

International Affairs: Vol. 67: №4, 2021: Summary

Russian-American Summit in Geneva

On June 16, 2021, Geneva hosted a summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joseph R. Biden. The Russian-American talks began with a narrow-format meeting with the participation of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. The negotiations subsequently continued in an expanded format. At the end of the summit, a US-Russia Presidential Joint Statement on Strategic Stability was adopted.

Vladimir Putin began his press conference with the words: "I think there is no need for long opening remarks since everyone is familiar with the topics of discussion in general: strategic stability, cybersecurity, regional conflicts, and trade relations. We also covered cooperation in the Arctic. This is pretty much what we discussed."

Answering a question about the atmosphere prevailing during the negotiations, he commented: "I believe there was no hostility at all. Quite the contrary. Our meeting was, of course, a principled one, and our positions diverge on many issues, but I still think that both of us showed a willingness to understand each other and look for ways of bringing our positions closer together. The conversation was quite constructive."

US-Russia Presidential Joint Statement on Strategic Stability

We, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin and President of the United States of America Joseph R. Biden, note the United States and Russia have demonstrated that, even in periods of tension, they are able to make progress on our shared goals of ensuring predictability in the strategic sphere, reducing the risk of armed conflicts and the threat of nuclear war.

The recent extension of the New START Treaty exemplifies our commitment to nuclear arms control. Today, we reaffirm the principle that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

Consistent with these goals, the United States and Russia will embark together on an integrated bilateral Strategic Stability Dialogue in the near future that will be deliberate and robust. Through this Dialogue, we seek to lay the groundwork for future arms control and risk reduction measures.

Who is Mr. Biden? A Question Still Unanswered Even After the Geneva Summit

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FIVE months have passed since the inauguration of Joe Biden as the 46th president of the United States, and in this time, the US has faced a variety of domestic and foreign challenges requiring a quick response from the White House. This response, both on its own but especially in comparison with the actions of the Obama and Trump administrations in similar situations, provides ample material for analyzing the behavior patterns of the new American leadership.

It should be noted that two consistent hypotheses have prevailed in assessments and forecasts of the activities of the new head of the White House. The first hypothesis states that the new administration will in some way continue the presidency of Barack Obama. According to the second hypothesis, all the actions of the Biden team will be the opposite of Trump's policies in both ideological and practical

aspects. Presumably, the Biden administration should be viewed in comparison with the political practice of his two predecessors, so we should start by identifying their characteristic features.

THE characteristic features of the Biden administration are most clearly manifested in its handling of the crises or critical situations in domestic and foreign policy that the new president has already had to face.

JOE Biden's inauguration took place in an extremely turbulent domestic political environment.

The White House pulled back from the investigation into the storming of the Capitol, letting Congress and law-enforcement agencies take the lead on this issue. The statements by President Biden and other administration officials were limited to categorical denials of any electoral violations and general statements about an "attack on democracy." This passivity of the presidential administration allowed Donald Trump, after a short period of complete silence, to return to the political arena as the unofficial leader of the Republican Party and even begin purges within the party ranks.

BIDEN took office during the initial stage of mass vaccinations against the coronavirus in the US, and battling the pandemic became the White House's top domestic policy priority. ... The White House continued to hold press briefings on the coronavirus situation several times a week. However, in contrast to the previous administration, the president seldom spoke at such events: The floor was given to virologists, staff of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other officials. Thus, even this opportunity to tightly link successes in the fight against the pandemic with Joe Biden himself was not fully utilized; instead, the emphasis was put on the teamwork of specialists approved by the political leadership.

ON March 25, 2021, Joseph Biden held his first full press conference as president of the United States and offered a comprehensive explanation of his views on the essence of the modern historical process and the future of the US. Biden sees the world as an arena of competition between two political ideologies – democracy and authoritarianism. The leading democratic country in this model is the United States, while the People's Republic of China is leading the authoritarians. Biden believes that the winner in this confrontation will be destined for the key role in the 21st century. Biden was quite categorical regarding China's chances of winning: "not on my watch."

While Biden's rhetoric about ideological struggle is similar to the ideas espoused by Obama, the essence of his agenda is much closer to Trump's position.

EVEN though Russia and Turkey are vastly different in terms of bloc affiliation, geopolitical significance, and many other parameters, Washington's positions toward Moscow and Ankara exhibit significant similarities. The similarities can be generally characterized as inconsistency masked by the rhetoric of justice.

THE Biden administration has taken several significant steps showing that its position contrasts sharply with the position of the Trump administration on the Middle East. For example, Washington suspended contracts on the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia and the UAE and criticized Saudi Arabia's participation in the armed conflict in Yemen. In addition, the publication of the full report of the investigation into the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi was announced. According to media reports, this report focuses on Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia. Such an abrupt shift in attitude from friendly to cool could undermine the efforts of the previous American administration to soften disagreements between Israel and America's traditional allies in the Arab world.

As for the White House's position on Israel, although it did not abandon Trump's decision to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem, Washington distanced itself from the Netanyahu government and resumed financial assistance to Palestine.

THE examples of the steps and decisions of the new American leadership provided above are not exhaustive but seem to most clearly illustrate the characteristic features of the Biden administration and its differences and similarities with the two previous administrations.

The key difference between the Biden administration and the Obama and Trump administrations is the almost complete absence of focus on leadership.

In addition, it should be noted that, with respect to the two initially postulated hypotheses about inheriting Obama's policies and rejecting anything related to Trump, the Biden administration's policies are a bizarre hybrid that take the 2011-2014 rhetoric about protecting democracy and human rights around the world and stretches it to cover protectionist measures and open confrontation with China, which are a direct continuation of Trump's policies of 2017-2020.

Based on the above, we can conclude that the interests of the Biden administration can be seen as belonging to one of two categories: reputational interests, which are necessary to maintain the image of the leader of the free world, and essential interests characterized by rivalry with China and the need to mobilize economic development.

The Rise and Fall of Russian-American Relations: An Overview of Events in Recent Decades Before Geneva

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AT THE turn of the 21st century, Russian-American relations were characterized by a flurry of activity from political elites and diplomats. For example, in the course of a single year, from September 1999 to September 2000, Vladimir Putin, as prime minister and then as president of Russia, and US President Bill Clinton participated in multiple high-level meetings together, including an APEC summit, a G8 summit, and the Millennium Summit put on by the United Nations in New York.

As it turned out, official and informal meetings between Presidents Putin and George W. Bush over the course of just under seven years, from June 2001 to April 2008, were the most numerous.

It is worth noting that Russia was the first state to lend a helping hand after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, in New York and Washington. Both countries began to jointly fight international terrorism, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and drug trafficking on the planet.

Against the generally positive backdrop of bilateral relations, tensions grew in political cooperation between Russia and the US in the context of addressing international problems. ... The partnership on an equal footing with the US that Russia was striving for was in great doubt. Economic and political cooperation followed mainly parallel but separate tracks.

In July 2009, Russian-American presidential commissions were established in various areas of cooperation, and the heads of the countries' foreign affairs agencies became their coordinators. The number of commissions reached 25. These structures worked very actively and functioned until the fall of 2014.

Cooperation on military diplomacy in the Russia-NATO Council grew stronger.

The global financial crisis; the Iranian nuclear program; the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); global climate change; innovation; Russia's initiative to create an international sea piracy tribunal; and trade, economic, scientific, and cultural cooperation issues comprised the bilateral relations agenda.

Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama met 12 times at bilateral and international summits between January 20, 2009 and May 7, 2012.

Vladimir Putin's return to the Kremlin in May 2012 coincided with the completion of a three-year "reset" in relations between Russia and the US. The American establishment openly opposed Putin as the leader of Russia, forgetting about the legitimate right of people to choose the leader of their country and the inadmissibility of interference in the internal affairs of another state, which interference violates international law. Anti-Russian propaganda during the 2012 US presidential race, won by incumbent Barack Obama, played a certain role in the situation.

In December 2012, US Congress rescinded the Jackson-Vanik amendment but soon adopted a sanctions package – the Magnitsky Act – using human rights violations as an instrument of political pressure on the Russian Federation, its official bodies, and certain citizens. Russia responded by adopting the symmetrical Dima Yakovlev Law, restricting entry for politicians, journalists, and businesspeople, as well as vetoing the adoption of Russian children by Americans. Since the end of 2012, competition between Russia and the US for supplying hydrocarbons to Europe has increased and continued to damage the national interests of the two world powers.

The scenario for the deterioration of Russian-American relations seemed to have been planned and generated in the US for years to come.

In the second decade of the 21st century, US military diplomacy noticeably deteriorated due to disagreements within NATO and the inconsistent policies of the alliance when addressing numerous problems.

The unproductive policies of President Obama and the White House administration have been repeatedly criticized by American experts and public figures. ... Russian political analysts believe that blame for the new Cold War lies squarely with the US and its European allies.

Late December 2016 saw an unprecedented deterioration in relations between Russia and the US. The Obama administration decided to swiftly deport 35 Russian diplomats and their family members, as well as to close Russian diplomatic missions on the US West Coast (San Francisco, Seattle) and trade mission properties in Washington and New York. Russia eventually retaliated and evened out the number of Russian diplomats in the US and American diplomats in Russia.

Until recently, relations between the two world powers were furthered by Presidents Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump (January 20, 2017-January 20, 2021).

