2). The new President of the USA stands for “America first”. At the same time, he “resigned” from the leadership of the USA when it comes to human rights, democracy and the international rule of law (Patrick 2019). He has wavered institutional pillars and weakened regulatory foundations, since he has undermined western solidarity by repeatedly attacking NATO and G7. In fact, he has renounced the international agreement that moderates Iran’s nuclear weapon programme and has threatened to leave the World Trade Organisation. He withdrew from the partnership among the Pacific Ocean countries, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), he forced NAFTA’S renegotiation into a more sealed deal. He removed the USA from the Paris Agreement on Climate, simultaneously leaving the UN Human Rights Council and UNESCO. He refused to participate in the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

He started a “war” against China; he signed the historical trade agreement (15/01/2020) between USA - China, with duties that had been imposed on Beijing to inflict punishment still in effect. More provocatively, the White House’s National Security policy defines China and Russia as strategic

rivals, in respect of Beijing for their claims about the Southern China sea and as for Moscow, for the annexation of Crimea. Resistance to Chinese and Russian regional hegemony signals that Trump's administration is not willing to accept the "four policemen" that Roosevelt had not refused during World War II with the USA, the Soviet Union, the British Empire and China enjoying the primary responsibility of maintaining order in their "neighbourhoods". USA's tendency to repeat America's mistakes a century before, in 1919 - 1920, is apparent in the rejection of accession to the League of Nations, they gave in to isolationist policy and economic nationalism just to watch a world fall apart (Patrick 2019). With the anticipation of the prediction not turning out to be true this time.

The real threat for democratic liberalism does not come from rival value systems, the danger lies within. Experience demonstrates that the tendency towards cartel capitalism, bureaucratic excess and unbridled individualism is destroying Western culture (Pabst 2019). Nevertheless, the frontal is twofold: apart from introspection, in order to compensate for the "invasions" of those revisionist authoritarian regimes, whose ambitions have increased over the past fifteen years, democratic states all over the world will have to seek new strategies to defend their open democracies and digitised societies. The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, which was established in Helsinki by European Union Member States and NATO, is moving towards the right direction, but its scope must be extended so that it includes China's practices. The new law on foreign interventions by Australia, which penalises new methods of foreign influence and espionage which mainly come from China (Grigas & Hamilton 2018 and Hamilton 2018), could be set forth as an example. The creation of the European Endowment for Democracy and the Civil Society Forum signals a possible change of course as a result of comprehending the challenges of our times. Besides, if Russia and China are not sliding towards liberal democracy, this constitutes a problem, not only for their oppressed citizens, but for us as well (Freeland 2012).

6. CONCLUSION

The stake of the times is whether the 20th century has been defined by the fight for freedom of information against censorship, the 21st century will be determined by malicious institutions, states or companies that abuse the right to freedom of information (Puddington 2017 : 15).

Competition between democracy and authoritarianism inundates nearly every aspect of modern conflict of great powers. The USA and the European Union may promote essentially "illiberal developments" at will, while authoritarian regimes could promote democracy, even involuntarily (Risse & Babayan 2015: 384). During the past two decades, despotic governors have attempted to imitate democratic institutions and adopt democratic rhetoric (Krastev 2011:10). A blur in the boundaries between democracy and authoritarianism is in sight (Krastev 2013). Through political identity, China and Russia generally advocate alternatives against liberalism and competition among the states subsequently indicates a battle of values and beliefs and not only that. Washington is embarking on a heinous campaign - a smoke-free World War III, according to former leader Deng Xiaoping, aimed at delegitimizing and overthrowing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Brands 2018: 69). The Orange Revolution in Ukraine is to Russia what September 11th was to the United States, as Russian officials have been quoted as ominously saying of "an orange plague" that could sweep everything in the post-Soviet space. Whether those rivalries culminate to war of the great powers may be the main issue of 21st century geopolitics (Brands 2018: 62).

The Achilles' heel of a strong and rising China shall be the lack of a democratic political identity, as demonstrated by the recent events in Hong Kong (Ci 2019). Moscow and Beijing could find themselves in a tight spot, as protests all over the world threaten to place them on the wrong side of history (Dorsey 2019). With regard to the success of the venture, we must not assume that liberal democracy is the last word in human political development (Kaplan 2018:2). Governance systems are not immortal and democracies might be determined by authoritarian regimes. Institutions are disintegrating, societal norms are disappearing, democratic procedures and practices are prone to apathy, demagoguery and decay. The "democratic machine can assist in the humanisation of modern artificial world". That was the promise of democratic politics and it has not been broken to a great extent. How will the state face monsters, such as tech giants: Facebook, Google, Amazon, Apple? The system that will triumph will be the one that will offer more dignity to domestic citizens and more hope to the allies abroad. However, states that are knocked off stride - regardless of state form -

during the course of their history (China - century of humiliation, Russia - shock of transition²⁰) are required to redetermine their route to success (China - second economy globally and gaining national confidence for the Russian people (Grant 2012: 25).

“If the 20th century is a refutation of communist utopia, the 21st will be characterized by the collapse of liberalism”, advocated the philosopher Panagiotis Kondylis, adding meaningfully “it will be the most shocking and tragic in human history” and concluded: “History is not over”. (Kondylis, 2000). It remains to be seen.

During his speech, former US President John F. Kennedy, in his inaugural address after taking the oath of Office on January 20, 1961, said: “In the long history of the world, only a few generations have taken on the role of defending freedom in times of greatest danger. I do not abdicate this responsibility. I welcome it.” (Edel 2019). The greatest challenge is upon us.

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²⁰ The complexity of the triple Russian transition from a global superpower to a nation state, from leading to the economy of the market and from a single-party autocracy to a fragile democracy composes the “new post-soviet order” in the context of separatist conflicts and ethnic tensions (Chaguaceda Armando 2018 :77).

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