

The Role of the Elites in the Evolutionary Process: Conceptual Framework and Modern Interpretations



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Abstract. The article considers the influence of the elites on the evolutionary process and the current global upheavals that have evolved into a confrontation between two megacivilizations (West and Non-West), which threatens humanity with extinction. The aim of the study is to try and answer the questions whether these processes were to be expected; whether they correspond to the general principles of social development or are a coincidence. The research on the elites in the context of a civilizational approach and combining it with the concept of democracy allowed D. Zolo to build an elite model of civilization development, linking three components: stages of civilization development, type of elite, and form of government. It has been established that as civilization develops (from its inception to its demise), the elite moves from power forces to its supranational form, and this movement is accompanied by the transformation of forms of government from anarchy to tyranny. It is shown that the period of the heyday of a civilization coincides with the period of the rule of national elites; as soon as the elite loses the quality of national power and becomes *supranational*, the civilization starts declining. The source of the evolutionary development of a civilization is the creative potential of the elite, the vital energy of which is found in the passionarity of the ethnic group, “triggered” by the action of the hypercompensation mechanism based on A. Toynbee’s “Challenge-and-Response” principle, which may not work in the case of the rule of the supranational elite. An assessment of the current state of the Western elite has shown its supranational nature and the worsening process of degradation accompanying the decline of Western civilization. This corresponds to the paradox of lagging behind, according to which a civilization that is more advanced

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in terms of technological development finds itself in a state of spiritual crisis and disintegration earlier. From this point of view, the unfolding confrontation is a clash between the supranational elite and its national opponents, who defend the traditional values and interests of their own countries. The novelty of the research lies in the construction of an elite model of the development of civilization, and in the consideration of a structural model of an evolutionary leap in the case of the rule of supranational elites.

Key words: national elite, supranational elite, civilizations, elite degradation, democracy, passionarity.

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Introduction

Russia’s special military operation in Ukraine, which began in 2022, revealed the deep processes taking place in the world. One of them is degradation of the supranational elite represented by a group of people with great power, influence and privileges that exceed the borders of national States. Yesterday’s “*best of the best*” have turned into political puppets brought up by a transnational system of power (the so-called *Deep State*) and focused not on the national interests, but on the interests of globalists and the destruction of the cultural codes of their countries by waging a mental war against their own people. In parallel, a global proxy war has been unleashed with traditional States, primarily with Russia, which, according to Vladimir Putin, is fighting “*not just for Russia’s freedom but for the freedom of the whole world*”¹ during the special operation in Ukraine.

The reason for the degradation of the supranational elite can be found in the aggregate influence of a whole range of factors. Among them we can highlight the decline in the level of knowledge and quality of representatives of this elite, caused by globalization and universal availability

of information; loss of trust on the part of the population due to the lack of adequate channels of communication and feedback between the elite and the people; reduction of social responsibility of the elite due to the prevalence of personal enrichment over the interests of society; inability of the elite to adapt to new challenges and meet the requirements of society, to respond quickly to the changes that are taking place.

The consequences of the ongoing transformation of the ruling elite are catastrophic for the whole world and have already acquired the scale of a global confrontation between two megacivilizations (West and Non-West), endangering the continued existence of all humankind. This clash becomes even more tragic, because the struggle is existential for each of the megacivilizations. For the USA and its satellites (Western megacivilization), defeat means the loss of hegemony, the interests of which are defended by the Western establishment; for the Non-Western part of the world, it means the loss of sovereignty and national identity, the formation of a neo-colonial world “*based on the rules*”.

Against this background, the following questions arise: is everything that is happening a certain pattern that corresponds to the principles of social development, or is it a certain combination of

¹ Plenary session of the World Russian People’s Council. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/72863>

circumstances that arises under the influence of certain factors at a specific historical moment in time; what is the role of elites in the ongoing global events? The aim of the study is to try and find an answer to the above questions; thus, we propose to study the role of elites in the historical process in the context of existing theoretical knowledge combined with the current reality. The novelty of our approach consists in building an elite model of civilization development, and in considering a structural model of an evolutionary leap for the case of the rule of supranational elites.

Literature review

Modern literature contains many studies devoted to historical, methodological and theoretical aspects of elite studies. A significant part of these works discuss the definition of the term “elite”, the discrepancies in relation to which are caused by different approaches to the study of elites. Some researchers who study elites from the point of view of a value-based approach focus on their personal characteristics, defining elite as a carrier of certain personal qualities, such as intellectual and moral superiority over the majority, leadership, wealth, unique socio-psychological qualities, creative component, etc. (G. Mosca, J. Bodin, L. Freund, R. Willemse, L. Vasilieva, A. Naronskaya, etc.); whereas proponents of the structural and functional approach focus on the functional characteristics of leaders: the ability to professionally engage in public administration, make strategic decisions and control strategic resources of power (V. Pareto, R. Michels, A. Etzioni, L. Sanisteban, H. Lasswell, G. Ashin, O. Kryshtanovskaya, O. Gaman-Golutvina, etc.). The most complete analysis of the term “elite”, the stages of its formation and modern interpretations is contained in the works (Ashin, 2010; Gaman-Golutvina, 2000; Gaman-Golutvina, 2016; Krivoruchenko et al., 2012; Ledyaev, 2008; Mokhov, 2008; Fazulov, Kirilov, 2019). The object of our research is ruling (political) elite, which we

will define with the use of the formulation proposed by O. Kryshtanovskaya: “*the elite is the ruling group of society, which is the upper stratum of the political class. The elite stands at the top of the state pyramid, controlling the main strategic resources of the government, making decisions at the national level*” (Kryshtanovskaya, 2005).

Another group of works focuses on various approaches to elite theory. Thus, a whole series of publications by Russian professor V. Ledyaev considers classical and modern concepts of power (Ledyaev, 2009; Ledyaev, 2010; Ledyaev, 2012). A comparative analysis of the functional and functionalist concepts of elites was carried out in the work (Ryabchenko, 2021). The former defines elite as individuals who exert a strategic influence on social processes, whereas from the standpoint of the latter, elite is viewed through the prism of its contribution to the preservation of the social system.