The only full-scale summit of the Russian and US presidents was held in Helsinki, Finland, on July 16, 2018. Shortly afterward, the Americans announced their intention to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and did so unilaterally.

Not just summits but also visits to Moscow by Washington officials became rare, except for contacts with John Bolton, the US President's National Security Adviser.

The Russian and US presidents met again during the G20 summit in Osaka (Japan, June 28-29, 2019). ... Trump raised no objections to Putin's statement that Russian-American relations had noticeably deteriorated over the recent period.

In addition, on December 11, 2019, the US White House hosted a working meeting on arms control between US President Donald Trump and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. At the time, veterans of American politics once again called on Trump to "reset" relations with Russia.

Peaceful economic diplomacy based on international law, parity of relations, and mutual respect for national interests might have been a good alternative to the liberal world order and the degradation of Russian-American relations.

Washington's frequent replacement of key figures in US foreign policy, especially those working with Russia, did not facilitate the normalization of US-Russian relations in the 21st century.

Russian-American relations and the international community need a new model for political and economic cooperation and a new model for the entire system of international relations.

The Role of WHO in the First Year of the Fight Against COVID-19

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The history of WHO is a history of developments in these two overlapping and complementary areas, including successful efforts to develop vaccines and organize vaccination drives against poliomyelitis, measles, and smallpox. In fact, the 12-year-long history of vaccinations against smallpox in all countries, including the least developed ones, brought triumphant victory over this disease in 1970.

Another equally important WHO achievement is the standardization of medical work in all spheres: primary health care that standardized medical assistance, the identification and prevention of dangerous epidemics, tropical diseases, etc.

By the time the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, WHO already had a vast organizational structure with headquarters in Geneva and six regional and country offices in 149 countries. Today, it is present in Africa, America, Southeast Asia, Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Western Pacific.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, WHO has been paying particular attention to informational and organizational aspects for the simple reason that medical treatment is the responsibility of the medical institutions of countries and their national health care systems headed by corresponding national governments.

In the sphere of information, WHO is moving in two directions: first, gathering information about the course and spread of the disease, as well as treatment methods to keep the medical community and local health protection agencies informed, and second, preparing and disseminating recommendations for the population.

The first death from the coronavirus was recorded in China on January 11, which meant that WHO had gotten ahead of the pandemic by introducing global response mechanisms even before the dangers and risks of this new disease were fully known. About 15 days after the disease was identified, at the national level, WHO had collected and studied the main information about the new disease and its risks, and offered it to the medical community and the general public. It had also launched a monitoring mechanism and methods for mitigating epidemic flareups and a mechanism for studying the causative agent of this new deadly disease.

In the first two months, WHO was doing a lot to inform the medical community. It continued its efforts later, albeit on a smaller scale.

After six months, it became clear that "infodemics" – the overabundance of information, some accurate and some not – about COVID-19 had developed into an even greater problem. On June 29, WHO conducted the first conference on infodemiology – combating dubious or even false information.

WHO'S first function after the start of the epidemic was to organize studies of the new disease and analyze and improve the preparedness of medical and administrative structures to deal with the emerging problems. In the latter half of January, it became important to know whether the outbreak of the new infection posed a genuine concern to the world and its health care system.

By February 3, WHO had finalized its Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan designed to improve the capacity to detect, prepare, and respond to the outbreak. Based on what had been learned about the virus at that stage, possible action strategies were formulated for national and regional health organizations.

EFFORTS to combat COVID-19 were initially regarded as a purely medical problem. Early in 2020, the main efforts were focused on informing national medical organizations and facilitating the work of the medical community to study and combat the new disease. As the epidemic began to spread far and wide, WHO switched to working with national government agencies, since the problem was clearly no longer just a medical one. It started talking – and not a moment too soon – about combating COVID-19 at the level of national governments.

Through its April 20 resolution “International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines, and medical equipment to face COVID-19,” the UN GA supported the WHO's efforts and acknowledged “the crucial leading role played by the World Health Organization” in coordinating the global response to control and contain the spread of COVID-19.

JUST a month after the first reports of the new disease, the Pandemic Supply Chain Network created by WHO in collaboration with the World Economic Forum held its first meeting “to create and manage a market network allowing for WHO and private sector partners to access any supply chain functionality and asset from end-to-end anywhere in the world at any scale.”

Two months after the initial outbreak of the pandemic, the shortage of vital means of protection became apparent. On March 3, “WHO issued a call for industry and governments to increase manufacturing by 40% to meet rising global demand in response to the shortage of personal protective equipment endangering health workers worldwide.”

WHO, the UN Foundation, and the Swiss Philanthropy Foundation announced in Mid-March the launch of the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund to accept donations from private individuals, corporations, and institutions. In just 10 days, the fund raised more than \$70 million from more than 187,000 individuals and organizations. Donations are accepted from private persons from the minimum level of \$25 to large sums.

Personal protective equipment was the primary concern. By that time, WHO had shipped almost 2 million individual items of protective gear to 74 countries that needed them most.

Since financial problems remained acute, on May 27, WHO established the WHO Foundation to focus on emergencies and pandemic response by facilitating contributions from the general public, individual major donors, and corporate partners.

The fight against COVID-19 is not yet over, but it is abundantly clear that UN international bodies and their partners have been effectively organizing efforts to combat the pandemic. While national governments were pursuing national aims, often at the expense of other countries, UN international organizations, primarily WHO, became the guarantors and instruments of the joint struggle of the world community with an unexpected and serious threat.

Latin America After COVID-19: What's Next?

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THE CRISIS triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has been a major test for Latin America. In late May 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the region the new epicenter of the pandemic, which peaked in July-August 2020. The fairly fragmented health systems in all Latin American countries were unprepared to deal with this wide-scale crisis.

Brazil is worst off, with 12.2 million total cases and 301,000 deaths.

Latin American governments failed to coordinate their positions and action plans as the pandemic unfolded in the region. Their efforts can be nominally divided into three categories: relatively fast and resolute responses in the form of the declaration of a state of emergency or a total lockdown (Peru, Paraguay, Argentina, Columbia, Ecuador, Bolivia, and El Salvador); partial lockdowns and selective curbs on economic activity (Chile and Cuba); and no changes to economic activity and lifestyles (Brazil, Nicaragua, and Mexico). The governments of Uruguay and Costa Rica urged citizens to take precautions and practice social distancing but left the final choice up to citizens.

Economic recession is an obvious effect of the pandemic; GDP could fall in Latin America and the Caribbean by 9.1% in 2020. South America will find itself in the worst situation, with a drop of 9.4%. Peru will lose 13%; Argentina, 10.5%; Brazil, 9.2%; Ecuador, 9%; Chile, 7.9%; Columbia, 6.5%; Bolivia, 5.2%, and Uruguay, 5%. The Bolivarian countries (Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba) will lose even more: 26%, 8.3%, and 8%, respectively.³ It should be said that in 2019, the average debt in the Caribbean was 68.5% of GDP.

In addition, experts are drawing attention to a burgeoning crisis in global governance, steadily growing protectionist and isolationist sentiments, an increase in the number of those who live below the poverty line, as well as a shortage of medicines needed to treat COVID-19 patients.

The pandemic exacerbated many existing social problems, including social inequality. "Latin America is one of the most unequal regions in the world and the differential impacts of COVID-19 risk [is] making this situation worse."

According to the UN, women and girls are suffering comparatively more from the pandemic. Even though more women than men are directly involved in fighting the pandemic (women constitute 72.8% of those employed in the health care sector), their incomes are 25% lower than those of their male colleagues. Lockdowns, closed schools, and sick family members increase the burden on women as the main group expected to provide medical care. Domestic violence, femicide, and other forms of sexual and gender violence are on the rise.

The pandemic is aggravating an already critical food security situation caused by a shortage of essential goods, rising unemployment, political unrest, and dwindling purchasing power. Latin America and the Caribbean have seen an almost three-fold rise in the number of people requiring food assistance.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the situation with food supplies in Latin America will noticeably deteriorate by 2030.

Education is facing its own share of problems. Although children and adolescents are less affected by the health impacts of the pandemic, the educational process in the Latin American and Caribbean countries has been disrupted, leaving over 171 million schoolchildren at home. Educational inequality

could be aggravated by the lack of access to distance learning resources. In Ecuador, for example, the virtual form of education proposed by its minister of education effectively excluded 50% of children and young people from the education system because they have no Internet access.

Refugees and migrants are especially vulnerable: They encounter major problems accessing basic rights and services or are even kept outside national social protection systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the failure of the social safety net in Latin America and led to a crisis in the health, economic, and human rights sectors. The measures taken to contain the spread of the virus were not a commensurable response to the problems created by the pandemic. Insignificant support from the state failed to produce the desired effect and further increased social tension.

The lessons of the pandemic should lead Latin American countries to revise their existing development model and formulate a new concept for responding to threats and challenges.

Social tension gradually rose in countries whose leaders advocated strict lockdowns (for example, in Argentina and Bolivia, where strict restrictions were imposed on the population). In Bolivia, stringent pandemic mitigation measures brought people in the country's rural areas to the brink of starvation. People in Cochabamba blocked access to the city's garbage dump, further complicating an already precarious sanitary situation.

A big problem is that as the global pandemic bore down on the region, Latin America was politically and ideologically split into three opposing blocs – authoritarian, left-wing, and right-wing governments. This was probably a key factor behind the unwillingness of the region's countries to coordinate their coronavirus mitigation efforts.

