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Interview / Интервью

Global Politics in the Context of Digitalization

Interview with Tatiana Alexandrovna Alekseeva, Dr.Sc. (Philosophy), PhD (History), Honored Scientist of the Russian Federation, Professor, Head of the Department of Political Theory, and Marina Mikhailovna Lebedeva, Dr.Sc. (Political Sciences), PhD (Psychology), Professor, Head of the Department of World Political Processes at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (MGIMO University)



In the photo: on the left — T.A. Alekseeva, on the right — M.M. Lebedeva.

Abstract. The present interview features prominent Russian scholars in the fields of international relations theory and technological transformation, Tatiana A. Alekseeva and Marina M. Lebedeva, representing the MGIMO academic school. The dialogue covers how the political organization of the world is being transformed by the introduction of new technologies, how theories of international relations react to digitalization processes, and what new theoretical approaches can be expected. In particular, it is noted that constructivism is rather cautious about digitalization and the use of quantitative methods of analysis. Answering the questions of the editorial board of the journal, the fundamentally new contributions of digitalization to international relations and world politics compared to previous technological advances. Thus, it is argued that the speed of the impact of digitalization on political and international political pro-

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cesses is many times greater than in previous stages of development with the introduction of new technologies. At the same time, digitalization causes many negative and side effects. The article uses concrete examples to illustrate the contradictions generated by digitalization, related, on the one hand, to Internet freedom, and, on the other, to state sovereignty. It is noted that states can cooperate with each other in countering crime in the digital sphere, if it is not of a political nature. In the case of terrorism and politically motivated actions of criminals, state cooperation becomes more complicated. Digitalization has brought new leaders to the forefront—the United States and China. Digital companies in these countries actually determine many areas of development. A special question arises in connection with the definition of standards in the digital sphere, since it is obvious that the standards of those companies and countries that will be adopted will largely determine the further development of digitalization and the international political processes caused by it. The article sets out an argument as to why a complete breakdown of production chains and a total fragmentation of the internet are unlikely to occur. The authors discuss how the political organization of the world will evolve and the prospects and limitations of various types of digital technologies. It is assumed that network relations will become dominant in the world, but the process of transformation, the transition to network interaction can be very painful.

Key words: digitalization, theory of international relations, digital technologies, digital companies, digital sovereignty, digital diplomacy

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Мировая политика в условиях цифровизации

Интервью с Татьяной Александровной Алексеевой, доктором философских наук, кандидатом исторических наук, заслуженным деятелем науки РФ, профессором, заведующей кафедрой политической теории, и Мариной Михайловной Лебедевой, доктором политических наук, кандидатом психологических наук, профессором, заведующей кафедрой мировых политических процессов Московского государственного института международных отношений Министерства иностранных дел Российской Федерации (МГИМО МИД России)

Аннотация. В интервью с ведущими российскими экспертами в области теорий международных отношений и технологической трансформации Татьяной Александровной Алексеевой и Мариной Михайловной Лебедевой, представляющими научную школу МГИМО МИД России, обсуждаются проблемы международных отношений и мировой политики в условиях цифровизации. Показано, как трансформируется политическая организация мира в результате внедрения новых технологий, как теории международных отношений отражают реакцию на процессы цифровизации и появления каких новых теоретических подходов к изучению международных отношений в цифровую эпоху можно ожидать. В частности, отмечается, что конструктивисты довольно осторожно относятся к цифровизации и применению количественных методов анализа. Отвечая на вопросы редакции журнала, эксперты анализируют, что принципиально нового внесла цифровизация в международные отношения и мировую политику по сравнению с предыдущими технологическими скачками. Так, приводятся рассуждения о том, что скорость воздействия цифровизации на политические и международно-политические процессы во много раз больше по сравнению с предыдущими этапами развития при внедрении новых технологий. При этом цифровизация вызывает много негативных и побочных явлений. На конкретных примерах показаны противоречия, порождаемые цифровизацией, связанные, с одной стороны, со свободой Интернета, а с другой — с суверенитетом государства. Отмечается, что государства могут сотрудничать друг с другом в противодействии преступности в цифровой сфере, если эта преступность не носит политического характера. В случае терроризма или политически мотивированных действий преступников сотрудничество государств осложняется. Цифровизация вывела на авансцену новых лидеров — США и Китай. Цифровые компании этих стран фактически определяют многие направления развития цифровизации. Особый вопрос возни-

кает в связи с определением стандартов в цифровой сфере, поскольку, очевидно, что от стандартов тех компаний и стран, которые будут приняты, во многом будет зависеть дальнейшее развитие и цифровизации, и обусловленных ею международно-политических процессов. Эксперты объясняют, почему вряд ли произойдет полный распад производственных цепочек и полная фрагментация Интернета. Т.А. Алексеева и М.М. Лебедева рассуждают о том, как будет выстраиваться политическая организация мира, какие перспективы и ограничения существуют у различных видов цифровых технологий, и выдвигают предположение, что сетевые отношения станут доминирующими в мире, но процесс трансформации и перехода к сетевому взаимодействию может оказаться весьма болезненным.

