



Letter from Siberia

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a former Russian oil tycoon now serving a nine-year jail sentence for fraud and tax evasion, sees the emergence of a new world order

In all likelihood, 2007 will turn out to be truly a watershed year in recent human history—the year in which we will see an acceleration in the formation of a new world order. At the very least, not only will the categorical need for such a world order become universally recognised, but its general features will become apparent as well. This world order will differ fundamentally from the United States-centred world in which we have been living for nearly 20 years; however, it will not much resemble the bipolar post-Yalta world (1945-90) either.

China will at last clearly stake its claim to the role and status of a global superpower, the military and economic protector of the eastern hemisphere. The signs of China's transformation will include its response to new missile launches by North Korea—already China is giving clear signals that the key to a resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue lies in Beijing, and no place else. The rest of the world will have to accept China's terms for settling the matter and thereby recognise China as not just a regional superpower, but a global one too.

The new world order will mean not only a global status for China, but also the formation of a new non-aligned movement, with Delhi, Tehran and a number of Latin American capitals as its emerging centres. This movement will be amorphous and disjointed, but the mere fact of its existence will ensure that the world can neither remain unipolar nor become bipolar on the Yalta model. A potential American attack on Iran will accelerate the formation of this new world order, because it will force China to declare its strategic ambitions sooner, as well as catalysing the formation of yet more new centres of active anti-American sentiment worldwide.

China will assert itself not only as a political and military power, but also as an economic superpower: it will test its wings by manipulating the rest of the world both as the largest producer of all categories of industrial

the anti-globalisation revolt, which is itself a driving force for the formation of the new world order.

Russia finds itself in a particularly difficult situation. It has essentially abandoned the industrial economy, but has not achieved a post-industrial one. It has abandoned many of the things that have made it unique historically, but has not sufficiently fitted into the America-centred world either. It is feeling remarkably strong pressure from China, which is interested in the sparsely populated vastness of Siberia, so rich in natural resources. A rapid Sini-fication of the Asian part of Russia is already taking place, and represents the main strategic threat to the country's security. Even today, the logistical interaction and human contact between the areas to the east of Lake Baikal and the countries of Asia, especially China, are comparable with or even exceed such ties with Moscow, while Sini-fication is seen as something inevitable.

Fuel for thought

Energy policy will be a key factor in the new world order. The new generally accepted “fair price” for oil of \$40-60 per barrel will stimulate serious capital investment in alternative, “borderline cost-efficient” fuels. Among these are gtl—gas-to-liquid—which renders small gas and gas-condensate fields located far from consumers economically viable; technologies for turning coal into motor fuels and for gasification of coal underground, which will give many old coal-producing regions a new lease of life; and, on the American continent, huge reserves of underground heat sources may be deserving of a serious look.

But even if work begins in all these directions, as well as towards improving energy efficiency in industry and homes and the use of various small-scale alternative sources of energy, we cannot forget that the economies of developing countries will continue to grow, meaning there will not be any reduction in energy prices in the near and medium term. The year ahead will show which strategy the developed countries are going to choose to work their way out of their looming energy crisis.

1. Reindustrialisation based on a “new competitiveness” deriving from an energy-efficiency advantage over the industry of China and other developing countries.
2. New colonial wars—this time for energy resources.
3. New leadership: abandonment of the model of increasing material consumption in favour of improvement in the quality of life, an increase in the intellectual component of the consumer basket.

Strategically speaking, only the third way holds promise for the future. Human nature is extremely conservative, and there is of course a strong desire to postpone making such a radical decision. But this is not possible—the decision will be made in 2007. Whether we are aware of it or not, the direction for the next decade or more is going to be decisively set. ■

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goods, “the world's factory”, and as the largest holder of the world's reserve currency, the dollar. The United States, western Europe and Russia will start to feel like economic hostages of the People's Republic.

The formation of the new world order will mean a slowing down of the process of globalisation in its current form. On the one hand, globalisation has brought the world a great deal of technological benefit; on the other, it has led to large-scale violations of the rights of individuals and of societies—from nations to civilisations. This assault of unification, which ignores the deep differences between people and their fundamental needs and ways of interacting with the world around them, has given rise to