The rapidly expanding scale of the pandemic and growing social tension caused by extreme uncertainty both at the global and national levels combined in Latin America with rising public dissatisfaction with national policies. The main problems sparking protests in the region were the crisis of the neoliberal development model, the economic downturn, systemic corruption, the unacceptably high level of social inequality, and numerous human rights violations. The pandemic only exacerbated social instability and dissatisfaction with the authorities that had been brewing in the region.

Today, closed borders and the limited freedom of movement of people, goods, and services are exacerbating disagreements within CELAC and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), making a new round of talks about optimizing and improving the algorithms of future cooperation, especially in emergency situations, inevitable. On the other hand, the pandemic has revived the interest of several Latin American alliances in closer cooperation with nonregional partners to acquire humanitarian aid and technical assistance.

The crisis that shook Latin America exacerbated the shortcomings of the social protection and public health systems in the region. In a new geopolitical and economic reality, Latin American and Caribbean governments will have to reassess the positions of their states in the contemporary international system of coordinates that was shaped largely in accordance with neoliberal paradigms.

The future will depend on the ability of Latin American leaders to promptly respond to the rapidly changing situation and integrate into new world trends: They will either take advantage of new development opportunities or regress. Today, it has become abundantly clear that regional transformation processes will accelerate. A stable and inclusive development system in the Latin American region requires firmer state policy, firmer responses to crises, and stimulated economic growth.

The Russian side consistently supports this linkage. According to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, "[I]f there is a need to combine efforts to address common threats, it is wrong to underestimate or

downplay the role of sovereign states. However, supranational bureaucratic platforms were making attempts to overrule sovereign states.”

The OSCE in the Context of International Efforts to Combat Terrorist Financing

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A DISCUSSION about the effectiveness of the global system for anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) is unfolding in the Western media and expert community.

According to a report published in 2020 by the company LexisNexis, worldwide spending on AML programs exceeds \$180 billion a year. The AML system has become an integral part of the day-to-day operations of financial institutions. While money laundering was not even considered a crime until the early 1980s, today, companies such as HSBC or JPMorgan Chase have 3,000 to 5,000 specialists focused on fighting financial crime and over 20,000 professionals tasked with identifying high-risk transactions and monitoring compliance with AML standards in these institutions.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has provided a platform for a substantive and detailed exchange of views on issues of combating the financing of terrorism. At the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan in cooperation with the Transnational Threats Department of the OSCE Secretariat, a Regional Conference on Countering Terrorist Financing and Transnational Organized Crime was held online on May 11, 2021. The Conference brought together more than 200 senior experts and government officials² from OSCE participating states and Partners for Cooperation, international organizations, including the United Nations, the CIS Anti-Terrorism Center (ATC), the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure, Interpol, NATO, the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (EAG),³ and others, as well as representatives of nongovernmental organizations and academia.

Today, such joint work is more necessary than ever. Combating the financing of terrorism is a key item on the agenda of international cooperation against terrorism. It has also been included among the strategic areas of cooperation between the OSCE states in accordance with the OSCE Consolidated Framework for the Fight Against Terrorism.

The use by criminals of charitable activity, which has gained international significance during the COVID-19 pandemic, was discussed at the forum as a separate topic. Experts noted that the increase in international humanitarian aid had also increased the risk of this aid being diverted to support international terrorist organizations (ITOs), which seek to:

- make active use of humanitarian aid programs to strengthen their financial base
- redirect donations for their own benefit through individuals associated with ITOs
- use the heads of nonprofit organizations for ITO purposes, including without their knowledge
- create fake nonprofit organizations as a legal source of raising funds;
- use their activities in this area to recruit new supporters.

Action to prevent terrorists from seizing goods, medical supplies, and other materials being shipped as humanitarian aid is also among the international efforts to combat terrorist financing being taken in the area from Vancouver to Vladivostok, especially since there are already concrete examples of this kind of terrorist activity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, significant segments of the economy and thus of citizens' financial activity have gone online. As a result, terrorist financing mechanisms have also shifted. There has been a rapid expansion of darknet markets, an increase in the number of fraudulent websites posing as real

ones, a proliferation of cases of theft from credit cards and phishing e-mails sent for this purpose, and broader use of cryptocurrencies by terrorist groups as the safest way of self-financing.

Another phenomenon noted by Conference participants was the use by terrorist cells of criminal sources of self-financing.

How can effective international cooperation to counter all these challenges and threats be ensured? The International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1999, established an international legal framework for broad cooperation between states (including all 57 OSCE participating states) that provides for criminal, civil, or administrative liability for offences related to terrorist financing.

Important guidelines for developing and strengthening international cooperation on suppressing terrorist financing are provided by UN Security Council resolutions 2462(2019), 2253(2015), and 2199(2015), which urge all states to, among other things, “identify economic sectors most vulnerable to terrorist financing, including but not limited to non-financial services, such as, inter alia, the construction, commodities and pharmaceutical sectors.”

Comprehensive international standards are set out in 40 FATF recommendations on money laundering and nine special recommendations on countering the financing of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as in supplementary memoranda.

So what is the role of the OSCE in this ramified system of international mechanisms for countering terrorist financing?

Perhaps the focus of its efforts in this area is providing targeted technical assistance to individual states and facilitating periodic discussions on this topic among all interested OSCE states, as was the case with the conferences held in 2019 and 2021 at the initiative of Turkmenistan. A key role in this process is played by the OSCE’s 13 field presences, which are the main channel for these efforts in host countries.

Another major area is providing guidance to assist countries in conducting national assessments of ML/FT risks and in maintaining statistics that may be useful to AML/CFT authorities in their daily work. For example, an OSCE Handbook on Data Collection in Support of Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing, National Risk Assessments was issued in 2012 by the OSCE Office of the Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA).

The OSCE cooperates closely with the UNODC in matters of combating money laundering and terrorist financing. This area of cooperation has always been a priority for both organizations.

Russia plays a laudable role in international efforts to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. In 2019, as part of the FATF mutual evaluation process, our country successfully defended a report assessing the effectiveness of its national AML/CFT system and was ranked among the top five countries in the world in terms of this indicator.

Since 2015, FATF has been implementing a Russian initiative to identify channels and sources of funding used by ISIL, Al Qaeda and affiliated individuals and entities. About 70 jurisdictions have already taken part in this study, producing a report that is updated three times a year.

The Moscow-based International Training and Methodology Center for Financial Monitoring plays an active role in the advanced training of specialists from around the world. In the period from 2017 to 2020, 5,176 experts from 22 OSCE participating states underwent retraining and advanced training at the Center. In 2020 alone, 1,887 specialists from OSCE countries took advantage of opportunities offered by the Center.

Overall, the discussion of a key aspect of the global fight against the terrorist “international” that took place at the May 2021 Conference was constructive and results-oriented.

The Myanmar Spiral

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For several decades, Myanmar was under military rule. But the 2008 constitution established a system of governance that paved the way for multiparty elections while at the same time leaving control over the political process with the Armed Forces (the Tatmadaw) in Myanmar.

On February 1, 2021, that system failed. On the day that the Myanmar parliament, elected in November 2020, was to meet for its first session, the country’s top political leadership were arrested, and legislative, executive, and judicial powers were transferred to the commander-in-chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. The military stated its intention to hold a new election at the end of a one-year state of emergency that it declared.

The West immediately called the change of power in Myanmar a coup d’état. However, the military denies this. They maintain that they used a provision of the constitution that provides for the introduction of a state of emergency and the transfer of full power to the commander-in-chief in the event of a threat to the security of the country. The problem, however, is that the president is the one authorized to make that decision, but the president was arrested, and his functions were performed by the first vice-president, General Myint Shwe, nominated by the military.

The NLD never wanted to share power with the military. In order to limit the power of the Tatmadaw, the party has repeatedly raised the issue of constitutional reform, proposing dozens of amendments, including on curbing the right of the military to appoint members of parliament and transferring control of the Armed Forces from the senior general to the president.

CURRENT events in Myanmar are largely determined by an external factor – namely, the US-China rivalry. Myanmar is China’s most important strategic partner. First of all, it is China’s gateway to the Indian Ocean, one of the most important integral elements of China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Two factors are significant here.

China enjoyed favorable relations with the former military regime of Myanmar, and the US expected that, with the changes of power in the early 2010s, the Naypyidaw-Beijing axis would be over. But the Chinese have managed to build bridges with Aung San Suu Kyi. Today, China, along with Singapore, is the largest investor in Myanmar.

Realizing the impossibility of tearing Myanmar away from China, Washington strategists returned to their previous line of discrediting Myanmar as a state that violates civil rights and carries out the genocide of ethnic and religious minorities. A major bet was placed on the crisis around the Rohingya Muslim minority.

Interestingly, during all the years of Myanmar’s democratization, there have been no public or political organizations supporting the interests of the Rohingya. At the same time, during this period, Islamic radicals in Rohingya enclaves dramatically stepped up their activities and formed armed detachments. In 2016 and 2017, Rohingya militants carried out a series of attacks on government checkpoints near the border with Bangladesh that resulted in numerous casualties among both military personnel and civilians.

In response, Myanmar security forces stepped up operations against Islamic extremists, for which the West immediately accused Myanmar of “ethnic cleansing” and genocide.