Ключевые слова: цифровизация, теория международных отношений, цифровые технологии, цифровые компании, цифровой суверенитет, цифровая дипломатия

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— **Dear Marina Mikhailovna, digitalization is a phenomenon that encompasses all spheres of the modern world. Does it have a specific impact on international relations and world politics? If so, what does this specificity entail?**

— **M.M. Lebedeva:** Indeed, there is no sphere in the modern world that remains untouched by digitalization. I would highlight three aspects that are critically important for international relations and world politics. Here, the latter is understood not only as the interaction between states, but also as the interaction between states and non-state actors in the international arena. These aspects perhaps distinguish international relations and world politics from other spheres in the context of advancing digitalization.

The first aspect is related to the fact that technological revolutions have always led to a restructuring of the political foundations of the world order. Thus, the emergence of agricultural tools led to the formation of feudalism; the Industrial Revolution facilitated the creation of capitalism. In the 20th century, another, albeit less significant leap was driven by the discovery of atomic energy. As a result, the club of five nuclear powers largely determined world politics and international relations in the second half of the 20th century. Klaus Schwab also draws attention to leaps in technological development that set the trajectories of global development (Schwab, 2016), although for him, the world-

political aspect fades into the background, giving way to the technological one.

Will digitalization change the political organization of the world? In my opinion, it absolutely will. Today, there is much talk about multipolarity, on the one hand, and turbulence, on the other. I cannot accept the term “multipolarity” in its usual sense—that is, as the existence of several states that determine world politics and international relations. It seems to me that we should instead speak of polycentricity, where the centers are not only states, but also international organizations, para-organizations (BRICS), transnational business, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and others. In turn, the concept of “turbulence” in international relations, introduced by James N. Rosenau in the last century (Rosenau, 1990), is gaining a new lease on life today (see, e.g.: (Oppenheimer, 2021)). At the same time, turbulence is often understood as chaoticization or a process leading to chaoticization (see, e.g.: (Haass, 2008)).

Both vectors of development—polycentricity and turbulence—are not mutually exclusive. Digital technologies generate turbulence and chaoticization because they dismantle previous ties and relations. Essentially, they break down established hierarchical connections. At the same time, they rebuild these connections largely into network relations, though hierarchical ties do not disappear entirely.

The second aspect relates to the reasons behind the destruction of existing ties and relations. Digitalization has made state borders “transparent.” Initially, the transparency of borders was driven by the massive entry of various actors onto the world stage, as noted by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye in the early 1970s (Nye & Keohane, 1971). The next stage in the development of the transparency of national borders began at the end of the 20th century with the emergence of the Internet. Klaus Schwab, however, does not attribute the Internet to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Nevertheless, it was precisely with the Internet that the digitalization of world politics and international relations began. The modern world is built on Westphalian principles, the foremost of which is sovereignty, and the Internet began to disrupt this principle by enabling cross-border communication and information transfer.

The digitalization of the 21st century has accelerated these processes, including, for instance, through the cross-border nature of cryptocurrencies. At the same time, information and communication technologies, alongside other scientific and technological advancements, have generated a range of opportunities and challenges in the transnational environment. On the one hand, this includes the development of public diplomacy. Nowadays, virtually all embassies and foreign missions of various countries are represented in the virtual environment. Participants in international meetings simultaneously use online and offline communication during negotiations (Lebedeva & Zinovieva, 2023). On the other hand, the world is confronted with fake news, which has become a crucial element in hybrid wars. In the realm of security, as well as during armed conflicts, national borders are bypassed using new technologies, such as drones, cyberattacks, and so on.

The third aspect is related to the fact that the “transparency” of borders gives rise to a whole range of new areas in the international sphere that require coordination at the global level. The first such area was Internet regulation (Zinovieva, 2015). The space of the Internet is global, whereas states have their own limitations, including in the

realm of legislation. Thus, one of the first key precedents regarding Internet jurisdiction was the “*Yahoo case*” in 2000. Its essence was that items with Nazi symbolism were being sold on the American company *Yahoo*’s auction site—which is prohibited in France but permitted in the United States. Today, the spectrum of all these issues related to the transnational nature of actions based on new technologies has expanded significantly.

Digitalization is one of the phenomena associated with the emergence of a new, post-non-classical or, in other words, “Prigoginian” worldview, named after the prominent Russian-born Belgian physicist Ilya Prigogine. He argued that modern science refutes determinism and insists that creativity manifests itself at every level of natural organization. The instability of phenomena and processes is an essential element of existence; there is no single bifurcation, but rather entire cascades of them, pushing development in one direction or another, often under the influence of a random factor. As a result, new, unpredictable macrostructures emerge, and the future is open. Moreover, *The End of Certainty* presupposes modifications, whereby even individual actions can prove significant. Even a small energetic impact—a “nudge”—is enough for the system to reorganize and a new level of organization to emerge (the “butterfly effect”).

