

# **The Three Counterrevolutions Occurring Today: A Critical Analysis of the Decline of Westernization, Modernism, and Unipolarity**

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***Abstract:** This paper examines three simultaneous counterrevolutions reshaping the present international order: the spatial counterrevolution from westernization to civilization-states, the temporal counterrevolution from modernism to post-modernism, and the material counterrevolution from unipolarity to multipolarity. Drawing upon established theoretical frameworks, this analysis demonstrates how the global system initiated by the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), consolidated during the Enlightenment, and reinforced through post-1991 globalization is now undergoing fundamental transformation. The essence of this analysis is descriptive rather than prescriptive. These counterrevolutions are seen as the engines for an emergent geopolitical transformation that mainstream political discourse has so far failed to adequately comprehend.*

## **Introduction**

Three major counterrevolutions are unfolding in this historical period—counterrevolutions that elude the analyses and discussions taking place in the public arena, particularly within mainstream mass media. Even well-known pundits and political commentators appear unable to keep pace with these emerging developments. The intention of this paper is to provide a frame of reference to help understand the underlying processes and developments which have occurred in our society over the last three hundred years, what is otherwise known as the process of westernization and modernization of the world.

## **The Spatial Revolution: Westernization and the Nation-State System**

The world has been gradually westernized, in the sense that it has adopted what is called the nation-state project or structure for the definition of the political sphere of public affairs management. The nation-state was formulated in the Treaty of Westphalia in Germany in 1648, which concluded the Thirty Years' War. The peculiar characteristic that defines it is that the state is the sole political sphere that acts as the ultimate agent of authority in all matters of geopolitical life, in all matters of international interaction.

*The Westphalian peace reflected a practical accommodation to reality, not a unique moral insight. It relied on a system of independent states refraining from interference in each other's domestic affairs and checking each other's ambitions through a general equilibrium of power. No single claim to truth or universal rule had prevailed in Europe's contests. Instead, each state was assigned the attribute of sovereign power over its territory. (Kissinger,[9])*

The Treaty of Westphalia established "the precedent of peace reached by diplomatic congress and a new system of political order in Europe based upon the concept of co-existing sovereign states." This principle of international law presumes that each state has sovereignty over its territory and domestic affairs, to the exclusion of all external powers.

As stated above, the State is the ultimate authority, the sole decision maker for its territory; therefore, any formal legal interaction with another region, territory, population or geographical or societal entity must only be conducted through the State — not the church or members of the clergy, not selected dukes, counts or marquises. This is the nation-state apparatus, and now it includes within it city-states, once sovereign entities but now subordinate to this supreme nation-state.

This is a specifically Western construct which has been successfully imposed on the world through a couple of centuries of colonization, brought about by the geopolitical restructuring of World War I and World War II. As European influence spread across the globe, "these Westphalian principles, especially the concept of sovereign states, became central to international law and to the prevailing world order" (Pressbooks, [16]). This is the first point: the world has gone through a spatial revolution that materialized in the westernization of the world.

## **The Temporal Revolution: Modernity and Scientific Rationality**

The second point is that the world also has gone through a temporal revolution, through what is known as the rise of the modern world. The modern world has also originated in the West. It developed as a result of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century and the adoption of scientific rationality as the sole and universal way of understanding all of reality.

*As the Enlightenment centered on reason as the primary source of authority and legitimacy, many philosophers of the period drew from earlier philosophical contributions, most notably those of René Descartes (1596-1650), a French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist. Descartes was the first of the modern rationalists. He thought that only knowledge of eternal truths (including the truths of mathematics and the foundations of the sciences) could be attained by reason alone. (The Enlightenment, [19]).*

The Enlightenment was centered around the idea that reason is the primary source of authority and legitimacy, and it advocated such ideals as liberty, progress, tolerance, fraternity, constitutional government, and separation of church and state. The Enlightenment was marked by an emphasis on the scientific method and reductionism<sup>1</sup>, along with increased questioning of religious orthodoxy.

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<sup>1</sup> Reductionism is the intellectual engine of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. It marked a radical shift from the medieval/Aristotelian view of the world, which focused on "purpose" and "spirit", to a modern, mechanistic view that focused on "parts" and "interactions."

Political and economic life was judged and analyzed and ultimately validated by scientific rationality alone. This gave rise to the modern world where religion and tradition were increasingly disregarded, where nationalism was gradually denigrated and ridiculed, all in the name of this type of technocratic and scientific approach to human life. Hence, all ideas that pre-date the modern age were considered primitive, ignorant or based on superstition. That brought us the age of Enlightenment. We have therefore gone through a spatial revolution, in the sense that the world has been westernized, and we have gone through a temporal revolution in the sense that the world has been modernized.