The West's anti-Myanmar campaign around the Rohingya was aimed at portraying the Myanmar military as criminals exterminating an innocent ethnic and religious minority, and the Myanmar civil authorities as indulging their crimes. World public opinion was thus led to believe that, since the actions of the military against the Rohingya were criminal, it was also a crime to suppress armed antigovernment protests by Karen, Shan, and other separatists, who have been waging an armed struggle against the central authorities throughout the period of independence and still are.

Removing national security from under Tatmadaw control, which the NLD has been unequivocally pushing for in recent years, would deprive Myanmar of the internal bonds ensuring its unity and sovereignty, and turn it into something like Libya or Ukraine.

WILL the West succeed in making Myanmar a new rogue state modelled on North Korea? In any case, persistent efforts are being made to achieve this. The international reaction to the change of power in Myanmar was swift and very negative.

Unlike Western countries, the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) reacted to the change of power in Myanmar with predictable calm.

Like China, Russia considers the events in Myanmar an internal affair. Both Russia's and China's representatives firmly rejected efforts by Western powers to adopt a UN Security Council resolution condemning the actions of Myanmar's military junta.

There is every reason to believe that Myanmar will withstand the current crisis. Its economy before the COVID-19 pandemic was doing very well: The GDP growth rate was over 6% and occasionally hit 8%.³ At the moment, it is extremely important that the military maintains all previously achieved economic freedoms, and Senior General Min Aung Hline has a reputation as a problem solver. Most members of his new government are civilians with good work experience.

Sports as an Effective Means of Information Confrontation in the 21st Century

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IN THE 21st century, information confrontation is becoming one of the main means of achieving superiority in the geopolitical confrontation between individual states, as well as between various interstate associations, unions, and coalitions. At this new stage of the restructuring of the world order, initiated by powerful interests that include representatives of the world's financial, economic, information, and political elites, Russia has once again found itself at the center of global contradictions, as it has the largest reserves of natural resources, vast territory, and significant environmental, intellectual, strategic military, communication, and other capabilities.

In the context of the growing role and importance of information globally, steps taken as part of information campaigns present many new challenges to states and their policies. Since the early 2000s, global sports policy has been moving to the fore of the information confrontation among leading world powers.

Today, the results per se of sports competitions very often lose their significance, and sport is increasingly used as a political tool. A number of leading Western countries, first and foremost the United States, aim to completely revise Olympic and world sports in order to use them in their foreign policy interests.

A new round of the Cold War against Russia was initiated by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), acting as the prosecutor of an allegedly state-sponsored system of doping by Russian athletes at all

international competitions, including the Olympic Games. WADA has been seeking to charge Russian athletes with doping for several years, ever since Russia's brilliant victory at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.

With the adoption of the Rodchenkov Anti-Doping Act in late 2020, the US went even further. The law contains a provision that if an athlete or an entire country supporting that athlete causes damage to American taxpayers, sports industry, and athletes, they could face penalties of up to 10 years imprisonment and fines of up to \$1 million. In other words, the US is conferring upon itself the right to criminally prosecute the organizers and participants of doping schemes at all tournaments where American athletes compete, regardless of the athlete's country. This is a direct violation of the Olympic Charter targeting American athletes' top competitors.

In the US, there are significantly more real doping violations than in Russia, but it was Russian teams that WADA banned from the Olympics. ... Russia was fifth, with 82 violations.² And yet, at the December 2017 IOC Executive Board meeting, the decision was made to ban the Russian team from participating in the PyeongChang Olympics on the basis of a report by Richard McLaren on alleged state-sponsored doping in Russian sports.

The CAS sanctions are the harshest and the most unprecedented in the history of world sports. This decision has caused major reputational and material damage to Russia; an attempt was made to drive Russia out of world sports in general. By upholding the sanctions and applying the principle of collective responsibility, the court thereby violated the basic principles of the Olympic Charter.

At PyeongChang 2018, the Russian national team was already forced to compete in a neutral status under the official banner of "Olympic Athletes from Russia," although this did nothing to prevent our media from referring to our team as the Russian national team: Olympic jurisprudence has not yet invented means to punish them for noncompliance with these formalities.

International sports has long been known to be extremely corrupt. Even Rodchenkov indirectly admits that other countries have "state-sponsored doping systems." But persecution and endless sanctions – and the most severe ones at that – are imposed exclusively on our country.

In the 20th century, WADA did not exist. Doping control was carried out by a medical commission within the International Olympic Committee (IOC). It was only in 1999 that an "independent" agency was established at the initiative of Richard Pound, a member of the IOC Executive Board from Canada. In his book published later, Pound made no secret of the fact that he pushed through the World Anti-Doping Code using all sorts of political maneuvers, persuasion, and blackmail.

The new Cold War declared against Russia is the result of a fundamental crisis of the modern world order and is being waged on various fronts using a variety of methods, including the constant intensification and expansion of sanctions. As a result, in addition to the impact on the economy, this puts direct pressure on the Russian authorities. Nowadays, the influence of politics on sports is increasing; sport is used more and more as an instrument of political confrontation between states in the international arena and a tool for achieving leadership. Sport is tending to become a tool in the hands of politicians.

In the six years since the remarkable victory of the Russian national team at the 2014 Sochi Olympics, the second to be hosted by Russia, not a week has passed without someone encroaching on our place in the world of big sports. The Cold War in international sports is quite real and tangible. However, no one will succeed in revising our victorious sports history or barring our athletes from setting records, despite the power of information campaigns.

Degradation as a Hallmark of the Modern World and Challenges to Russia

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HUMANKIND has found itself in a rather deplorable state in 2021. The coronavirus pandemic as a new global threat has exacerbated existing risks and challenges. The economic depression that has affected the world, coupled with social problems and the inability of states to effectively protect their citizens, has revealed a systemic crisis of the existing world order. "Degradation" has become a key term in describing the situation in various sectors.

Disturbing trends are rife in the world, creating a sense of emergency. In this situation, guided primarily by their own interests and in search of solutions, countries are beginning to alter their behavior in the world arena, acting more recklessly, opportunistically or even uncharacteristically.

In the context of political trends in international relations following the disintegration of the USSR, the changing role of countries commonly referred to as "small power states" has brought about an entire class of states that are vociferously trying to put themselves on the radar of the international community through their provocative behavior.

The strategy of managed instability employed against the former republics and allies of the Soviet Union was designed to create a "belt of tension" around Russia comprising states of Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltics that have reoriented themselves to the West, and to tear Ukraine and Belarus away from Russia.

The change of government in the United States has not brought any noticeable improvements in the situation on the world arena, other than the extension of the New START treaty. No sooner had Joe Biden become president than he declared the US's readiness to sit at the head of the table and manage global affairs, which no one has ever asked America to do.

Having built its global sphere of influence that comprised more countries and was more attractive than the American empire, the USSR, degraded as a result of perestroika and betrayal by renegade party and state leaders, abandoned its vanguard role in the world, which today is seen as a huge fatal mistake. The result was the demise of a great power as a consequence of the suicidal policy of its leadership that acted according to Western patterns.

Acknowledging that the old Cold War has been unleashed against it by new means, Russia, facing a growing and very real threat to its further existence, can no longer limit itself to complaining about the West's unfriendly behavior and expect changes for the better, unless it wants a repetition of the Soviet tragedy.

It is important to understand that it is unrealistic and counterproductive for Russia to expect a sudden warming in relations with the US at present.

By advancing toward Russia's borders and deploying its missiles, officially designated as air defense systems, on platforms that can be converted to nuclear weapon delivery systems, the US is creating the potential for interpreting the launch of such missiles as a nuclear attack, with all ensuing consequences.

Under these circumstances, Russia should provide an alternative for cooperation and build up the resources of its political and economic competitiveness, abandoning chimeras and delusions regarding the omnipotence of the market and the need to participate in Western-controlled economic mechanisms such as the WTO and Russophobic political institutions like the European Parliament.

The degradation of the value and concept of democracy was graphically demonstrated during the recent US presidential election, which more than half of the country's voters consider unfair. That did not prevent the new US administration from continuing to exploit the subject of democracy, albeit with certain changes.

Russia's decision to meet the national liberation uprising in Crimea to end Ukrainian nationalist domination, as well as to accommodate the Crimean people's desire to return to the Russian state, was extremely important and had deep historical roots. Russia continues to come under attack for that, and in this context, it is not clear why the Russian side is doing nothing to reject the allegations of violating Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Unlike the US, Russia is not used to behaving aggressively, toughly, and sometimes recklessly on the world arena, as the USSR did in the past and as China is doing right now. Furthermore, the mudslinging at the history of the Russian state, which began during the perestroika years and was accompanied by the denigration of the ideology of patriotism, to a certain extent continues to this day. Without decisively ending the attacks on our own history that are being orchestrated from Western centers, it will be impossible to eliminate the "fifth column" and unite in the face of upcoming trials and battles for the sovereignty and rights of Russia from which our people must once again emerge victorious.

Civil Society as a Political Actor

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THE PARTICIPATION of civil society in the politics of various countries is receiving increasing scholarly attention. Two clashing opinions regarding the place and role of civil society in today's world stand out in works written on this subject. Some researchers believe that civil society organizations should stay out of politics, while others insist that involving all civil society groups in the political process is vital to obtaining unique and accurate information necessary for political decision-making.

It should be noted that analysis of the participation of civil society in political processes is often complicated by the fact that the meanings that some public figures, journalists, and even political scientists give to some terms that would seemingly have commonly accepted definitions are completely different from the meanings given to them by others.