Thus, Prigogine placed at the center of his worldview the “bridging of being and becoming,” a “new synthesis of these two essential ‘dimensions’” of reality—two interconnected aspects of reality, but with the decisive role belonging to time (becoming). Consequently, we are entering a new era of the “history of time (which has ‘penetrated everywhere’)” where being and becoming can be united—with priority given to the latter. However, in this case, it is precisely the speed of communication provided by digitalization that proves decisive.

Therefore, we are entering another global scientific revolution, specifically associated with post-non-classical science. Recall that, according to Academician Vyacheslav S. Stepin, the key ideas of post-non-classical science are non-linearity, coevolution, self-organization, global

evolutionism, synchronicity, and systematicity (Stepin, 2003).

Understandably, the transition to a new worldview and the shift in scientific paradigm does not happen overnight; it is a relatively lengthy and quite contradictory process. For example, the transition from the Newtonian “classical” to the Einsteinian “non-classical,” and now to the Prigoginian “post-non-classical” worldview is by no means complete; in a sense, we are constantly in a transitional period, applying the achievements of previous eras to specific themes and problems. The Danish physicist Niels Bohr also wrote about this.

One of the aspects of the transition to a post-non-classical world is the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Let us recall that the First Industrial Revolution involved mechanization, water power, and steam engines; the Second involved electricity, the assembly line, and mass production; the Third involved computerization and automation. Finally, the current revolution, above all, involves digitalization. We can pinpoint the moment when its conceptualization emerged—with the publication first of an article and subsequently a book by the German economist and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, Klaus Schwab, titled *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Schwab, 2016).

According to the researcher, the world stands on the brink of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, whose main features are the “ubiquitous” and mobile Internet, increasingly cheaper miniature manufacturing devices, artificial intelligence (AI), as well as nanotechnology, quantum technologies, robotics, etc. Moreover, this is not just about the “digitization” of economic flows and processes, but a comprehensive digital transformation of the world, driven by megatrends and a multitude of equally significant factors.

Today, it is difficult to name a sphere of human activity in which digital approaches are not applied or attempted, and the realm of foreign policy and international relations is no exception. This is a new variation of the “Black Swan,” that is, an event that is an outlier (nothing in the past can convincingly point to its possibility) and

carries an extreme impact, while human nature makes us concoct explanations for its occurrence after the fact (Taleb, 2011, p. 10).

The term “digital diplomacy” entered the practice of international relations back in the 2000s, and its significance became obvious during the COVID-19 pandemic. A different kind of diplomacy has emerged, operating by different, non-traditional rules. Thanks to the development of digital technologies, which vastly accelerate communication processes between states, new forms of diplomatic interaction have arisen—the integration of information and communication technologies (artificial intelligence, virtual reality, decentralization of systems, etc.). In short, the very nature of the diplomatic agencies’ work is changing, as they have been equipped with powerful tools for establishing international ties and managing international processes.

Digital diplomacy, based on networked information and communication technologies, not only enables negotiation, but also qualitatively expands the potential to influence the achievement of foreign policy goals by engaging with civil society, business corporations, the mass media and other structures.

It should be emphasized that digital diplomacy is oriented toward the strategic, and by no means solely tactical, application of Internet tools in international relations. This, in turn, means that as a result of digitalization, the very paradigm of diplomacy has changed, and the possibilities for achieving foreign policy goals have vastly expanded. According to the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, no profession today can do without social networks, and diplomacy even less so. It entails the integration of artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, virtual diplomatic actions, as well as the active use of social media. “The processes of digitalization, their regulation, balancing, and adaptation to specific situations deserve special attention. And I am convinced that these processes should not become an end in themselves, but must be carried out actively after carefully weighing, of course, all the risks and threats to society, and they must serve to protect our national interests, to protect our

values, our culture, and our history,” emphasized S.V. Lavrov.¹

Although with the advent of the Internet and social networks this line of activity seems to have already taken shape, today we are talking about a qualitative increase in the scale and depth of penetration of digital diplomacy into international processes and phenomena.

Over time, the negative sides of digitalization have also become apparent. For instance, cyberattacks targeting diplomatic missions and their staff have now become a common practice. Cybersecurity issues are acquiring paramount importance in these conditions—there is the potential for information leaks, the manipulation of the images and ideas of politicians and diplomats, and the destruction of international agreements and principles of confidentiality, without which no diplomacy is possible. The safety and resilience of the digital diplomatic infrastructure itself may be called into question.

— How is the phenomenon of digitalization of the modern world reflected in theoretical studies of international relations and political theory?

— **T.A. Alekseeva:** The world order is currently undergoing a significant transformation. Increasingly, it is a highly complex system of constantly accelerating transnational communication. The new world requires reconceptualization, because most of the principles perceived as universal truths in the discipline of international relations emerged under specific historical conditions and were answers to the concrete “challenges” of their time. Hence the novelty of ideas and interpretations, even if the “grand theories,” such as political realism and liberalism, still persist. They are complemented by new approaches, such as the “quantum-like” theory of decision-making (Alekseeva, Mineev &

Loshkariov, 2017). As the renowned French thinker Michel Foucault wrote: “To work is to undertake to think something other than what one has thought before” (Foucault, 1996, p. 308). He also wrote: “To write a book is always, in a certain sense, to destroy the previous one” (Foucault, 1996, p. 309).