A significant contribution to the study of the processes of elite genesis was made by such researchers as O. Gaman-Golutvina, A. Chirikova, A. Duka, V. Mokhov, G. Ashin. They analyzed the phenomenon of elites in foreign and domestic science and revised what has been done in etiology over the past few decades; they also contributed to the development of Russian science about elites in methodological and applied aspects.

In the framework of *cyclical* concepts of historical development, elite dynamics are studied from the perspective of “circulation of elites”, the main provisions of which were set out in the works of V. Pareto and G. Mosca, who considered the development of elites as a cyclical process: elites that arose in the lower strata of society rise to the upper strata, flourish and gradually die off, and they are replaced by new elites, going through the same phases of development and decline as their predecessors² (Zartman, 2019; Mokhov, 2012).

² See: <https://libeldoc.bsuir.by/handle/123456789/50323>

Proponents of the *civilizational* approach explore the formation of elites in an inextricable relationship with the development of civilizations and consider spiritual and cultural factors to be the basis of their cyclical reproduction (Mokhov, 2014; Badova, 2017).

The *systems* approach explores the “elite – masses” dichotomy as a basis of the social structure of any society; if interconnections in this dichotomy are destroyed, this can cause destabilization of society and its disintegration (Naronskaya, 2019; Dekker, Willemse, 1996). At the same time, the greatest danger to society lies in intra-elite disintegration into opposing groups pursuing their own special goals. The lack of consensus between competing sub-elite groups regarding the place and role of each of them in the power hierarchy can lead to going beyond the intra-elite conflict and spreading to the masses, thereby contributing to increasing instability in society. Special attention is paid to the influence of elites on the country’s political structure, when the democratic regime represents a kind of optimum relationship between the masses and the elites working in the interests of society and thereby increasing the activity of the population (Kochetkov, 2009; Popov, 2010; Gaxie, 2017). It is noted that “*in the modern world, domination is shifting to the global transnational elite*” (Kochetkov, 2009, p. 152). The role of transnational elites in the global conflict and their influence on the global political process is considered in the works (Ivanova, 2015; Kochetkov, 2017; Lane, 2023). The authors note that the turn of transnational elites from a neoliberal strategy to a neoconservative one, accompanied by increased military spending and rising incomes of the American military-industrial complex against the background of reduced social spending and changes in the principles of the global financial system due to the loss of the hegemony of financial capital, meets serious resistance from adherents of the old

approach and causes large-scale unrest throughout the modern world economic system.

The democratic foundations of society were considered through the prism of the interaction of elites and masses in the concept of the economic origins of dictatorship and democracy proposed by D. Acemoglu and J. Robinson, who argue that the stability of the socio-economic system is determined by the long-term “effectiveness” of its political and economic institutions (Acemoglu, Robinson, 2006). The economic theory of elites has been developed in the works (Lavrov et al., 2018; Ilukhin, Ilukhina, 2018). The authors show that the increasing role of elites in the economic processes of the Russian economy leads to the emergence of new socio-economic institutions (for example, the institution of leadership), which, due to their influence on economic processes and trends, can aggravate population differentiation in terms of living standards.

The latter areas include the study of elites within the framework of *institutional* and *synergetic* approaches. The first is related to the ability of the power elite to establish “*rules of the game*”, and the abandonment of such rules contributes to the weakening of the elite and its falling under the “pressure” of paradigms formed by new power structures (Duka, 2001). The processes of elite transformation within the framework of a synergetic approach are considered through the prism of increasing chaos in a closed system, requiring the elite to take actions that would reduce the entropy of the system and achieve maximum results for society. If the elite turns out to be unable to solve these problems, then new teams that most correspond to the established order come to power (Vasilieva, 2011).

Methodologically, this work continues a series of works on elite theory in the context of the civilizational approach. Let us look at it in more detail.

Civilizational approach to elite theory

Within the framework of the civilizational approach, the historical process is viewed through the prism of local civilizations in all their diversity and uniqueness. *“Human history is the history of civilizations. It is impossible to think of the development of humanity in any other terms”* (Huntington, 2003, p. 46). Each civilization develops cyclically, going through phases of origin, growth, prosperity, decline, and disintegration. At the same time, the driving force of development and the fundamental elements of any civilization, according to supporters of the civilizational approach, are spiritual and cultural factors, and the reasons for its disintegration are mainly associated with internal processes, the main among which is the degeneration of the ethnic group (Skolota, 2008).

The first representatives of the civilizational approach³, when dwelling on the causes of the death of civilizations, considered the concept of “ethnos” in the broadest sense of the word, meaning the people as a whole. Thus, N. Danilevsky, who formulated the theory of cultural and historical types, compared the development of civilization with the development of any organism on earth, during which there is a gradual depletion of its forces, leading eventually to the decomposition and death of this organism. N. Danilevsky associated the “rotting” of civilization with the exhaustion of the creative active principle in the peoples, when *“they either calm down on what they have achieved ... and grow old in the apathy of complacency (like, for example, China); or reach unsolvable, from their point of view, antinomies, contradictions, proving that their*

ideal ... was incomplete, one-sided, erroneous ... – in this case, disappointment sets in and the peoples fall into an apathy of despair. This was the case in the Roman world, during the spread of Christianity” (Danilevsky, 2008, p. 131).

The German historian and philosopher O. Spengler associated the death of civilizations with the aging of any organism on earth, including peoples. In his opinion, the life of the people is closely interconnected with the life of culture, since culture is an external manifestation of the soul, which, having exhausted its creative powers, enters the final phase of its existence – the phase of civilization, when *“a people represented by a variety of forms and fused with the land”* transforms into a *“nomad, parasite, inhabitant of a big city”* who is barren, irreligious, and detached from tradition; at this point there occur *“the most extreme and most artificial states that a higher type of person is capable of. They are the completion ... They are the end, without the right of appeal...”* (Spengler, 1993, p. 163).