## **The Material Revolution: Globalization and Unipolarity**

In more recent times, the world has gone through a material revolution: globalization. According to Manfred Steger [18]: “globalization refers to a multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant.”

Globalization has become the single and universal technological and tele-communicative structure that reorganizes all of life and fundamentally transforms it into one big happy global mall, where goods are readily available worldwide, cheaply and abundantly, exotic destinations in every corner of the globe just one click away and parcels delivered, often by robotic means, to one’s address in a short time. While globalization has multi-faceted implications affecting different realms (economic, cultural, political, etc.), its most visible and mundane aspect manifests as the “entropic counterfeiting of reality” (Baudrillard, [2].) Entropic because at every additional "cloning," the copy of the original reality further deteriorates to the extent that copies with no original traits start proliferating. An American citizen does not need to go to Venice, as Disneyland provides "the same experience" at a fraction of the cost. The watered-down Venice version one can experience at Disneyland must be "good enough" for the masses—conspicuous consumption is at the core of the new consumerist impetus behind globalization.

This phenomenon accelerated after 1991 with the fall of the Soviet Union and the advent of a unipolar world where the United States was the sole superpower, governing the totality of the world and forcing the world to operate according to westernized, modernist and globalist norms.

## **The Three Counterrevolutions**

What we must understand, what is taking place in our world today, is that we are now going through a counter-revolution in all three areas: spatial, temporal and material.

### **The Spatial Counterrevolution: From Nation-States to Civilization-States**

The profound discrepancy that is manifesting today between the analyses of the majority of pundits and political commentators and the new realities that are emerging at the planetary level can therefore be

traced back to the failed ability to grasp this new trend underway, this push toward the "civilization-state" by political and television personalities, who still divide themselves according to the outdated canons of neo-liberal and neo-conservative. Both sides of the political spectrum are still slaves to the modernist, unipolar and westernized vision.

The contemporary shift in global politics reflects a move away from ideological conflicts toward civilizational identities. As Hale & Laruelle [4] observe in their analysis of civilizational politics, "civilizations [are treated] not as distinctive 'things' that might 'clash' but as meaningful social imaginings." This perspective builds upon earlier frameworks while acknowledging that Therborn [17] notes: "The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural rather than primarily ideological or economic." Acharya [1] critically examines this "civilization state" discourse, arguing that while civilizational identity has gained prominence in the rhetoric of rising powers, it represents less a clash of inherent cultural essences than a strategic framing by political elites.

This reconceptualization of civilizational politics has proven prescient in understanding the transition from Cold War ideological conflicts to contemporary identity-based geopolitics. Recent scholarship, as *Hale & Laruelle [4]* demonstrate, shows that civilizational identity functions as "meaningful social imagining" rather than predetermined cultural destiny, opening space for agency and strategic choice in international relations.

A classic example are the analyses and positions taken regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The relationship between Russia and Ukraine is very complex and unique and operates through a political, economic and cultural interaction completely different from what, for example, defines the relationship between the United States and Canada. But most pundits and political commentators use a unipolar and Western-hegemonic sensibility to try to understand and frame the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, wondering how Russia could not yield to the expectations of Western observers.

The rules of the nation-state are too restrictive for international actors who increasingly operate in accordance with a multipolar sensibility. While a certain impatience toward Western hegemony has been present for a long time, only recently have these impulses toward emancipation from Western dominance been able to take shape in a more coherent and systematic way, mainly thanks to a growth in economic and political importance of nations such as China, India, Russia and Brazil.

The assertion of Western cultural universalism faces significant challenges in the contemporary international system. Acharya [1] articulates this critique, noting that "the emphasis on civilizational identity is evident not only in rising powers such as China, India, Turkey, and Russia but also reflects a broader contestation of liberal international order's claims to universal validity." As Therborn [17] observes, the promotion of Western values as universal suffers from being empirically questionable, normatively problematic, and strategically dangerous in generating resistance.

This critique of Western universalism underpins much of the resistance to the nation-state model that was imposed through colonization. The rising emphasis on civilizational identity represents not merely cultural assertion but a fundamental challenge to the political architecture inherited from Western expansion.

And nations which show the greater economic potential for the future, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, are clearly siding with the non-Western bloc, either by being already part of BRICS (Indonesia) or waiting to become part of it (Malaysia).

### **The Temporal Counterrevolution: From Modernism to Post-Modernism**

The second counterrevolution underway is a temporal counterrevolution: we are moving from a modern world to a post-modern world. The modern world is the idea of a single and universal scientific rationalism that must be imposed on all people, all times and places, regardless of their cultural specificity. A post-modern world irrefutably rejects this conception.