Although the social sciences are developing various post-positivist and post-empirical methodologies, the “political”—in the best traditions of Carl Schmitt—is still predominantly viewed in accordance with the mechanistic tradition, through constant discourses about the state as a machine, the state as an organism, the balance of power, etc. And although we seemingly try to think in terms of network flows, dominant international political thought is structured around a Newtonian “axis.” Over the last decade, concepts and constructs from theoretical physics, quantum theory, thermodynamics, and the self-organization of biological systems have entered the academic lexicon of political science, including the theory of international relations. They usually act as metaphors, significantly enriching the understanding of socio-political processes through “comparison.”

Traditionally, the theory of international relations rested on the triad of “Realism—Liberalism—Marxism.” After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), constructivism was proposed to take the place of Marxism, although it is not so much a theory as an approach applied within various paradigms, for example, in the book by Samuel Barkin (2010).

Let us recall that political philosophy and theory today are already dominated by third-generation constructivists (and, according to some scholars, even fourth-generation constructivists), which could not but affect their views on the issues of digitalization. Theorists, while remaining committed to the basic postulates of constructivism, have at the same time paid special attention to communication theory and framing as ways of constructing reality and saturating it with specific meanings. This current emerged under the influence of the philosophical discourse of postmodernism.

¹ Lavrov S.V. Without Agreements Between Countries in the Field of the Internet, the World Faces Cyber Anarchy // EurAsia Daily. April 14, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <https://easaily.com/ru/news/2022/04/14/bez-dogovorennostey-stran-v-oblasti-interneta-miru-grozit-kiberanarhiya-lavrov> (accessed: 10.10.2025).

One of the newest currents of constructivism is interactive constructivism. It was formed under the influence of the “School of the University of Cologne in the Federal Republic of Germany” (FRG) and authors such as Kersten Reich, Stefan Neubert, and others. The attention of interactive constructivists is focused on discourses, which they believe should be perceived and analyzed as fluid, existing temporarily within contexts of social understanding. Hence the concentration of constructivist researchers on methods such as discourse analysis. They insist that it is precisely discourse that shapes the world around us, and they propose examining socially reproducible groups of ideas and meanings that have taken root in a particular community.

Constructivists generally emphasize the subjective factors of reality perception, believing that social phenomena, including international relations, are too complex to be explained solely through empirical constructs. Therefore, they insist on paying attention to the context in which structures are formed, and to how and why certain practices have become relatively fixed, while others remain mobile and mutable. In addition, constructivists focus on studying identities, for example, the role of the “Self”—“Other” interactions in the study of world politics.

Constructivists are quite cautious about digitalization and, more broadly, about the use of quantitative methods in analyzing international relations. Some constructivist theorists fundamentally deny the possibility of knowing and explaining processes, leaving to science only the right to interpret the meaning of these processes for the actors. Since constructivists do not recognize the absolute certainty of scientific knowledge, they limit the scope for research, especially quantitative methods, which traditionally rely on an empirical base.

At the same time, constructivists give credit to digitalization when it comes to examining and analyzing certain specific problems. In particular, digitalization signifies a qualitative leap on the path toward the “annihilation of distance,” which H.G. Wells wrote about in his time (Wells, 2023, pp. 19–21). The destructive consequences of

previous stages in the “annihilation of distance”—the transition from walking to horseback riding, then to harnessing steam power, electricity, the telephone, the radio, and finally, the Internet—not only radically changed the way and pace of life but also manifested themselves far from instantly. Now we can only guess or imagine the possible scenarios for further progression along the path of digitalization, including in the sphere of international relations.

Of paramount importance is also the cultural factor, linking geography with the history of humanity. Today, geography is primarily associated with a map showing not only oceans, seas, and mountains but also (which plays a particularly significant role in politics) interstate or community borders. In this regard, political thought is quite diverse, but one can nevertheless identify three main approaches: geopolitical, civilizational, and geocultural. Digital data on the dynamics of the spread of sociocultural constructs also indicate an expansion of the spectrum of topics and directions in international studies.

— **M.M. Lebedeva:** Theories reflect the world in which we live. Realism and liberalism, as the first theoretical approaches in international relations, proceeded from a state-centric organization of the world. As the world developed in the 20th century, various associations of states and international institutions drew attention within the framework of later versions of these theories, and within neoliberalism—non-state actors as well. Neo-Marxism introduced the idea of the class nature of states. By the end of the 20th century, the world had become even more complex. Critical theory, constructivism, and even the quantum approach emerged in relation to political science (Wendt, 2015). The metaphor of the quantum approach is taken from physics and presupposes probabilistic rather than deterministic outcomes; moreover, actors can simultaneously be allies and adversaries to one another depending, for instance, on the issues under consideration. At the same time, the behavior of one actor influences all the others, and so on.