For this reason, it is essential not only to develop standard approaches to studying the role of civil society in the world in general and in the EU countries in particular, but also to identify the main institutions through which civil society advocates its positions on the full range of national and international problems.

The perception of structured civil society is based on essentially the same principle in most Russian works on the subject. The same principle has been used by Russian politicians in talking about the structure of civil society. In a speech at the Second Russian Civic Forum in 2008, then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev called political parties, NGOs, and NPOs "the most important elements of structured civil society that have taken shape in Russia".

There exists a variety of views among Russian and foreign scholars on the role of civil society in the modern world, but they amount to three key points.

First, civil society is considered in most studies to be an autonomous social sphere based on the principles of free choice and self-organization that is in opposition to the government.

Second, civil society is often referred to as the third sector. This phrase has been used since the 1970s and stands for the nonprofit sector as distinct from the public (state) sector and the commercial sector.

Third, civil society is sometimes examined on the basis of the “social capital” concept, which is a political science criterion for evaluating the civic engagement of the population and for characterizing driving forces of democratic development.

Many Russian and foreign scholars do often link the participation of civil society organizations in political processes to democratic development.

Citing developments in Central and Eastern Europe, such researchers usually contend that democratization in authoritarian countries passes through three phases that involve changes in civil society’s role: liberalization of an autocratic regime, institutionalization of democracy, and consolidation of democracy.

Civil society must push aside its internal divisions for the sake of the common goal of liberalization and democratization. The behavior of civil society organizations and attempts to avoid cooperation must be strictly controlled.

The institutionalization of democracy phase is a period of constructive civil society – a civil society that helps establish a new, democratic institutional order and thereby fill the power vacuum formed by the dissolution of the former regime.

During the consolidation of democracy phase, civil society may act as a school of democracy for forming and establishing democratic values and accumulating social capital. While remaining unanimous on key issues, civil society becomes divided on various, more specific matters.

In East European countries, civil society has been seen in recent decades as an environment for the free expression of political views and a battlefield for fighting state control and repressive practices. This attitude to civil society persists. Even leading dissidents in East European countries are forced to admit that East European civil society retains a strong idealistic image and is an uncompromising antagonist of the state.

In conclusion, we would like to stress a very important fact: Although civil society organizations are commonly presumed to be outside of politics, they actually seek to influence all political decision-making by the government by pressing for wide-scale public debate of emerging problems and placing the rule of law at the forefront.

Horizontal Diplomacy as a Means of Fostering Interaction Among Young Diplomats

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IN NOVEMBER 2021, the Council of Young Diplomats (CYD) of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs will mark its 20th anniversary. Although 20 years is not all that long, it is still a long time to be bringing together young specialists. Over the years, the CYD’s membership has changed and expanded, and its trends, priorities, and approaches to working with young diplomats have evolved.

The CYD was established in 2001 on the initiative of energetic young Foreign Ministry employees with support from the ministry’s leadership. It was initially the brainchild of a relatively small number of enthusiasts driven by the idea of supporting young employees of the Foreign Ministry. The CYD is an

organization comprising current Foreign Ministry employees. It is important to note that it is not a legal entity, but a voluntary organization set up by the ministry's young employees on their own accord.

The CYD can be considered a response to the changed role of diplomats and diplomacy in the world today rather than an attempt to move away from the traditions formed through the centuries-long history of Russian diplomacy. Mentorship continues to flourish at the Russian Foreign Ministry; young diplomats are encouraged to pursue traditional diplomatic aims using new means of communication, new formats of interaction, etc., which complement traditional diplomacy but do not replace it.

The CYD was created as a diplomatic tool in response to several circumstances: (1) the increased role of diplomats and diplomacy in society and the world; (2) changes in national policy and an awareness that national diplomacy should be revived; (3) greater initiative and proactiveness of young Russian diplomats.

Like any other voluntary organization, the CYD was designed to bring people of similar ages and convictions closer together to help them address common problems, broaden their horizons and contacts, and create an atmosphere for young diplomats to maximize their professional development.

The CYD is open to anyone under the age of 35 who has been employed for at least five years by the central office of the Foreign Ministry, the ministry's offices in federation members, or foreign missions. Those who initiated the CYD understood that the first years of young employees' work in the ministry are the most formative in their professional development.

The supreme body of the CYD is the Reporting and Election Conference, which is elected from among young diplomats for a year. The organization relies on the principles of electivity, democracy, and transparency.

In 2020, despite the problems created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the CYD helped organize and actively participated in the two-week online event "100% Tatarstan," which discussed many aspects of domestic and foreign policy, including international affairs, tourism, the environment, security, medicine, education, the labor market, etc. The forum attracted diplomats, businesspeople, politicians, and public figures from the Russian Federation and other countries. The online format of the event made it possible to hold talks amid the pandemic.

The network operates on the principles of open, equal, polycentric, and mutually advantageous cooperation and trust to create favorable conditions for Russia's cooperation with other countries for the long term, and to promote Russia's positions and protect its interests in the international arena by creating a wide circle of friends and establishing open and engaging dialogue with them on a consistent basis.

Since 2014, we have identified three main forms of work within the "horizontal diplomacy" concept: (1) forums of young diplomats; (2) bilateral cooperation with similar organizations within the foreign policy departments of other countries; (3) the Moscow Diplomatic Club.

Throughout its existence, the CYD's activities have gone far beyond grassroots level citizen diplomacy. It functions in close cooperation with the Foreign Ministry to formulate aims and tasks that complement the Foreign Ministry's official policy agenda. It uses new tools to achieve officially formulated policy goals, acting as a structure of public and official diplomacy.

The fact that the CYD attracts leading Russian experts, and former and current politicians to address international problems makes it a "soft power" instrument.

Once the CYD achieves its main objective – i.e., the establishment of the International Association of Young Diplomats (IAYD) – Russian diplomats will promote the interests of Russia within the association

and act as a certain complement to official diplomacy, which will make the IAYD an instrument of public diplomacy.

Overall, the activities of the CYD and its structures clearly show that substantial progress has been made in institutionalizing “soft power” tools in Russian diplomacy. The fact that a multitude of institutions created to facilitate diplomatic activity were set up in relatively short order after a deep crisis makes foreign and domestic criticisms of Russia’s foreign policy course unjustified, even if there is indeed still work to be done.

The United Nations Association of Russia: 65 Years of Fruitful Work at the National and International Levels

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ON MARCH 28, 2021, the United Nations Association of Russia (UNA-Russia) turned 65. UNA-Russia is an international nongovernmental organization with a mission of providing “all forms of support for the objectives and principles proclaimed by the UN Charter” and helping to “strengthen confidence and friendship among nations.”

SINCE its inception in 1956, UNA-Russia’s stated goal has been to support the United Nations, which, according to its charter, means maintaining peace and security; developing friendly relations among nations on the basis of the principles of the equality and sovereignty of nations; promoting international cooperation in dealing with international economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian problems; and encouraging and championing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for everyone regardless of race, gender, language, and religion.

UNA-Russia bases its daily work on the firm conviction that a key task of world politics is unwavering adherence to the requirements of modern international law, since no matter what various nations think of the current world order and what they want the future order to be like, it is obvious that any system of international relations can be stable only if it is based on international law. The UN Charter is the core of international law, and the UN is the guardian of global law and order.

UNA-Russia has more than 40 collective members, including the Russian Academy of Sciences, various educational institutions, and some nongovernmental organizations. It was founded by the USSR Academy of Sciences, Lomonosov Moscow State University, MGIMO, and other higher education institutions and research institutes. It brings together powerful research and human resources.

UNA-Russia was responsible for bringing the International Model United Nations (IMUN) concept to Russia. IMUN is a project that allows students to participate in simulations of key UN bodies like the General Assembly and the Security Council. The Russian version of IMUN is the Vitaly Churkin Moscow International Model United Nations, an annual event that takes place at MGIMO in April. It has brought together tens of thousands of Russian university and secondary school students since it was launched.

At the behest of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and with support from the Russian Foreign Ministry, Russia’s Permanent Mission to the UN Office in Geneva, and the UN Information Center in Moscow, UNA-Russia carried out a series of events in 2020 marking the 75th anniversary of the UN.

Its main task continues to be to support the high goals and principles enshrined in the UN Charter. UNA-Russia possesses unique resources for supporting people's diplomacy – or, to use the language of today, the participation of Russian civil society in the global civil society movement.

MGIMO Rector Anatoly Torkunov has held the post of UNA-Russia chairman since 1997. It was mainly thanks to his efforts that UNA-Russia became a public educational institution for preparing the rapidly growing social group of Russian citizens involved in international relations and seeking to establish cooperation with international organizations, primarily those of the UN system.

A MAIN project of UNA-Russia is the Russian Regions and the Sustainable Development Goals program – a unique “two-way” project in which not only institutions and representatives of the UN system shape international opinion about Russia's regions, but Russia's regions come up with global initiatives and shape international politics. Today, in the context of global challenges and the COVID-19 pandemic, when communication in many spheres has moved online, the importance of such interaction and exchange of experience cannot be overestimated. They are very needed because of their clear and proven mechanisms. This program allows us to help our regions better understand and appreciate the importance and value of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and adapt it to regional specifics and strategies.

The Russian Regions and the UN Development Goals program is a tool for promoting national projects in UN organizations. The program also helps boost the image and investment appeal of Russia's regions. UNA-Russia's years of experience, strong staff, and good track record guarantee the program's success.