A post-modern world actually sees that modern world disintegrating as more and more populations are moving in a rather organic way toward nation, culture, custom, tradition, identity—this is why identity politics is becoming so influential, both on the right and on the left, beginning with the American political landscape, but gradually in an increasingly decisive way in many other nations.

The distinction between modernization and westernization has become increasingly salient in contemporary international politics. Lee [10] examines how East Asian states perform "civilizational narratives" that embrace modernization while rejecting Western cultural hegemony, noting that "becoming a modern society involves industrialization, urbanization, and rising levels of literacy, education, and wealth, but the qualities that make a society Western are distinct: classical legacies, Christianity, separation of church and state, rule of law, social pluralism, civil society, and representative government."

This crucial distinction reveals that "while the world is becoming more modern, it is simultaneously becoming less Western," as *Therborn [20]* notes in his analysis of states, nations, and civilizations. Modernization does not necessitate westernization; instead, multiple modernities can coexist, each shaped by distinct civilizational foundations.

Occidentalism is increasingly interpreted as what some refer to as "Western toxicity." The new emerging nations don't want global liberal values. They don't subscribe to the "woke" values typical of Western-branded globalism. And they are deliberately drawing on those civilization-state-centered frames of reference and that spatial revolution to push back against spatial westernization, with space understood as the fact that the world's geography is centered on the West, politically and economically. Culturally speaking, there is increasingly a backlash against the Western conception of "global culture."

## **The Phenomenon of Retraditionalization**

It is a generalized reaction: it is being discovered that more and more nations are rejecting even the nation-state project as a whole. They no longer want to deal with the nation-state because they realize that project inevitably plays by Western rules. And this is why we see Narendra Modi speaking of India more as a civilization, not so much as a state, or Zhang Weiwei, the Chinese scholar, who refers to China as both a state and a civilization.

*China's ancient (yet highly modern) civilization emphasizes the Confucian idea of unity in diversity. China will play the nation-state game, but it will play it in its Chinese civilization-state way, with unique Chinese traits. (Zhang Weiwei [22]).*

We also see Putin openly rejecting the nation-state and reasserting Russia as a new imperial civilization with Eastern Ukraine, which is completely Russian, belonging ethnically and culturally to that side.

The phenomenon of retraditionalization has gained increasing scholarly attention. As defined in the *Encyclopedia of Global Religion (Juergensmeyer & Roof, [8])*, retraditionalization refers to "a social and cultural process where a community or society deliberately re-emphasizes, revives, or returns to traditional values, practices, and beliefs that may have been diminished or marginalized during periods of modernization or globalization." *Galić and Nikodem [4]* examine this in post-socialist contexts, noting that "the post-communist transition was characterized by political attempts at retraditionalization, particularly through the increasingly public role of religion." This process represents not merely nostalgia but an active reconstruction of identity in response to the perceived failures of imposed modernization paradigms.

Examples of retraditionalization taking place include the rediscovery and promotion of Confucianism in Communist China and Putin's stances on religion, which completely reverted the promotion of atheism that occurred during the Soviet Union time. The Orthodox Church is now a central part of Russian daily life, and Putin, the ex-KGB officer, now attends religious ceremonies flaunting his newfound religious fervor.

Retraditionalization is just but one example of negation of the modernist approach that shaped much of the cultural, political and social life experienced in Western societies in the past three centuries.

## **The Material Counterrevolution: From Unipolarity to Multipolarity**

Materially, the unipolar world ushered in through globalization is now transforming into a multipolar world. The globalist world is transforming into a world centered on the civilization-state, where more and more populations are convinced that the globalist structure of technology and telecommunications, which together form a single political and economic system, is also re-usable in the new framework of civilization-states. But in creating their own world, their own Chinese sphere, their own Russian sphere, their own

Turkish sphere, their own Indian sphere, their own pan-African sphere, globalism is transforming into diverse and multi-varied “globalisms.”

*Why is 'multipolarity' so important? Because its opposite 'unipolarity' is immoral, unjust, and outdated... With the rise of China, Russia, the expanding BRICS and other members of the Global South, a multipolar world order is emerging fast. (Zhang Weiwei [23].)*

Zhang further elaborated: "Multipolarity is already there, but what we need is a multipolar world order. This is still in the making" [24]. BRICS exemplifies this shift, as its "overall GDP by purchasing power parity is already much larger than G7, roughly close to 40% of the world's GDP, compared with 33% of G7" (Zhang Weiwei, [22]).