The concepts put forward by N. Danilevsky and O. Spengler have no direct reference to elite as a source of creative inspiration and the development of civilization, but consider the people as a whole; nevertheless, the idea of elitism can be traced in their teachings, since both thinkers associate the development of a civilization with the creative potential of the people, which concentrated in individuals endowed with *“excellent qualities”*, and the death of a civilization is associated with the massification and barbarization of society, the prevalence of *“entirely insignificant people”*. The idea of elitism is most vividly represented in the concepts of P. Sorokin, N. Gumilev and A. Toynbee.

P. Sorokin, the author of works on social stratification, which is the differentiation of *“a certain given set of people (population) into classes in hierarchical rank”* and which is expressed *“in the existence of higher and lower strata”*, placed all the responsibility for the transformations taking

³ So far, the academic community has not come to a consensus regarding who should be considered the founder of the civilizational approach. Despite the fact that most researchers say it is the Russian scientist Nikolai Yakovlevich Danilevsky, there are other points of view that attribute the emergence of the foundations of civilizational theory to earlier periods (Granin, 2020). In this paper, we will adhere to the opinion of the majority, which recognizes N.Y. Danilevsky as the founder of the civilizational approach.

place in society on the upper stratum (elite). A strong and talented aristocracy is the mainstay of society and the engine of its development, but the “*degeneration of the power of the ruling classes*”, which “*sooner or later becomes inevitable*”, turns out to be the cause of upheavals and revolutions. According to P. Sorokin, one of the signs of such degeneration is the destruction of the “*mechanism of social distribution*”, when the untalented and weak elite, using all means possible, does not let “*tadpoles*” from the bottom to penetrate their environment”, thereby blocking the influx of talented “*nuggets*”, accumulating “*incompetent rulers*” at the top of society and disturbing the social balance. “*History tolerates predatory, cruel, cynical governments, but for the time being, as long as they are strong... But history cannot stand powerless and “kind”, senseless and parasitic, arrogant and untalented governments for a long time*” (Sorokin, 1992, p. 291). Thus, P. Sorokin, as well as his predecessors, sees the source of society’s development in a talented creative minority, the degradation of which is the main cause of social upheavals, leading to the reformatting of society and to its complete destruction.

We cite many examples from the history of humankind that confirm our theory. These are the degeneration of power in Ancient Rome in the 2nd century BC, which led to the emergence of the movement of the Gracchi brothers; and the rule of the “*extremely incompetent, untalented warmonger*” John II in France on the eve of the revolution of the late 14th century; and the consistent decomposition of the aristocracy under the governments of Louis XIV, Louis XV and Louis XVI, which resulted in the revolution of 1789; and the transformation of the Russian aristocracy “*into a social parasite*” at the end of the 19th century, which eventually led to the end of the “*wart on Russia’s body*” (Sorokin, 1992).

L. Gumilev’s passionarity theory speaks about the source that allows the creative minority to realize its potential; L. Gumilev believed that the

rise of passionarity – the vital energy of an ethnic group – ensures the activity and creative rise of talented people who collectively represent the elite in society. During periods of declining passionarity, the elite also degrades, as it begins to form from “*evil nobodies*” with reduced qualities. Passionarity is based on certain energy vibrations called *ethnic field*, the fluctuations of which are caused by planetary and cosmic processes (solar radiation, electromagnetic storms, seismic activity, etc.) (Gumilev, 2016).

L. Gumilev’s concept is expanded by the theory of A. Toynbee, who believed that any historical event is an internal reaction of society to an existential challenge from the outside. The main principle postulating the development of civilization, in his opinion, is “*Challenge-and-Response*”, the essence of which lies in the ability of society to respond to the challenges it faces. It is this principle that determines the movement of civilization at all stages of its existence: from genesis to death. If a society accepts a challenge and adequately responds to it, then it develops; ignoring a challenge or failing to respond to it threatens society with degradation up to its complete destruction (Toynbee, 2011).

“*Rare superhumans*”, whose representative “*can only be described in one word: Personality*”, are capable of adequately responding to the challenge, performing an act of creation and ensuring the growth of society. It is such Personalities who are able to “*overcome the inertia or open hostility of the social environment*”, disrupt social balance and establish a new order. “*The very fact that the growth of civilizations is the work of creative personalities or creative minorities suggests that the uncreative majority will be left behind until the discoverers pull up the rearguards to their own level*” (Toynbee, 2010, p. 268). But the very Individuals who have lost the ability to create contribute to the disintegration of society. “*For ... one of the symptoms of social disintegration and the cause of social division is the degeneration of a minority that was previously able to*

lead thanks to its creative potentials, but now retains power only through brute force” (Toynbee, 2010, p. 464).

In addition to reducing the passionarity of the ethnic group, which affects the degeneration of the elite, modern scientists consider a serious factor in the degradation of the upper strata to be their loss of the quality of national power, which should mobilize both society and government to achieve national goals. The main criterion of the “national elite” is its ability to implement policies in the public interest aimed at strengthening the sovereignty of the country. At the same time, there are situations when the elite has not yet become national, being some kind of *power force* representing the interests of individual territorial societies; either it is *no longer* such, having incorporated into the “world elite” or having become a comprador elite (Mokhov, 2014).