Digitalization provided a new metaphor—the network metaphor—which was first studied by

Manuel Castells (1996) back in the late 1990s, during the formative period of the Internet. However, the network approach had already gained traction in international relations in the 21st century, when studies demonstrating the role of network relations in world politics began to be published increasingly often (Cerny, 2010; Sikkink, 2011).

Saskia Sassen also offers an interesting angle on examining international relations and world politics: in response to Michele Acuto, she observes that digital technologies are not a “steam engine,” but rather an infrastructure, “the foundation of many socio-technical interactions” (Acuto & Sassen, 2019, p. 40), and it is precisely network interactions that create this infrastructure.

Network theory and the quantum approach to international relations are not mutually exclusive. Both approaches emphasize that the actors of international relations and their connections cannot be considered independently of one another, pointing to non-linearity, the unpredictability of choices, etc. However, is it enough to rely merely on metaphors from the natural sciences when studying international relations and world politics? As Ole Wæver notes in a dialogue with Linda Monsees, one of the solutions here might be to turn to the ideas of new materialism, which imply a departure from dualism—in particular, the material and the immaterial, nature and man, etc. In doing so, Wæver draws attention to the fact that, in this case, theory itself is a technology, and technology is a theory (Monsees & Wæver, 2019).

Thus, specialists in the field of international relations and world politics face the task of conceptualizing digital realities and formulating their own approaches, which will likely synthesize both ideas from the natural sciences and contemporary philosophical concepts.

— In your opinion, how can a balance be found between protecting one’s digital sovereignty (for example, through data localization laws) and the necessity of maintaining a global, open, and secure Internet? Is a conflict between these principles inevitable, or is a synthesis possible?

— M.M. Lebedeva: States strive to protect themselves from external interference in the digital sphere. This applies to both foreign states and non-state actors, including business entities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), hackers, etc. Hence the data localization law, the requirement for various structures to monitor content posted on the Internet, and so forth.

Elena S. Zinovieva and Alexander A. Ignatov have defined “digital sovereignty” in a broad sense as “the independence of the state in the digital sphere and the ability to independently implement information policy both domestically and in the international arena.”² However, the problem lies in how feasible this is, since digital sovereignty differs from national sovereignty in its traditional sense in that:

- 1) it lacks clearly defined borders,
- 2) it stands in opposition to global interdependence and transnational corporations (TNCs) in the fields of technology and data management,
- 3) in the digital space, there are no states, institutions, or people, but only their digital copies; as a result, it becomes difficult to hold anyone accountable for offenses (Shitkov, 2025).

This gives rise to numerous problems. Thus, a contradiction emerges between Internet freedom and security issues. For example, in the previously mentioned “Yahoo case,” this issue remained open.

I believe the situation will be similar to what is observed in an arms race: the emergence of new types of weapons leads to the development of new means of protection, and so on in an upward spiral.

— Cyber warfare, cyber espionage, disinformation campaigns—how are these new threats redefining the concept of national security and defensive alliances? Can we expect

² Zinovieva E.S., Ignatov A.A. “Digital Sovereignty” in the BRICS Agenda // Russian International Affairs Council. January 24, 2024. (In Russian). URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/tsifrovoy-suverenitet-v-povestke-obedineniya-briks/?sphrase_id=137399354 (accessed: 16.10.2025).

new international treaties to emerge, similar to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, but for cyber weapons?

— **M.M. Lebedeva:** Perhaps we should distinguish between criminal actions carried out by non-state actors and confrontations between states, although, of course, such a division is not always obvious. However, it is still easier to reach an agreement on criminal aspects, while reaching agreements on politically motivated actions is significantly more difficult. It is precisely for this reason that problems arise in defining what constitutes terrorism and in combating this phenomenon.

Nevertheless, at the national level, legislative acts are being adopted to counter computer attacks. For instance, in 2013 (as amended on December 22, 2017), the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation “On the Creation of a State System for Detecting, Preventing, and Eliminating the Consequences of Computer Attacks on the Information Resources of the Russian Federation” was signed in Russia.³

Obviously, the problem cannot be solved solely at the level of individual states. It is of a global nature, which is why various international organizations, including the United Nations (UN), are engaged in countering cybercrime and combating cyberterrorism. However, it is unlikely that effective results can be achieved at this point. The reasons for this are both political and technological. In future, we need agreements similar to those reached during the Cold War, in particular, analogous to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Furthermore, in all likelihood, business entities working in the field of countering threats in the information space should be involved in the development and implementation of such agreements. In any case, negotiation is, of course, necessary.

³ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 15.01.2013 No. 31s (as amended on 22.12.2017) “On the Creation of a State System for Detecting, Preventing, and Eliminating the Consequences of Computer Attacks on Information Resources of the Russian Federation” (Extract) // Consultant Plus. URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_140909/ (accessed: 01.11.2025).

— **T.A. Aleksseeva:** Blockchain technology—a ledger for storing and transferring digital assets—may prove to be highly promising. All records in the blockchain are stored as blocks that are linked together by special keys. The blockchain is unbreakable. Blocks cannot be altered or deleted; new ones can only be added. The blocks are stored on a multitude of computers interconnected via the Internet. This makes it possible to trace the history of purchases and sales of an asset, for example. Such data cannot be falsified.