We are now seeing the rise of sovereign civilizations that are challenging the unipolarity of a single superpower, the United States, with multipolar political actors, political powers that see and define themselves as having their own sovereign and autonomous civilization-state. And it is all held together by the tele-communicative and technological structure of their own adaptation of globalization which transcends into multiple “globalisms.”

The essence of Western-branded globalization is the creation of a "citizen of the world" who corresponds to a consumer emptied of any historical, national or religious identity. In contrast, the new globalism with marked characteristics centered on national identities characterized by specific civilizations is now at the service of culture rather than the other way around. From a single globalization with a distinctly Western character, we move to a plurality of "globalisms" where only the technological infrastructure is preserved but redefined in contexts compatible with the unique specificities of each different culture.

### **The Anti-developmentalism Movement**

In recent decades a significant number of African countries have embraced the epistemic and political rejection of "Development" as a universal, linear, and benevolent process of modernization. This movement views the mainstream development paradigm—promoted by Western institutions (World Bank, IMF, USAID, etc.)—not as a neutral path to prosperity, but as a mechanism of neo-colonial control, cultural erasure, and structural dependency. It is not a desire for stagnation; rather, it is a demand for sovereignty over the future. It posits that the "Development" narrative serves to maintain the West as the superior model (the "developed") and Africa as the perpetual inferior (the "developing" or "underdeveloped"), thereby justifying interventionism and eroding African agency.

Anti-developmentalism argues that the very concept of "development" is rooted in a specific Western historical experience (industrialization, secularization, liberal democracy) that is falsely presented as universal.

By measuring Africa against Western standards, African societies are pathologized as "lacking" or "failed." African scholars and leaders are increasingly rejecting these metrics (e.g., GDP, Western-style governance indices) in favor of indigenous concepts of well-being (e.g., *Ubuntu*<sup>2</sup>) or alternative modernities that do not mimic the West. Leaders such as Julius Nyerere (1922-1999,) who was the first president of Tanzania and a prominent African thinker, developed the concept of *Ujamaa*, a model of African socialism based on extended-family communalism, rural cooperation, and self-reliance. The idea emphasized community ownership, collective decision-making, and development rooted in indigenous social structures rather than Western economic models.

Drawing on James Ferguson's work [3], anti-developmentalism critiques how the development industry transforms political issues (inequality, resource extraction, land rights) into technical problems to be solved by foreign experts. Anti-developmentalists argue that "Development" depoliticizes poverty. It hides the fact that Africa's poverty is often a result of historical exploitation and unfair global trade terms, not a lack of "technical know-how." The current resistance involves re-politicizing these issues, demanding fair trade and resource sovereignty rather than aid or charity.

A more structural and radical critique ("Development" as Neo-Colonialism) is rooted in the work of Walter Rodney [17] and Kwame Nkrumah [12]. It views development aid and loans not as assistance, but as tools to trap African nations in debt and enforce policy compliance (conditionalities). The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the 1980s and 1990s are often cited as proof that Western "Development" actually de-industrialized Africa and destroyed social safety nets.

This is the strongest driver of the pivot toward multipolarity. African states are rejecting the "paternalism" of Western donors who attach human rights or governance conditions to funding. In a unipolar world African nations had to accept Western development models because there was no alternative. In a multipolar world, the rise of China, India, Russia, and the Gulf States offers alternatives. China's "infrastructure-first, non-interference" approach allows African leaders to pursue modernization projects without adopting the Western ideological package of "Development" (liberal democracy, NGO oversight, etc.). This validates the anti-developmental stance: one can build roads and dams without Western "Development."

Furthermore, anti-developmentalism is currently manifesting as a fierce defense of sovereignty; for example, the expulsion of Western troops (France, US) from the Sahel (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso) is often framed in anti-developmental terms—rejecting the "security-development nexus" imposed by the West in favor of local or alternative security arrangements (e.g., Wagner Group/Russia). We are seeing a shift from "seeking aid" to "transactional partnerships." Leaders like Paul Kagame (Rwanda) or William Ruto (Kenya),

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<sup>2</sup> The word "Ubuntu" originates from the Zulu and Xhosa languages and is most commonly translated as "humanity to others" or "I am because we are". It encapsulates a philosophical belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity, emphasizing that a person's humanity is derived through their relationships and interactions with others.

despite their differences, often employ anti-developmental rhetoric by criticizing the "begging bowl"<sup>3</sup> culture and demanding reform of the global financial architecture (e.g., the Bridgetown Initiative or the Nairobi Declaration), signaling a move away from being passive recipients of development.