Another equally important project realized by UNA-Russia is the holding of international youth Model UN events, the first of which was held over 30 years ago.

In its 65-year history, UNA-Russia has achieved a lot both at home and abroad, implementing its projects and programs under UN auspices to strengthen relations between peoples and states. UNA-Russia intends to continue to help realize the foreign policy priorities of Russia as an influential center of the contemporary world by involving its regions not only in the implementation but also in the formulation of the country's foreign policy agenda. Today, the results of the SDGs are an important international criteria of a region's investment attractiveness.

Igor Sechin: “The Long-Term Stability of Oil Supplies Is Under Threat Due to Lack of Investment”

ROSNEFT took part in the 2021 St. Petersburg International Economic Forum [SPIEF].

For the Rosneft public joint-stock company, the 24th annual SPIEF event was rich and productive. The main event for the oil and gas sector at SPIEF 2021 was a speech by the head of Rosneft, Igor Sechin, on the “Transformation of World Energy.”

The report was far-reaching, detailed and informative: It addressed the future not only of national and global fuel and energy complexes, but also of the world economy as a whole. Most significantly, Sechin touched on how each global player is responsible for how this most crucial industry for human civilization will develop.

A number of the largest European companies have set a goal of switching from oil and gas to diversified energy sources. The plan is to achieve this by reducing hydrocarbon production, which will help them achieve carbon neutrality.

Under these difficult conditions, when it would seem reasonable to seek a way out of the crisis, we are hearing increasingly loud “predictions” about the end of the oil era and the complete abandonment of

hydrocarbons in favor of so-called alternative energy. During this critical period, a number of investors are beginning to listen to the false prophets, and the long-term stability of oil and gas supplies is being threatened by lack of investment. As a result, the growth of hydrocarbon reserves in recent years is at historic lows, resulting in an already palpable shortage of resources. “This trend may become the ‘new normal’ for the world’s major players and lead to further stress on the supply side. The world is at risk of facing an acute shortage of oil and gas,” Sechin stated.

An important factor, in his view, is that India’s national energy concept does not count on one or two priority areas, but envisions the balanced development of all energy sources: renewable energy, biofuels, gas, cleaner use of oil and coal, and a transition to new sources of energy, including hydrogen.

Sechin also said in his speech that the world is facing the strategic problem of “inter-fuel competition.” According to him, so-called “green” energy is already a significant force and driver of development in the Asia-Pacific region, where the growth of renewable energy capacity has already exceeded that of Europe and the US.

The lack of technology needed to implement plans to change energy paradigms and transition to a low-carbon economy has become a major problem. The IEA estimates that in 2050, about half of the low-carbon energy technologies currently under development will be at the prototype and pilot phase. Even by 2070, 30% of those technologies will still require commercialization and, thus, more and more investment.

During his speech, Sechin focused on Rosneft’s environmental initiatives in particular. Rosneft’s carbon management plan aims to reduce emissions from exploration and production by 30%, prevent 20 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions, eliminate routine flaring of associated gas, and reduce methane emissions.

As a responsible and efficient producer of oil at low cost, Rosneft is laying the groundwork for sustainable future growth by investing in reducing greenhouse emissions, increasing production of cleaner motor fuels, and increasing the share of natural gas in its portfolio,” he added.

International rating agencies give high marks to Rosneft’s achievements in terms of sustainable development. The company is on the leaderboard in a number of specialized ratings, and continues to improve. The international agency Sustainalytics twice raised Rosneft’s rating in April, putting it at the top of the list in the Russian oil and gas sector. For a second year in a row, Rosneft has also been included in the list of constituent companies in the FTSE4Good Index Series, which have high ratings for ESG (environmental, social, and governance), as well as transparency in information disclosure. In addition, Rosneft tops the Bloomberg ESG ratings of leading companies in the oil and gas industry, and is among the industry’s top 10 in the Refinitiv ratings.

The significance of the Rosneft CEO’s report is confirmed by the heightened international interest it drew.

Sechin’s report exemplified a deep, thorough, and pointed analysis not only of the industry, but of the entire world economy through the lens of energy resources and the oil industry. Its high quality, substantive content, and big-picture view – which analysts floundering in the streams of rhetoric had forgotten was even possible – were in the truest sense of the word a breath of fresh air.

Rosneft not only in words, but in deeds, sets an example of resoluteness and determination: Despite the objective difficulties faced by the global oil and gas sector today, the Russian producer is opening a wide space for its partners to cooperate.

SPIEF-2021 has proven once again that Rosneft means what it says. That is why people listen to what it says – and, most importantly, why they believe it.

Discrimination Against the Ethnic Russian Population in Latvia: An International Legal Analysis

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On June 10, 2014, the Saeima, Latvia's parliament, passed a new preamble to the Latvian Constitution that states that the Latvian state was created to "guarantee the existence and development of the Latvian nation, its language and culture throughout the centuries."

After analyzing the political situation in Europe before, during, and after World War II, one can draw a clear distinction between Latvia's occupation by Nazi Germany and Soviet preemptive defensive action along its borders.

It should be added that the incorporation of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia into the USSR before Germany attacked the Soviet Union and the liberation of these countries from German occupation by the Red Army enabled them to avoid being labeled by the United Nations as "enemy" states as defined in Articles 53 and 107 of the UN Charter, with all ensuing consequences under international law.

ON MAY 4, 1990, the Supreme Council of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic adopted a declaration of independence, and on August 21, 1991, it passed a constitutional law on Latvia's statehood. These two acts formed the basis for restoring the 1922 Constitution. The 1990 declaration also annulled the 1940 declaration on Latvia's incorporation into the USSR, even though both declarations had equal grounds for legitimacy – they were just adopted in different periods and in different historical contexts by the then parliaments of Latvia.

It is obvious that all state ethnic policy measures pursue the same goal: the goal set in the preamble of the constitution of guaranteeing the existence and development of the Latvian nation, language, and culture – in other words, only the Latvian language and culture.

Ethnic minorities that were living in Latvia when it gained independence in 1918 accounted for 25.7% of its population, and it wouldn't hurt reiterating that, in response to a demand from the League of Nations Council, Latvia made a declaration at a Council meeting promising to respect and defend the rights of its minorities.

The Law on the Status of Former USSR Citizens Who Are Not Citizens of Latvia or Any Other State, which came out on April 12, 1995, gave ex-Soviet citizens who were resident in Latvia as of July 1, 1992, and were not citizens of any state (i.e., the non-Latvian population of the country) the status of "non-citizens" ("nepilsoni" in Latvian) – a special status invented by the Latvian state and not formalized in law or characterized in jurisprudence.

Remarkably, when joining the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Latvia made a reservation aimed at preventing the convention from applying to noncitizens by arguing that they were not a national minority.

Having made a quarter of Latvia's population de facto stateless, Latvian authorities have been going out of their way for the past three decades to deny these people Latvian citizenship. Various legislative and

bureaucratic obstacles have been raised, including unreasonably high Latvian language proficiency requirements.

The legislation of a country normally divides its population into three categories – citizens, aliens, and stateless persons. The entire International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights deals with the rights of every human being, except Article 25, which deals with the rights of citizens – namely, the right of “every citizen” to “take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives,” to vote in elections and be elected, and “to have access, on general terms of equality, to public service.”

In view of all this, the concept of non-citizens, to say nothing of their status, has no basis in international law, being purely and simply a political product. In fact, Latvia itself prefers to use the term “aliens” rather than the term “non-citizens” when referring to its non-citizens.

As we can see, to migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers – i.e., the traditional categories of non-citizens – CERD added one more group: persons who could not acquire the nationality of the country of their permanent residence.

It is worth mentioning a book published by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights titled *The Rights of Non-citizens*, which was based on a report by Professor David Weissbrodt, special rapporteur on the rights of non-citizens.

To better understand Latvia’s diverse stratagems to dodge its commitments on stateless persons living on its territory, it needs to be explained that statelessness results either from the loss of citizenship or the non-acquisition of citizenship at birth. The former type may be termed relative statelessness and the latter absolute statelessness.

The Latvian state has left this community only one way to acquire Latvian citizenship – naturalization. But it raised all but insurmountable obstacles to it, primarily requiring a high level of Latvian language proficiency without providing the necessary organizational, financial, teaching, temporal or other conditions.

As a party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,³⁸ Latvia has been submitting compliance reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). In concluding observations on the combined sixth to 12th periodic reports from Latvia, CERD said that it was “concerned at the reports that the current language policies discriminate against ethnic minorities in the fields of education and employment, public and political life and access to services.”

CERD recommended that Latvia “take measures to ensure that its language policy and laws do not create direct or indirect discrimination or restrict the rights of ethnic minorities to access education, employment and basic services, and ... that there are no undue restrictions on access to education in minority languages.”

Latvia pursues an openly discriminatory policy toward its ethnic minorities and non-citizens, and that the nation’s Western strategic partners support this policy, encouraging the country to demonstratively refuse to change it.

EU authorities should pay close attention to problems of this kind, since they occur on EU territory. But for some reason, we are not seeing Brussels take a strong and uncompromising stance on these kinds of issues, even though they are human rights issues and the EU declares human rights one of its chief values. On the other hand, Brussels is quick to react if EU interests are threatened.

Russia's New Strategic Guidelines on International Information Security

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ON April 12, 2021, Russian Presidential Decree No. 213 approved the Fundamentals of Russian State Policy in the Field of International Information Security.