Information technology (IT) specialists use this technology to transfer money between people without banks, systems like *WebMoney*, or other intermediaries. This is how the Bitcoin cryptocurrency emerged. It is reasonable to assume that, in the future, the technology could radically change the approach to work in a whole range of industries—from banking and healthcare to online commerce. For example, the technology can already make transfers faster and cheaper, protect medical data, and make logistics accessible to every participant in the process. It is anticipated that in the future, blockchain will significantly simplify financial ties, the inevitable consequence of which will be a change in the functions and nature of the activities of banks and administrative structures. The main characteristics of blockchains are transparency (records in the blockchain are accessible to everyone, which reduces corruption risks), high transaction confirmation speed allowing for prompt responses to changes, reliability (the system is resistant to hacks and failures due to its decentralized structure), economic efficiency, and legal compatibility.

For instance, in one country, an electronic voting system based on blockchain helped increase voter turnout by 25% and reduce vote-counting time to 5 minutes. Thus, the technology will contribute to lowering the level of corruption and political manipulation.

Nevertheless, the technology is not without its flaws, which criminal structures could exploit; that is to say, its use requires the creation of an international information security system.

In other words, the level of digital protection is still not very high. Furthermore, AI built on the basis of self-learning systems could begin to act in its own interests. As a result, humanity could lose the ability to control AI. It is also important to consider the potential threat to employment due to the automation of many work processes, which could result in social tension (provided that the retraining of workers does not take place). Artificial intelligence can make decisions based on its own logic, which might be unethical from a human perspective, especially since the legal status of AI is still in a “gray zone.”

However, the most important point here is perhaps the potential degradation of the individual or society: people might shift their intellectual activity onto AI, which in turn could lead to the mental and professional degradation of the individual (subject to a decrease in their brain activity). This threat is quite obvious. Recently, there have been several instances where students attempted to use digitalization technologies to write essays and even term papers. For now, the intervention of artificial intelligence is fairly noticeable, but what will happen in the future? Mass illiteracy?

— **In what ways has digitalization changed the toolkit of public diplomacy and the struggle for “soft power”? Can successful technological corporations (such as *TikTok* or *Netflix*) be considered new agents of international relations, and how should states respond to this?**

— **M.M. Lebedeva:** The term “public diplomacy” emerged in the second half of the 20th century in the United States and was defined as a government’s exertion of influence on the societies of other states.⁴ The channels of this influence are twofold: directly through government structures and through the programs of non-state actors sponsored by the government (Lebedeva, 2017). The development of digitalization has made a significant contribution to public diplomacy by sharply expanding the audience for interaction

with foreign societies through the websites of embassies and ministries, and the emergence of *Twitter*⁵ diplomacy (Tsvetkova, 2011). The next step in the development of digital public diplomacy was not only informing foreign societies but also actively interacting with them. Finally, the use of Web 3.0 technologies in public diplomacy leads to decentralization and user interaction (Ordovsky & Kozhemyakin, 2025).

By expanding the external audience, digitalization simultaneously increased the number of diplomats who began to engage in public diplomacy, writing tweets, posts, and so on. Representatives of non-state structures also became involved in this work. All this has made work in the field of public diplomacy more complex.

Which technological corporations are actors and which are not is a complex question. In the absolute sense, none of them are. For that matter, neither are states. No single state is the sole creator of world politics. *TikTok* acts not so much as an actor, but rather as a conduit for China’s “soft power.” In this regard, the company is highly successful. The American company *Netflix* is also unlikely to claim the role of an actor, but it is difficult to call it a conduit either.

— **In your view, is digitalization not becoming a new source of global inequality, dividing countries into technologically advanced “digital powers” and everyone else? Which international institutions and mechanisms could help to bridge this gap?**

— **T.A. Alekseeva:** It seems that the acceleration of global political processes, combined with the possibility of network and digital influence on both external and internal recipients, is creating new opportunities in the field of public diplomacy. For the first time in history, diplomatic and state structures have the opportunity to interact directly with the populations of other countries without any official statements or the use of mass media. The most important

⁴ Public Diplomacy // Dictionary of International Relations Terms : 3rd edition. Washington, DC : U.S. Department of State Library, 1987. P. 85–86.

⁵ The social network *X* (formerly *Twitter*) has been blocked in the Russian Federation at the request of the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Russian Federation (*Editor’s note*).

elements of digital diplomacy are interaction on social networks, which opens up the possibility of real-time communication, as well as holding conferences and summits without logistical costs, and organizing negotiations on pressing issues without the need to visit another country. In this regard, public diplomacy is acquiring a qualitatively new dimension today, as it allows for appealing to certain foreign structures or groups without intermediaries.