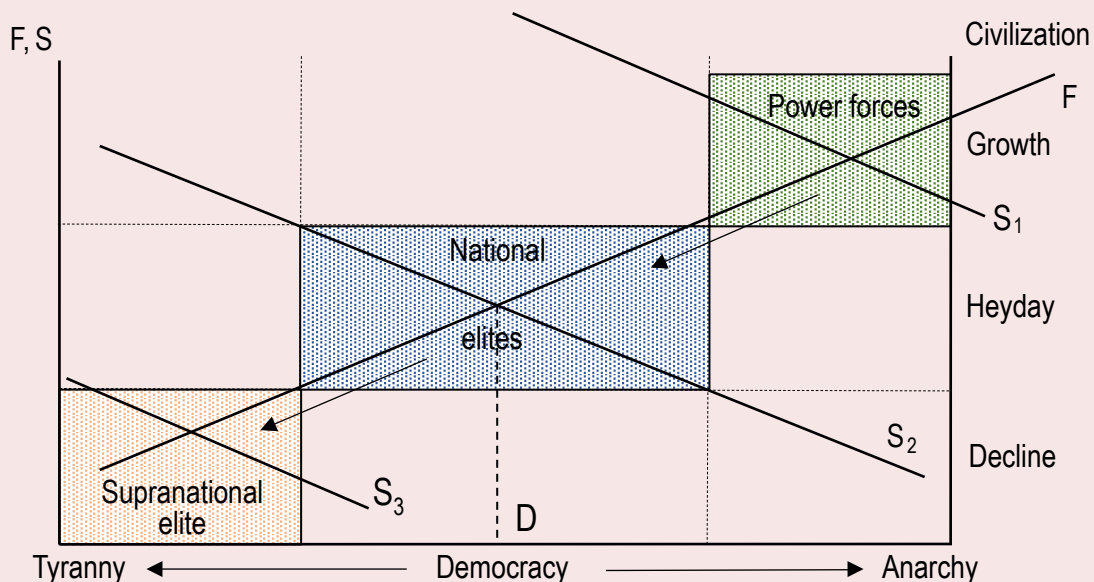
Elite model of civilization development

The above conceptual approaches to the role of elite in the historical process make it possible to

synthesize existing knowledge and assess the current geopolitical situation from the perspective of elite theory. Before doing this, let us turn to another modern concept that examines evolutionary processes from the point of view of the growing complexity of society and the resulting transformation of its democratic foundations. We are talking about D. Zolo’s concept of democracy, according to which politics is the selective regulation of social risks, and democracy is a kind of compromise between security and freedom (Zolo, 2010).

The synthesis of D. Zolo’s concept with the conceptual approaches to elite theory discussed above makes it possible to assess the role of elites not only in terms of civilization development phases, but also in accordance with the forms of government. The geometric interpretation of D. Zolo’s concept presents democracy as a mechanism for finding a balance between freedom and security, similar to the universal mechanism for

Figure 1. Elite model of civilization development



Source: own compilation.

establishing economic equilibrium. Deviation from equilibrium toward increased security characterizes the movement toward tyranny; if equilibrium deviates toward the growth of freedoms, then there is movement toward anarchy (Balatsky, 2013). The imposition of the postulates of the civilizational approach to elite theory on this construction allows us to build an *elite model of civilization development* (Fig. 1) and draw the following conclusions.

First, the development of civilizations generally correlates with the development of political elite, when specific types of ruling elites dominate at different stages of civilizational evolution. Thus, at the stage of the origin and growth of civilizations, which is characterized by the transition from patriarchal family communities to proto-state associations with their administrative centers, governing bodies (councils of elders, assemblies), religious centers and military formations and their further transformation into states, power belongs to the *powerful forces* that manage their territorial entities, have property rights to communal lands and maintain independence despite the increasing power of the tsars (Borisov, 2021). The heyday of civilization, as a rule, coincides with the period of the rule of *national elites* that implement policies aimed at strengthening sovereignty and creating conditions for the development of the state and society, whose interests they represent. As soon as the elite loses the quality of national power, becoming *supranational*, there begins a decline of civilization, the final point of which is its death.

Second, as civilizations develop, political elite shifts from the ruling forces to supranational elite, and the forms of government move from anarchy toward tyranny, which, although they act as extreme forms of government associated with the genesis and death of civilizations, do not necessarily imply their indispensable implementation. Rather, they indicate a certain vector of movement from one extreme to the other. So, if at the dawn of any civilization it is characterized by the presence of a

large number of disparate communities (analogous to anarchy), then by its decline any civilization is shifting toward a rigid dictatorship peculiar to the rule of a supranational elite, contrary to the generally accepted rhetoric about the democracy of its rule.

Third, in accordance with the laws of W. Ashby and E. Sedov, in the process of evolution, society become more complex, which in turn leads to an increase in social risks and a decrease in the level of public safety. Figure 1 shows this as a downward shift in the security curve ($S_1 > S_2 > S_3$), accompanied by a decrease in the level of democracy and a movement toward authoritarian regimes (Balatsky, 2013). The imposition of the civilizational approach to elite theory on this construction shows that establishing a balance between freedoms and security is a necessary, but insufficient condition for achieving democracy. Drifting around the conditional equilibrium point D, which means the predominance of democratic foundations in the social structure, is possible only when power is in the hands of a national elite focused on the interests of the State and its people, which, as was established above, globally coincides with the heyday of the civilization.

To confirm the above conclusions, let us turn to historical facts. For example, the history of *Roman civilization* is usually divided into the royal, republican, and imperial periods. The tsarist period, associated with the birth of Roman civilization and the formation of its statehood, is characterized by a gradual transition from disparate tribes (*Latins, Sabines, Etruscans*), in which there was no clearly defined power and in which the military-priestly nobility occupied the dominant position, to the Roman “civil community”, consisting of 30 curiae of 10 clans each, power and public relations in which were based on the principles of “military democracy”. During the republican period, which marked the heyday of Roman civilization, the principle of the supremacy of the Roman people

was enshrined in the legislative rights of the people's assemblies. Despite the fact that democracy was indirect, the political structure of the Roman Republic was quite democratic: the plebeians were equalized with the patricians in civil rights, the position of tribune was elective, there was a developed system of government institutions. The period of the Roman Empire is characterized by the collapse of republican institutions and the advent of the time of dictatorships, which ended with the collapse of Roman civilization in the 5th century AD⁴.