The "Collective West"—term which is being used increasingly in recent times— includes, at its core, the G7 and NATO nations, plus the "Pacific West" —Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand, and several other nations such as Israel and European nations not part of the EU (Norway, Switzerland and Iceland.) It is true that the BRICS+ club currently includes fewer nations; however, they are among the world's most populous (China and India) and potentially more prosperous in the immediate future (Malaysia, Indonesia and other South-East Asian nations.)

While the Collective West is seen as vertical (US-led hierarchy), the emerging multipolar order is perceived as horizontal (sovereign equals). And that is a powerful appeal for an ever-increasing number of nations including the entire African continent, with the notable exception of Ivory Coast and Benin, at present governed by strong men with undeniable ties to Western powers and willing to go along with the Western developmental model. But most nations of the "Global South" look at the unfolding of the multipolar world with renewed interest, hoping to benefit from the unstoppable realignment of political and economic power favoring the emerging nations and the weakening of Western influence.

## **The Failure of Contemporary Political Analysis**

The majority of pundits and political analysts are convinced that the modern world that defines that nation-state project for everyone, that single and universal construct that operates through a sort of political rationality, is still normative. And what is being gradually discovered today is that no, it is no longer.

*The historical expansion of Western power operated through military and technological superiority rather than cultural attraction. — Therborn[20]*

*"The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do." — Huntington [7]*

This historical reality is critical to understanding why Western norms and institutions, despite their claim to universality, are increasingly rejected by non-Western powers. The memory of colonial imposition shapes contemporary resistance to Western-led international order.

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<sup>3</sup> "Begging bowl" refers to the posture of a government that cannot function without extending a hand to Washington, London, Paris, or Brussels for financial assistance. It highlights that many African states fund significant percentages of their annual budgets (health, education, infrastructure) using donor funds rather than domestic tax revenue or trade profits. In political terms it symbolizes a master-servant relationship. The argument is that a beggar cannot negotiate; a beggar must accept whatever is given, including the insults and conditions that come with it.

The profound discrepancy between mainstream analysis and emerging realities stems from an inability to recognize that multipolarity is not merely a configuration of power but represents fundamentally different organizing principles. As Zhang Weiwei noted, the civilization-state model follows different logic than the nation-state: "Russia succeeded in turning this currency war into a war between goods and money. The West has money; the US has money. But Russia has goods. The same with China. China has manufactured goods" [24]. Zhang Weiwei implies that what began as a "currency war" with Western financial sanctions, has evolved into a strategic leverage of physical goods versus financial power. Russia and, to a large extent, China, have used their control over key real-world commodities and manufactured products to counter Western financial dominance.

## **Conclusion: Implications for Western Strategy**

We are witnessing the unfolding of these three counterrevolutions. The essence of this analysis is descriptive, not prescriptive. It is not being asserted that these counterrevolutions should happen per se, by virtue of some value judgment that sees this current counter-revolutionary trend as inherently positive; rather, it acknowledges that these counterrevolutions are happening regardless of our desires or will.

The shift from Cold War bipolarity to contemporary multipolarity introduces significantly greater complexity. As Petrakis, Kanzola, and Lomis [15] analyze in their game-theoretic study, "the global geopolitical landscape is characterized by the rise of new powers and a shift toward multipolarity," creating challenges that demand new analytical frameworks. Kohl [10] notes that "multipolarity alters the foreign policy of great, middle and emerging powers," as states navigate uncertainty, strategic competition, and institutional change in ways fundamentally different from bipolar systems.

This complexity reflects what Acharya [1] describes as a world where "people use politics not just to advance their interests but also to define their identity." The multipolar, multicivilizational order demands frameworks that account for identity politics, civilizational narratives, and the strategic agency of diverse actors rather than assuming universal convergence toward Western models.

It is therefore time to re-imagine American and Western geopolitical strategy in light of a world that is going through these spatial, temporal and material counterrevolutions and where the old paradigm, the old solutions and the old strategies no longer make sense. The question facing Western policymakers is not whether these counterrevolutions will occur—they are already occurring—but how the West will adapt to a world that no longer accepts Western universalism as normative.

The choice is between attempting to forcibly maintain a unipolar order through coercion, which scholars have warned would be normatively problematic and ultimately futile, or accepting multipolarity and seeking constructive engagement with emerging civilizational powers within a reformed international framework.

**Table 1: Revolutions and Counterrevolutions**

| <b>Axis</b> | <b>Revolution</b>             | <b>Counterrevolution</b>            |
|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Space       | Westernization                | Civilization-State                  |
| Time        | Modernism                     | Post-Modernism                      |
| Matter      | Globalization/<br>Unipolarity | Multipolarity/Multiple “Globalisms” |

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