— **M.M. Lebedeva:** Digitalization has indeed divided the world into leaders and laggards. I.V. Danilin demonstrates that Internet companies in the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC), such as *Facebook*,⁶ *Alibaba*, and others, are key players in digital markets: "It is the US and, to a lesser extent, China that structure the markets of the digital economy, preventing the chance for third countries and regions to seize leadership in this sphere—including by buying up foreign competitors and promising startups" (Danilin, 2020, p. 103). The world finds itself largely divided between these two states.

In terms of long-term planning, international organizations, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank, can provide assistance, including by financing educational projects in developing countries, which could raise the overall level of digital literacy. In general, however, the situation does not seem as clear-cut as a division into "digital states" and everyone else. First, digital technologies develop by immediately integrating into the global space. Therefore, it is entirely possible that new ideas and new startups will emerge in other parts of the globe outside the US and China, and it will not be possible to absorb all of them. Here, the formation of networks and the "tying of knots" [establishing nodes] within these networks becomes important. Second, the problem of standards arises. The struggle to promote "one's own" standards in the

digital sphere at the global level will be very fierce, as it is directly tied to the economic sphere.

— **The COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions have exposed the vulnerability of global supply chains, especially in the high-tech sector (chips, software). How do states protect their technological sovereignty? Will this lead to a complete collapse of global chains into isolated technological blocs (for example, a Western one led by the United States and an Eastern one led by China)?**

— **T.A. Alekseeva:** The global world today also depends on powerful processes of change within political systems themselves, the economy, and technological "breakthroughs." Hence the phenomenon of "technofeudalism," which is currently much discussed and written about by authors of various ideological orientations. This concept describes a new socio-economic system dominated by digital technological platforms, much like the hierarchical system headed by feudal lords that dominated society in the Middle Ages. This idea was articulated by the Greek economist Yanis Varoufakis, who has been described as "John Maynard Keynes with a touch of Marx." He argues that we are undergoing "epochal changes" where, due to the development of computing and big data, the end of the traditional market driven by capitalism is arriving. The similarity to feudalism lies in the fact that corporations will generate revenue not only from profit but also from an analogue of "rent" for access to a platform or advertising, much as feudal lords once exacted rent from peasants. For example, the American company *Apple* retains a 30% commission on app sales in the *App Store*, which resembles a "tribute" or feudal tax rather than a typical market form of profit.

Although they remain formally independent, small companies are in fact dependent on the infrastructure of tech giants ("landlords"), which is concentrated in the hands of just a few corporations. Researchers consider this to be a new form of capital. One of the possible consequences of digitalization could be the merging of business

⁶ The social network *Facebook* (part of the *Meta* group of companies) is banned in the Russian Federation. *Meta* is recognized as an extremist organization in the Russian Federation (*Editor's note*).

and power, which in turn could mean the emergence of monopolies on a scale that is currently exceedingly difficult to even imagine. This would no longer be simply capitalism, but a qualitatively new post-capitalism.

— **M.M. Lebedeva:** International tension, like the pandemic, represents a crisis situation, and crises typically lead to polarization. Today, we can observe polarization not only in the realm of the digitalization of world politics, but in other spheres as well. In particular, there is a polarization of right-wing and left-wing parties in Europe and in the United States.

As a result of the negative experience during the pandemic and the current complex environment, states are striving to secure their own technological production and their own technological supply chains. The most vivid example of this is the production of microchips. On the global market, the Taiwanese company Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) produces over 50% of microchips and supplies its products to countries including the PRC and the US. During the pandemic, there was an increased demand for microchips and, consequently, a shortage of them. TSMC began supplying microchips to *Apple*. Other companies had to wait months for microchip deliveries.⁷ Despite the fact that the microchips were being supplied to an American company, this prompted the US to develop their production on its own territory, albeit with the help of TSMC.⁸

The trend toward technological self-sufficiency will hardly lead to a complete collapse of technological supply chains, as such a thing is unlikely in today's interdependent world. Over time, the chains will be restored, albeit on a new foundation. At the same time, new ways are being

sought to find a balance between technological sovereignty and investment security; in particular, the ecosystem approach is being proposed (Stepnov, 2025).

— **Who holds greater influence over the digital environment today: national governments or transnational technological corporations (Big Tech)? How is the very nature of power in international relations changing in connection with this?**

— **M.M. Lebedeva:** It is hardly productive to pit transnational technological corporations against states. In most cases, they cooperate. Moreover, corporations lobby for their interests and are represented within government structures. A similar representation of government structures exists within the companies.

In certain cases, a transnational technological corporation may turn out to be more influential, and not only in the digital environment, but also—which is more significant—in world politics. Let us return to the example of TSMC. The fact that this company is more influential in the digital sphere than the Republic of China (ROC), where it is located, and which is not recognized by the Russian Federation—is seemingly obvious. However, TSMC also largely deters key geopolitical actors from an armed conflict that could result in the entire world being left without a sufficient quantity of microchips.