Another example is *Sumerian civilization*. At the stage of its formation, the disparate villages of the southern Mesopotamia were united into city-states (*nomes*), each of which had its own elite, tsarist government, army and culture. By the beginning of the third millennium BC, there were more than a dozen and a half nomes. The struggle for hegemony that unfolded between them contributed to the establishment of a kind of confederation of city-states with a single supreme ruler. A bicameral parliament was created to resolve military issues. The upper house (senate) consisted of elders, and any male citizen capable of carrying a weapon could take part in the work of the lower house. Thus, in the heyday of the Sumerian state, there was a kind of democratic government that limited the power of the king and recognized the rights of the people's assembly. The conquest of Sumer by the Akkadian army and the establishment of the monarchy of Sargon I, who proclaimed himself the "*king of Sumer and Akkad*", marked the beginning of the decline of Sumerian civilization. It is noteworthy that, having lost its independence and being under the yoke of Akkadian kings, the original Sumerian state went through a period of recovery associated with the construction of an irrigation system, roads and ports. However, gradual extermination

of the Sumerian population, disappearance of the Sumerian language, and spread of slavery eventually led to the collapse of the Sumerian state and complete disappearance of the Sumerian ethnic group (Kramer, 1965).

The elite model shown in Figure 1 has a number of limitations and assumptions that require additional research and understanding. First, the life of civilizations is much longer than the life of any elite, and throughout the life of a civilization, elites change many times under the influence of both internal and external factors. As a result, the cycle of elite change presented in the model in reality can occur repeatedly during the existence of civilizations, causing internal fluctuations associated with the formation (rise) and degradation (fall) of elites at each stage of civilization development. In this regard, the presented model is dynamic, since it demonstrates the *global vector* of movement of the political elite (from the ruling forces to the supranational elite) and the forms of the political structure of society it sets (from anarchy to tyranny) during the life cycle of the civilization (from its inception to its demise). However, in reality, the evolutionary process is an uneven movement, at each stage of which the elite can transform into any of the types under consideration, thereby causing fluctuations, the direction of which is determined not only by the ability of the ruling elites to withstand the challenge that has arisen, but also by the level of their passionarity.

Second, there are situations when it seems that there is a failure in the combination of national elite – civilization heyday / supranational elite – civilization decline. For example, the idea of building a socialist society in the past century was spread by the Soviet government far beyond the borders of the USSR; as a result, we can argue that the Soviet elite went beyond national interests and represented a supranational elite. During the same period, the peak of activity of Soviet society also occurred. That is, we can say that the

⁴ See: https://pnu.edu.ru/ru/faculties_old/full_time/ispitic/iogip/study/studentsbooks/lectures3/igpzlecture1/

heyday coincides with the period of rule of the supranational elite, which contradicts the logic presented above. However, this is not entirely true, since it was previously noted that the main criterion for identifying a supranational elite is its *loss of the quality of national power*. The Soviet elite, even extending its influence beyond the borders of the country, remained nationally oriented and acted as a national force mobilizing both society and government to achieve internal interests. Moreover, the loss of the quality of national power by the Soviet elite caused disintegration of the great country.

Structural model of an evolutionary leap: the case of supranational elites

The mechanism of the birth of ethnic passionarity is revealed by the structural model of an evolutionary leap developed as a result of the integration of A. Toynbee's "Challenge-and-Response" concept and L. Gumilev's passionarity theory (Balatsky, 2022). According to this model, the whole process can be divided into several stages. At the first stage, called *warm-up period*, there certain external challenges (stresses) consistently emerge, which society painlessly ignores up to a certain point in time. However, the cascade of external challenges, stretched over time, eventually "overflows the cup" and leads to the second stage – *reflection period*. At this stage, an inventory effect occurs when the potential of the system is assessed and a vector of its possible further transformations is formed to eliminate the problems that have arisen. The third stage, *training period*, is characterized by the concentration of all the resources of society in vital areas (mobilization effect) and the formation of a new elite capable of implementing transformations and making the transition to *innovation stage*, ensuring the restructuring of the entire system based on new management and organizational structures. The combination of these stages, which in their essence are the mechanism of action of A. Toynbee's