This strategic planning document reflects Russia's official views on the essence of international information security (IIS). The updated definition of IIS clearly formulates the fundamental approaches underlying the country's position in this field – namely:

- the priority of universally recognized principles and norms of international law in the global information space, taking into consideration information and communication technology (ICT) specifics
- equal partnership of all member states of the world community, regardless of the level of their information technology and the development of their information infrastructure, as well as the involvement, along with government entities, of all interested parties (the scientific and expert community, nongovernmental organizations and business circles) in ensuring international information security
- the maintenance of international peace, security, and stability in the information sphere.

It is noteworthy that the updated document for the first time stresses the importance of taking into account the national interests of the Russian Federation in implementing, within the framework of its state policy, an array of coordinated measures aimed at establishing an effective IIS system.

However, this does not mean a change in course for Russia. The need to fully consider Russia's national interests in the information sphere was previously declared in the Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation, approved in December 2016.

Special attention is given to threats posed by certain countries using their technological dominance in the global information space. The Fundamentals also reveal the true objectives of such dominance: monopolizing the ICT market, restricting other states' access to advanced technology, deepening their technological dependence on states holding dominant information technology positions, and preserving the digital divide between developed and developing nations.

Essentially, each area of state policy implementation is linked to countering various IIS threats.

Facilitating the development of an IIS system has been a Russian foreign policy priority at various international platforms for more than 20 years.

The course outlined in the new Fundamentals toward developing cooperation with foreign partners at all levels in the interest of creating an IIS system seems logical and consistent.

The Fundamentals formulate Russian initiatives that most member states of the world community have endorsed – primarily the initiative to ensure the adoption of a UN convention on ensuring international information security.

The establishment of a new [OEWG] group [on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies] for 2021- 2025 was another Russian initiative included in UN General Assembly Resolution 75/240 ["Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security"] that was supported by a majority of UN member states and adopted on December 31, 2020.

That was the second Russian initiative reflected in the Fundamentals and aimed at promoting and facilitating regular institutional dialogue under the aegis of the UN with the participation of all UN member states to ensure a democratic, inclusive, and transparent negotiation process on security of and in the use of ICT.

The third initiative, which was supported by a majority of member states during a vote on the Russian draft of UN General Assembly 74/247, "Countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes,"¹⁰ was related to the establishment of an open-ended ad hoc intergovernmental committee of experts to come up with a comprehensive international convention on combating the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes.

At the same time, the Fundamentals stress the need to reach and implement bilateral and multilateral international legal and other agreements between the Russian Federation and other countries on cooperation in this field.

Multilateral consultations with Russia's closest partners will require more active efforts on the part of existing expert groups, including the working group on information policy and information security under the Committee of Secretaries of the CSTO Security Councils, the SCO expert group on IIS, and the BRICS working group on ICT security issues.

Cooperation with ASEAN member states will get a new impetus as part of ASEAN-Russia dialogue on ICT security-related issues, the concept of which was approved on January 26, 2021, by the ASEAN-Russia Senior Officials' Meeting at the level of deputy foreign ministers.

Emphasis is being put on facilitating equal access to the latest ICT for all states; preventing technological dependence in the field of information technology, including the digital divide; developing and implementing global, regional, multilateral, and bilateral programs aimed at narrowing the digital divide; and facilitating the development of a national information infrastructure.

Overall, by maintaining the continuity of Russia's strategic course to prevent interstate conflicts in the global information space and reaffirming its commitment to facilitate the creation of an international information security system, the 2021 Fundamentals clearly demonstrate the country's new strategic guidelines, taking into account the national interests of the Russian Federation.

Building a Global Information Security System for the Future: New Angles

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THE YEAR 2020 made it abundantly clear that the world is firmly and apparently immutably digitalized. All countries, regardless of their level of political, military, socioeconomic, and technological development, use information and communications technologies (ICTs) in various fields. But governments are certainly not the only users of ICTs. Companies, research and educational institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and civil society have swiftly adapted their work to the virtual format. It is convenient, accessible, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, often the only possible format. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the digital space has become a familiar habitat for most of the world's population.

But due to the scale of their use, ICTs create global threats if they are abused. This makes information security a decisive factor in global social development and thus a key item on today's global agenda.

Discussing international information security is not just a current trend but an urgent need in the new reality.

Russia was one of the initiators of negotiations on information security in the UN framework,¹ and it continues to insist that this process proceed under UN auspices and that the UN play the central role in relevant decision-making. Our efforts at the UN are aimed at developing an international paradigm that would preclude conflicts in the information space and prevent its militarization, and encourage the peaceful use of ICTs.

Clear and uniform rules would make the digital behavior of states more predictable, and for this reason, Russia initiated the development of universal rules, norms, and principles for the responsible behavior of states in cyberspace.

But not all countries share Russia's principles. Western states are persistently pressing the international community to accept their idea of the world order as a system based on the rule of force and on rivalry between great powers. It is in their interest to water down the central role of the UN on information security by delegating some powers in this sphere to regional organizations and forums or by setting up manipulable pseudo-universal multilateral formats to replace UN institutions, which is an even more dangerous prospect.

Western countries expect this to give them complete freedom of action, including the possibility to arbitrarily interpret norms and principles of international law and apply only those that are convenient to them; to assign blame for cyberattacks, publicizing such accusations through the media; and to punish the accused by slapping sanctions on them.

It seems that there is a growing need for the international community to reconsider the traditional approaches to building a global information security system and to revise the form and substance of negotiations on this issue.

First, the era of closed-door, elite-club formats such as the GGEs is obviously gone.

Second, it is essential to achieve maximally practical results from international information security negotiations under UN auspices. No country, least of all developing nations, wants debate for the sake of debate.

Third, private sector involvement is essential to ensuring information security and building effective forms of cooperation in this area.

Fourth, the increasing scale of ICT use means that more attention needs to be paid to the various humanitarian aspects of information security.

ICTs may be used with impunity to fuel tension, create an atmosphere of fear, and enslave or manipulate a population. None of this has to involve an open confrontation between countries, since ICTs can be used to keep people under permanent psychological control.

I certainly have not addressed all angles of the topic of international information security here. But the subjects raised in this article, like other international information security issues, obviously need conceptual analysis both at the national and international levels. International information security issues are being discussed on an increasing scale worldwide. I am convinced that Russian diplomats will keep working to ensure that our country maintains its leading role in establishing a conceptual framework for new global principles of ICT use.

Forum of the World Summit on the Information Society: Chairmanship of the Russian Federation

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THE YEAR 2021 is a significant one for the Communications Administration of the Russian Federation: We are chairing the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum for the first time. That decision was made in late 2020, after which we immediately set out to make this a truly substantive event.

As usual, the high-level session was opened by ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao. In his speech, he drew attention to the following:

The WSIS Forum has evolved into the key global event on ICTs for development, an efficient mechanism for multistakeholder implementation of WSIS Action Lines and the SDGs focusing on gender equality, accessibility, young people and the elderly, knowledge creation, and the sharing of good practices, including coping with COVID-19 challenges using ICTs. The WSIS Forum is coordinated by the ITU in collaboration with more than 32 UN Agencies and continues to provide assistance in developing multistakeholder and public/private partnerships to advance the achievement of development goals. It is my great pleasure to welcome H.E. Mr. Maxim Parshin, Deputy Minister for Digital Development, Communications, and Mass Media of the Russian Federation as the Chair of the WSIS Forum 2021.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum is a truly multistakeholder platform coorganized by ITU, UNESCO, UNDP, and UNCTAD to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines. The Forum is about creating partnerships and collaborations for real action on the ground to bring the benefits of the technology to everyone, everywhere.

Ms. Gitanjali Sah, ITU strategy and policy coordinator, shared her impressions of the preparation process with us:

The WSIS Forum brings the benefits of digital collaboration to all stakeholders at an international, regional, and national level. Through this platform, UN Agencies and all other stakeholders have been working hand in hand to make a difference in the lives of people all over the world.

The organization of the summit was a key issue of the 2002 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference and all meetings of the ITU Council held in 2001-2005, which resulted in the creation of a special Working Group to prepare the summit. It was unanimously decided to make Russia's representative, **Yury G. Grin**, director of the Department for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications of the Russian Federation, head of the Working Group. He answers a few questions about that process:

The challenges were primarily not only in the discussion and decision-making, but in the very formulation of the following issues: first, information security, and second, Internet governance on an equal basis with a special role for states. On both topics, there were sharp disagreements between developing countries and the countries of the Western coalition led by the United States. At first, the US didn't want to discuss anything at all. Legally, Internet governance issues are enshrined in US national law.

What is noteworthy here is that no matter what international mechanisms we create, no matter what multilateral documents we sign – and these are certainly also important and necessary – the process of ensuring information security has no end.

No country or region benefited [over another], because absolutely all countries won. There was complete unanimity of views on all problems that were raised. Moreover, the desire to work together to develop ICTs around the world and address existing challenges received political support.

Obviously, we need this format. It is very relevant and essential. In fact, the summit was very timely, and it played an important role in the transition away from telecommunications – away from a “connected” society and toward an “information” society. Much of what we talked about then has already been implemented and even further developed.

Now we are already facing new challenges. We need to analyze the level of penetration of the latest technologies in our lives, assess the quality of the state of affairs, formulate new areas of activity, and make plans for further development, paying special attention to security issues.