— **The key elements of the Internet (the domain name system, protocols) have historically been governed under the significant influence of the United States and Western non-profit organizations. Are we witnessing a crisis of this model and an intensification of the struggle for multipolar Internet governance on the part of countries such as China and Russia? What could the fragmentation of the global network lead to?**

— **M.M. Lebedeva:** Internet governance is an old problem that arose at the very dawn of the Internet. It is well described in Russian academic literature. One of the latest publications on this

⁷ Abdulbarova Yu. Microchip Production: Largest Companies, Global Markets, Trends in 2022 // *linDEAL*. 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://lindeal.com/trends/proizvodstvo-mikrochipov-krupnejshie-kompanii-mirovye-rynki-tendencii-v-2022-godu> (accessed: 12.10.2025).

⁸ TSMC to Build Largest Microchip Facility in Arizona. US Strengthens Position in Chip Market // *IXBT*. September 26, 2025. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.ixbt.com/news/2025/09/26/tsmc-postroit-krupnejshij-zavod-po-proizvodstvu-mikrochipov-v-arizone.html> (accessed: 12.11.2025).

issue is the edited volume under the editorship of Elena S. Zinovieva, published in 2025 (Zinovieva, 2025).

Briefly speaking, the Internet, which was developed in the US, was initially governed from the US. From a technological and legal standpoint, the US continues to exercise significant control over the Internet. However, since it has become a global network, the question has arisen of “transferring” it to the level of international governance. Several countries, including Russia, have put forward a proposal to transfer governance to the international level—specifically, to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The US and Western countries are opposed to this, believing that it could lead to bureaucratization and strict centralization of control over the Internet. For now, this problem remains unresolved.

Attempts are being made to create national networks, which leads to the fragmentation of the global network. The negative aspects of this fragmentation include the deterioration of data exchange (including scientific data), difficulties in implementing cooperation in the fight against terrorist and hacker attacks, as well as complications in the operations of transnational business, and so forth.

— **How, in your opinion, will the political world change (and will it change at all) due to digital technologies?**

— **M.M. Lebedeva:** I believe that the political world will change fundamentally.

First, network relations will develop in the world. They will affect government structures, non-state actors, and the interaction between state and non-state actors. The hierarchical structure of political organization, based on Westphalian principles, will transform into a network structure, where the important components will be both the centers (actors) and their connections and relations with each other. At the same time, one can hardly agree with Richard Haass that such a world will be chaotic (Haass, 2008). Purpose-driven relationships will be facilitated by digital technologies, primarily communication and

information technologies, as well as artificial intelligence, given that we already interact quite successfully online. It is another matter that the very restructuring of the political organization of the world may be accompanied by chaoticization.

Second, changes will also take place at the state level. The most obvious of these will be the disappearance of a number of professions, which will entail social changes. The onset of this process could lead to the radicalization of political views. For example, there are studies demonstrating that in the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the implementation of robotics has led to an increase in right-wing views among the lower strata of the middle class (Kurer & Palier, 2019).

Thus, the transformation processes of the political organization of the world, both at the global and national levels, will be complex.

— **Are there any specific features of the impact of new technologies in the 21st century on world politics compared to the impact new technologies had in previous eras?**

— **M.M. Lebedeva:** I think a significant difference is the speed of transformations in modern conditions. Both the development of agriculture and the introduction of the steam engine or machine production, proceeded relatively slowly compared to modern transformations. Today, digital technologies are being implemented at a galloping pace. Will international practice have time to adapt to these changes? Obviously, coordinating positions at the international level will require significant time, even if artificial intelligence is enlisted in the process.

Another difference from the past is that digitalization has affected the very foundations of the political organization of the world and its bedrock—national sovereignty. Neither the Industrial Revolution in England in the 18th century nor subsequent technological innovations had such a critical impact on sovereignty. Hence the desire of states to secure themselves in the digital space. For instance, Russia adopted

a National Security Doctrine in 2000, and then again in 2016,⁹ taking into account the more complex conditions that had developed in the global digital sphere.

It is noteworthy that despite the “erosion” of sovereignty occurring in the virtual space, the reaction to this process is often asymmetrical. This is evident in Donald Trump’s isolationist policies across a number of areas: withdrawing from a series of international treaties, imposing tariffs, etc., while in other areas of foreign policy (for example, attempts to resolve international conflicts), D. Trump proves to be deeply involved in international relations.

Of course, transnationalization, driven by new technologies, affects not only world politics. However, in other spheres, it does not affect the essential parameters. For example, in medicine,

digitalization provides the foundation for the development of telemedicine, but it does not impact medicine as such.

— **T.A. Alekseeva:** I agree with my colleague, but I would like to make some clarifications. Digitalization, which has been discussed and written about so much lately, is far from eliciting admiration in everyone; in fact, it alarms many. In a broad sense, digitalization is the construction of a new management system for the public and private sectors, and in the narrow sense of the word, it is the digital transformation within the system of public administration and state activity. On the one hand, digitalization is designed to alter processes and services, making them faster while simultaneously opening up new opportunities for communication. On the other hand, digitalization poses its own risks, which, at the very least, require attention.

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⁹ Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation. Approved by Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of December 5, 2016, No. 646 // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (In Russian). URL: https://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/1539546/ (accessed: 12.11.2025).

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