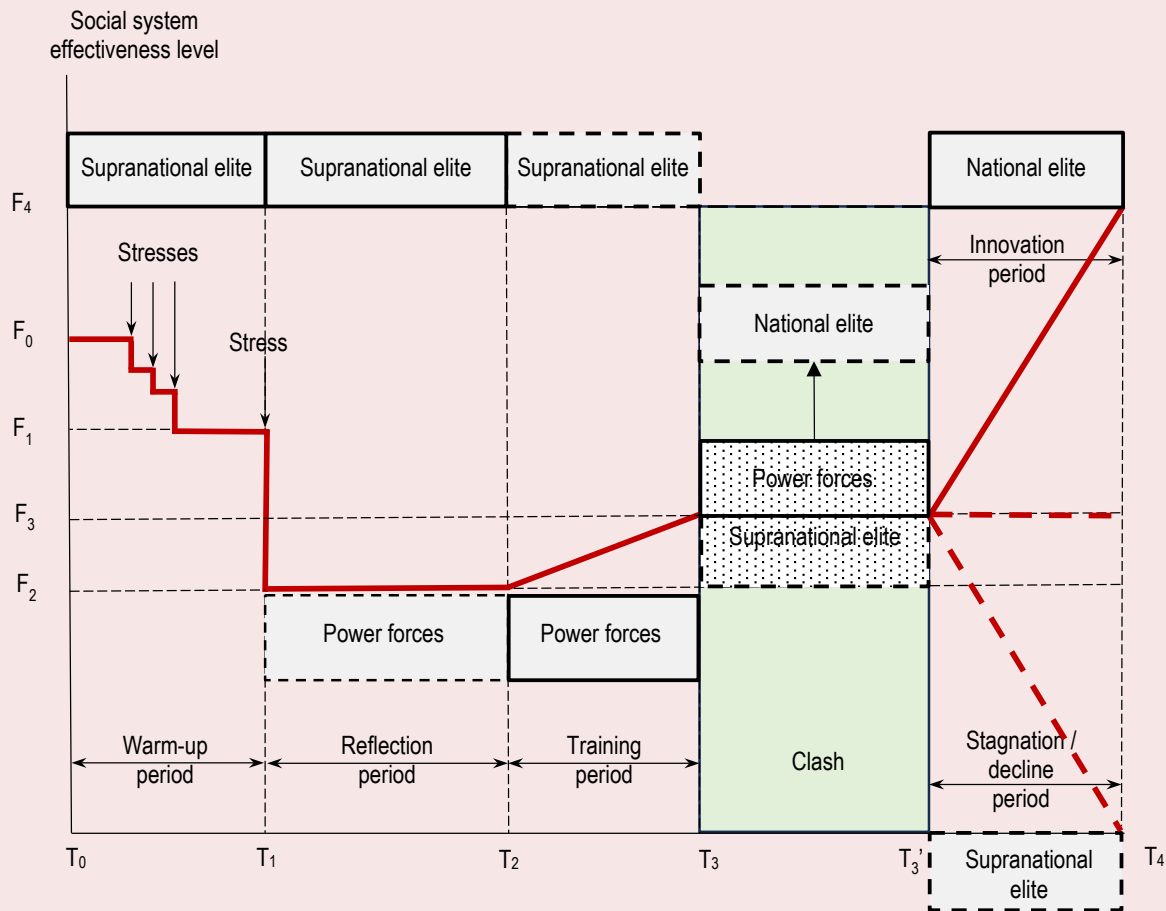
"Challenge-and-Response" principle, provides the effect of N. Taleb's hypercompensation, triggering the "explosion" of L. Gumilev's ethnic passionarity.

This model represents a general scheme of the birth of passionarity of an ethnic group, which can transform depending on the type of ruling elites who have taken on a cascade of external challenges. Let us consider the most meaningful and illustrative case when, during the warm-up period, a supranational elite is in power, unable to make decisions focused on the interests of its own State (*Fig. 2*).

A series of challenges coming from the outside during the warm-up period (T_0-T_1) violates the established foundations and creates a situation when, against the background of the ongoing rule of the supranational elite, whose interests extend beyond the borders of the country they govern, there emerge new, patriotic-minded power forces, for example, certain political parties focused on strengthening national sovereignty and internal development (T_1-T_2). The subsequent training period (T_2-T_3) is crucial, since it ends with a clash between a weakening supranational elite and strengthening power forces (T_3-T_3'). The outcome of this confrontation determines the further trajectory of social development (T_3-T_4). According to the classical model of an evolutionary leap, the combined impact of mobilization effects (at the T_2-T_3 stage) and restructuring effects (at the T_3-T_4 stage) causes hypercompensation effect, triggering an "explosion" of passionarity and providing an evolutionary breakthrough. However, such a trajectory is feasible in the case when, as a result of confrontation, the supranational elite/power forces gain the upper hand and the formation of a national elite takes place. When the supranational elite wins, there comes either a period of stagnation (at best) or a stage of decline.

The presented logic is quite clearly demonstrated by modern Germany, which, after its defeat in World War II, lost its sovereignty and fell under Anglo-

Figure 2. Structural model of an evolutionary leap for the case of supranational elites



Source: own compilation.

Saxon (American) influence. Despite the fact that the country was allowed to develop economically quite successfully, Germany’s political dependence did not allow it to form a national elite focused on internal interests. The global events launched in 2022 served as the “shock shake” for Germany, which was supposed to launch the hypercompensation mechanism in accordance with the model under consideration. However, the presence of a supranational elite in power has led to the fact that external interests have proved to prevail over national ones. German Foreign Minister Annalena Berbock expressed this very clearly: “If I promised the people of Ukraine that ‘we

will be with you as long as you need’, I want to keep this promise. No matter what my German voters think, I want to keep my promise to the people of Ukraine”⁵.

The lack of independence of the German ruling elite and its inability to pursue an independent policy leads to disastrous consequences, which the elite in power is absolutely unable to deal with. Thus, the rejection of Russian energy resources, which are the basis for competitiveness of the German economy; explosions at the Nord Stream gas pipeline and the unwillingness of Germany’s

⁵ See: <https://business-swiss.ch/2022/09/berbok-nevazhno-cto-dumajut-moi-nemeckie-izbirateli/>

allies to investigate them; countless anti-Russian sanctions harming the country's economic agents – all this contributed to the fact that the German economy ceased to be the largest one, began to plunge into recession, and its GDP drop by the end of 2023 amounted to 0.3%⁶. German industrial production decreased by 1.5% in 2023. The country's energy-intensive industries and the chemical industry were most severely affected: their production index decreased by 20 and 24% respectively⁷ from February 2022 to December 2023, according to the German statistics service *Destatis*. Against this background, German companies are reducing production and transferring it to other countries, among such companies are *Volkswagen AG* and *Mercedes-Benz*, the largest industrial gas producer *Linde*, *Delkeskamp* packaging plants, *Nelskamp* roofing tile plant, etc.; foreign giants such as French and American tire manufacturers *Michelin* and *Goodyear*, French manufacturer of seamless tubes *Vallourec*, South African pulp and paper group *Sappi*, Dutch zinc plant *Bludel* are leaving the country⁸.

Despite the fact that the economic decline deals a blow to the welfare of Germans, the ruling elite of Germany continues its anti-national policy, arguing that it is impossible to “*match the suffering of Ukraine and social guarantees in Germany*”, because “*this would be a mockery for the inhabitants of Ukraine*”⁹ and the population of Germany must tolerate this state of affairs, since German Chancellor O. Scholz said: “*I took an oath [to support Ukraine], and for the sake of this oath I will work day and night*”¹⁰.

⁶ See: <https://russian.rt.com/business/article/1208792-germaniya-ekonomika-oslablenie>

⁷ See: <https://expert.ru/news/promyshlennoe-proizvodstvo-germanii-upalo-nizhe-prognozov/>; https://www.pravda.ru/news/economics/1947172-germanija_perekhodit_na_import_plastika_khimproizvodstvo/

⁸ See: <https://www.fondsk.ru/news/2023/12/04/germaniya-teryat-svoyu-promyshlennost.html>

⁹ See: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/18281805>

¹⁰ See: <https://ren.tv/news/v-mire/1119944-sholts-odobril-umenshenie-vyplat-maloimushchim-radi-biudzheta-na-oboronu>

The result of the policy is a catastrophic drop in public trust in the ruling elite. Thus, according to the results of a survey by the *Institute for New Social Answers* (INSA, Germany) conducted in January 2024, 72 and 76% of respondents were dissatisfied with the work of the German Chancellor and the federal government, respectively. At the same time, the rating of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) has dropped to a record 13%, and the combined indicator of support for the ruling “traffic light” coalition – the SPD, the Greens, and the Free Democratic Party of Germany (FDP) – is only 30%. This is happening against the background of the growing popularity of the far-right parties Alternative for Germany (AfD; 22%) and the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance – Reason and Justice (BSW; 7%), which advocate policies in the interests of the German State¹¹. AfD co-chair A. Weidel, commenting on the words of German Foreign Minister A. Berbock regarding the support for Ukraine contrary to the interests of her own voters, said: “*Someone who clearly spits on the interests of German voters must not hold a ministerial post. We need a diplomatic foreign minister who will defend the interests of German citizens and advocate for negotiations and peace between Russia and Ukraine*”; BSW leader S. Wagenknecht said: “*A foreign minister, who claims to represent the interests not of German voters, but of the voters of Ukraine, and who rejects negotiations on ending the war in the interests of the U.S. government, is not only a blatant mistake, but also a threat to our country*”¹².

Returning to the structural model of the evolutionary leap, we can say that Germany is now clearly in the training period, which in the upcoming 2025 federal election will result in a clash of elite groups. The outcome of this clash will determine the future of the country.

¹¹ See: <https://iz.ru/1634059/2024-01-14/opros-vyivilnedovolstvo-rabotoi-kantclera-sholtca-u-bolee-70-nemtcev>

¹² See: <https://business-swiss.ch/2022/09/berbok-nevazhno-chto-dumajut-moi-nemeckie-izbirateli/>

The destructive role of the supranational elite can be traced on the example of the USSR, when Western elite, which waged a cold war with the Soviet Union, was able to launch a program of destruction of the country through the rule of Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, who betrayed the interests of their people. The policy aimed against national interests resulted in the disintegration of a great power, carried out by the authorities who ignored the results of the referendum on secession from the USSR, in which about 80% of the country's population voted for its preservation¹³. For almost a decade of the rule of Yeltsin, who actually took the oath of office to his overseas master in the US Congress in 1992, announcing the fall of the “*Communist idol*” who “*sowed social discord, hostility and unprecedented cruelty*” and “*inspired fear in the human community*”, and calling on the Lord to bless America¹⁴, the decline of the country and the formation of a supranational elite continued. Vladimir Putin's rise to power “*confused*” the plans of Western elites, who, according to former US President George W. Bush, expected that “*Russia would be more compliant. But then Putin changed dramatically*”¹⁵. The country entered the reflection period, when, along with the current oligarchy, a new force began to form, which entered into the struggle for national interests and which took almost two decades to become the very national force that launched the “*explosion*” of the passionarity of the Russian people, observed today in Russia.

Modern elite in the context of the evolutionary model of civilization development

The currently unfolding global confrontation, the catalyst of which was the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in 2022, is the

result of the evolutionary development of two megacivilizations (West and Non-West) and the growth of their civilizational identity, which took place over a long time, significantly exceeding a two-year period. The main characteristics of the two megacivilizations and the factors that led to their confrontation are described in detail in (Balatsky, 2022). The evolutionary model of civilization development formulated above allows us to supplement and clarify these characteristics, taking into account the assessment of the current state of the modern elite.

According to the division of the world into two megacivilizations by the value criterion proposed in the work (Balatsky, 2022), the United States and countries that are in the orbit of their interests (Canada, Australia, European countries, Singapore, South Korea, Japan, etc.) belong to Western civilization. In fact, we are talking about a coalition of unfriendly countries that have unleashed a hybrid war against Russia, which has become the personification of Non-West. In accordance with the evolutionary model of civilization development, it is easy to see that the countries of the West are united by another feature: almost all of them are States in which power is in the hands of a supranational elite. And, as we noted above, the loss of the quality of national power by the elite is an important sign of its degradation, which, within the framework of the civilizational approach, is considered as a feature of the disintegration of civilization; i.e. we can say that these are countries ruled by the elite at the stage of its degradation.

The catastrophic consequences of the process of degradation of the supranational elite are now more obvious than ever. The idea of “*European unity*” promoted by the supranational elite actually destroys national States, undermining their economies, energy security and sovereignty. Today, many European countries are experiencing an economic crisis, accompanied by an increase in unemployment and a decrease in the quality

¹³ See: <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/201612080822-kdk8.htm>

¹⁴ See: <https://mediamera.ru/post/25615>

¹⁵ See: <https://ren.tv/news/v-rossii/977084-vovan-i-leksus-pokazali-prank-s-bushem-na-forume-novye-gorizonty>

of life, while the elite continues to indifferently increase their power and wealth and build their “bright future” on the ruins of nation-States and the principles of democracy. Against this background, the very idea of European unity is “bursting at the seams”.

The degradation of the U.S. ruling elite results in a rapid rejection of democratic principles in favor of harsh authoritarian measures based on the principles of gerontocracy. Current events taking place in the United States seemed impossible a few years ago: destruction of the sacredness of the institution of presidency in order to eliminate a competitor in the election race; demolition of monuments to the country’s founding fathers under the auspices of the fight against racism; failed migration policy that turns the country into a “haven” for crime; restriction of freedom of speech and persecution of journalists for wanting to interview leaders of other countries; complete disregard for the death of American citizen Gonzalo Lira in a Ukrainian prison; legalization of various mental disorders that put people with healthy minds on the verge of insanity, etc. However, the most striking thing today is rapid aging of the ruling elite, bordering on the loss of all reasonable limits. Today, the president of the United States is an “*elderly man with a bad memory*”¹⁶, whose behavior causes outright bewilderment of the whole world; in 2023, 90-year-old Senator Dianne Feinstein, who had worked in the US Senate since 1992, died in office¹⁷; the Republican leader in the US Senate, 81-year-old Mitch McConnell, falls into prostration at his press conferences¹⁸; 83-year-old Nancy Pelosi, who

announced her intention to be re-elected to Congress in 2024, provokes a conflict in the United States and China by flying to Taiwan and declaring commitment to the principle of “One China” and support for Taiwan’s freedom at the same time¹⁹; 100-year-old Henry Kissinger also visited China, trying to mediate in the dialogue between the two countries²⁰. The list can be continued indefinitely, but even these few examples clearly demonstrate the process of degradation of the Western elite.

Nevertheless, today’s American elite, despite all the bravura speeches about its openness and democracy, is an example of a strictly hierarchical closed society, which is almost impossible to break into. Last but not least, this is due to the effective education system. Thus, the path to the political Olympus of both the American and world elite begins with the unification of the most prestigious universities, which is commonly called the Ivy League. Its leaders are Harvard University and Yale University, alma maters of thirteen American presidents. The age-old dispute between Democrats and Republicans is often compared to the confrontation between Harvard and Yale²¹.

Despite the existing system of grants for education for gifted but poor talents, Ivy League universities remain the abode of obscenely rich youth from the most elite families united in secret university fraternities, such as, for example, Skull & Bones, Scroll and Key, and the Wolf’s Head at Yale University. Commitment to the fraternity institution, which has long since turned into a kind of multinational corporation that takes care of its members, persists throughout life and is a guarantee of a successful career after graduation. Therefore, almost half of U.S. presidents, 42% of all U.S. senators, 30% of all supreme judges and 85% of the

¹⁶ See: https://www.1tv.ru/news/2024-02-09/470533-amerikanskiy_spetsprokuror_nazval_dzho_baydena_pozhilym_chelovekom_s_plohoy_pamyatyu

¹⁷ See: <https://topwar.ru/227089-prestarelaja-imperija-v-ssha-skonchalas-senator-rekordsmen-kotoraja-i-v-90-let-nesobiralas-pokidat-dolzhnost.html>

¹⁸ See: <https://ria.ru/20230830/makkonnell-1893276227.html#:~:text=Макконнелл%2C%20которому%2081%20год%2C%20замолчал,разгар%20пресс-конференции%20на%2019%20секунд>

¹⁹ See: <https://ria.ru/20230908/nensi-1895098320.html>

²⁰ See: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2023/07/20/986103-genri-kissindzher-priehal-v-kitai>

²¹ See: <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2017/09/08/cherep-i-kosti-liga-plyushha-kak-v-universitetakh-mira-gotovyat-mirovuyu-elitu.html>

heads of large companies were members of various fraternities²². At the same time, neither joining various fraternities nor graduating from prestigious universities guarantee a high level of education and competence of the modern elite (Balatsky, Ekimova, 2022).

These facts are a clear proof that Western civilization, having overcome the period of its heyday, confidently entered the stage of decline with its accompanying form of government (oligarchy) and supranational elite (see Fig. 1), whereas the Non-West, in accordance with the *paradox of lagging behind*, when a civilization that is more advanced in terms of technological development finds itself in a state of spiritual crisis and disintegration earlier, acts as a defender of traditional values and spirituality (Balatsky, 2022). It is difficult to predict how this confrontation will end, since the series of decisions taken today by the Western elite, according to Vladimir Putin, “... *really threatens a conflict with the use of nuclear weapons, and, consequently, the destruction of civilization*”²³.

Conclusion

Consideration of the role of elites within the framework of the civilizational approach closely links the development of a civilization with the development of elites, which at different stages of civilization development may exist in the form of a powerful force, national or supranational elite. Combining this approach with Zolo’s democracy concept made it possible to build an elite model of civilization development by combining three factors: type of elite, form of government and stage

of civilization development, and to show that as a civilization develops (from its inception to its demise), the elite moves from powerful forces to its supranational form, accompanied by a change in forms of government from anarchy to tyranny. The presented model is a theoretical construction that can later be used for empirical calculations for individual countries and civilizations.

The source of evolution at any stage of civilization development is the creative minority (elite), and the implementation of its potential is due to the action of the mechanism of an evolutionary leap based on the “Challenge-and-Response” principle and the passionarity of the ethnic group. Concentration of power in the hands of a supranational elite at the moment of launching the hypercompensation mechanism, which gives rise to the passionarity of the ethnic group, may not work and lead to the opposite effect. This is due to the fact that elite degeneration, an important feature of which is the loss of its national identity, leads to the decline of society. The extreme point may be the complete destruction and disappearance of a civilization.

The global confrontation between the West and Non-West that has unfolded in the world is actually a confrontation between supranational and national elites, degradation and development, a “*rules-based*” order and a world based on international law, which can be evil and good. The outcome of this confrontation remains to be known, but it will not change the vector of movement of civilization on a global scale.

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²² See: <https://russian7.ru/post/studencheskie-bratstva-ssha-kak-kuetsya/>

²³ See: <https://ria.ru/20240229/zapad-1930211871.html>

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