It would be very appropriate and timely to raise the issue of planning, preparing, and holding a new WSIS summit. And we shouldn't wait until 2025.

The past year demonstrated just how integral and vital ICTs are to all areas of modern life. And we should not forget that we are facing a fundamental era of not only challenges and threats, but also opportunities. Of course, we are increasingly aware of the risks we still face, the degree of responsibility to the citizens of the world, and the role of states as guarantors of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

The Russian communications administration continues to emphasize the contribution of UN agencies to solving the problems of building an information society, as well as the need to implement the decisions of the Summit under UN auspices. In tandem with our allies, we have consistently supported the continuation of the WSIS process and the adoption of a relevant decision at the UN General Assembly.

A very interesting period awaits us, during which many important tasks need to be solved. And as the saying goes: “The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”

Don't Be So Quick to Write Off Coal

Yuri Shafranik, *President of the World Politics and Resources Foundation*

Remember, the Stone Age did not end because humans ran out of stones. On the contrary, stone had a great future ahead of it: Instead of being just a material for the primitive tools of cave dwellers, it eventually became the basis for architectural and sculptural masterpieces.

The age of coal as a fuel is also coming to an inevitable end. The development of coal chemicals and high-conversion technologies will undoubtedly one day offer humanity products with incredible, almost “magical” properties.

In the meantime, we are facing a “brutal” hydrocarbon reality. ... Obviously, Europe does not want to freeze, and the surprises of global warming are by definition unpredictable. No one knows how much natural gas the EU countries may eventually need.

And coal is keeping up. “Freezing temperatures and rising gas prices have put coal-fired power plants back to work.

Renewable energy sources clearly will not be able to sustain the world's growing energy needs in the coming years. This means that demand for traditional hydrocarbons will continue to increase.

Just as with gas (where Russia, the most reliable supplier of blue fuel, instead of gratitude has been accused of expansionism and monopolism for decades), the West opposes Russia's coal industry development plans.

The growing competition in the global energy market certainly exacerbates competitors' envy. But then, they had no sympathy for us when the Russian coal industry was in dire straits.

We must bear in mind the sad legacy that the young Russian Federation inherited from the Soviet Union: the collapse of all economic performance indicators (with an automatic drop in coal consumption) and mounting social tension. The coal industry was falling apart across the board in terms of technology, mining safety, etc. Labor productivity and production efficiency were extremely low, too.

The Russian coal industry, which was 100% subsidized by the state, was not competitive on the world market.

The coal industry restructuring program was developed by the Ministry of Fuel and Energy and had three pillars:

1. the closure of dangerous and unprofitable mines as well as the termination of government subsidies
2. social protection for laid-off workers
3. technical reoutfitting of enterprises and encouragement of new, efficient projects.

Currently, 57 mines and 130 open-pit mines are operating in Russia. Half of them became operational after 2000 and use high-performance equipment and modern coal mining technologies.

As soon as Russia entered foreign markets with significant volumes of higher quality (and cheaper) coal, this immediately prompted complaints from Old and New World competitors who accused Russia of ignoring "green energy."

The coal industry may very well give rise to a powerful new multiplier effect. This requires the industry to gradually reinvent itself technologically, which will be facilitated by the use of the best available technologies (BAT), advanced digital and intelligent technologies, robotic systems, artificial intelligence, and deep processing of hydrocarbon raw materials.

We should note that the share of coal is particularly high (47%) in the energy balance of the fast-growing economies of the Asia-Pacific region, which together account for 44% of world energy consumption. The share of coal in electricity generation is also significant in Africa (22%), the CIS (14%), and the EU (13%). Given a number of complications, it's safe to assume that coal will remain a key source of energy in the medium term (five to 10 years).

According to Alexey Sinitsyn, a senator from Kemerovo Province: "Unfortunately, at the moment, the main challenge to our coal companies is exporting coal to Asia."

Meanwhile, the Asian market currently consumes 80% of all thermal coal produced globally.

That is the current situation. As for the next 370 years, perhaps the world will no longer have any need for coal long before then. But in the meantime, we just need to keep on working without reducing the creative and production paces achieved to date.

However, in the next 10 years, we must carefully analyze the global coal market and predict its development to ensure the industry's sure and steady transition to a new technological level dominated by high-conversion and coal chemicals. This is a major challenge that must be addressed immediately.

Three Hypostases of Alexander Nevsky: In Commemoration of His 800th Birthday

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IN MAY 2021, Russia marked an important anniversary: the 800th birthday of our legendary forefather, the Faithful Saint Prince Alexander Nevsky. We can and should be proud of the fact that he is the patron saint of Russia's diplomatic service. It is for good reason that Russia's best diplomats are awarded the Order of Alexander Nevsky for outstanding achievements in promoting our national interests. It is our duty to observe the date duly and with dignity.

The title of this article mentions three hypostases of Alexander Nevsky. How valid is this claim? Everybody knows about the military victories of the Faithful Saint Prince. Fewer people – primarily historians and foreign policy experts – can appreciate his merits as a politician and diplomat. And as far as I know, little or practically nothing has been written so far about his spiritual legacy and its connection to the current attitudes of Russians.

Let's begin with three prevailing (both in Russia and the West) assessments of his activity. The first assessment comes from his contemporaries and is shared today by most Russians. Their collective opinion is unequivocal: The prince is our national hero. ... According to the 2008 nationwide "Name of Russia" poll, Alexander Nevsky is considered the main figure in Russia's history. He is canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church.

The second group of opinions comes from the West: After rejecting a union with the Pope and submitting to the Golden Horde, he betrayed the cause of the Christian world and delayed by several centuries the rapprochement of uncivilized Russia and European civilization. If you think that this opinion is popular only among a handful of historians, let me recall the threatening warning of Strobe Talbott, who as US deputy secretary of state, warned that Russia "should dwell less on the image of Alexander Nevsky."² Even 800 years after his birth, the name of our Faithful Saint Prince evokes vitriol from Western politicians and diplomats who know Russia's history well.

These negative opinions could have been ignored had our so-called experts not echoed them in their blogs and in the media. They write that the prince's merits are if anything greatly exaggerated, that the battles he won were just minor clashes and skirmishes that were quite common in his day.

There is a third group of opinions that can conditionally be called "objectivist," even though they are very similar to the second group. Here is what our contemporary Russian historian Igor Danilevsky has to say about Alexander Nevsky: "He was neither a hero nor a traitor.... The fateful choice was not his: He was chosen by the khans of the Golden Horde. He merely obeyed their will, did their bidding, and used their strength to take care of his own immediate minor problems. Alexander Yaroslavich [Nevsky] never betrayed the national interests because there were no, and could not be, national interests at that time."

Alexander had a heavy burden to bear. He had to act simultaneously on three fronts: to oppose a Western invasion, contend with internal opposition, including that of his closest relatives, and look for the possibility of reaching an agreement with the Horde that would stop the devastating Mongolian raids on Russian cities and ensure Mongolian support in dealing with the first two problems.

It is strange to say the least – or even perfidy, to tell the truth – of our 13th-century ancestors and our contemporaries, the beneficiaries of the prince's triumphs, to say that Rus had no national interests. The prince's very difficult choice was indeed fateful – and the only correct one. The Horde started to shield Russia from Western invasions. In 1269, after Alexander Nevsky had already died, the Livonian Order began to threaten Russian lands once more. A small Mongolian unit that arrived in Novgorod under the treaty forced the Germans "to seek peace with Novgorod on its conditions since they feared the mere mention of the Tatars."

Alexander's greatest diplomatic achievement was that by 1260, as a result of masterful negotiations with Berke Khan and Prince Mindaugas of Lithuania, he managed to form a triple Russian-Lithuanian-Mongolian alliance against the West. At that time, the Livonian Order was on the verge of collapse. In 1262, the prince had to travel once more to the Horde, where he spent nearly a year. He once again "laid down his life for his friends," so to speak, to settle the problem of the beating of Mongolian officials in Russian cities. Successful as always, he set out for home, but fell ill either from stress or poison and died in Gorodets. That same year, Mindaugas was stabbed to death, which suggests that Papal agents were involved. It would be interesting to do some digging in the Vatican archives....

What is really amazing is that some things in our spiritual and political life have remained practically unchanged for 800 years. A couple years ago, before the current cold snap in relations between Russia and the West, certain people contended that Russia should abandon its active policy in the East and that the "pivot to the East was a political error"; others insisted that "there is no pivot to Asia," etc. Why this negative attitude to the "pivot to the East"? The West presents us with a long list of unfounded accusations.

The present differences in Russia's relations with the West and the East rightly worry us. But we need to fully understand that it is the logic of events in the international arena that is forcing us to multiply our positions in the East and that the firmer the ground under our feet in Asia, the more room we have for maneuver in the West. Where is the reasoning about a "pivot" coming from?

I don't think that dialogue with the West should be curtailed. It should be continued and actively promoted. The multilateral policy confirmed by the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation is our credo.

LET US discuss our own experience. The tragedy of the Soviet Union's disintegration was perceived by most as a catastrophe – the loss of everything we had believed in and lived by. And this is not necessarily and not always socialism and related principles. The feeling of emptiness from losing a big country and centuries-old good relations among its nationalities was frightening. It seemed as if we, as a vagrant without kith or kin, had betrayed and trampled upon everything our ancestors had created with their hands and brains over the centuries. Our Western so-called patrons rubbed their hands with glee in the expectation that, forced to its knees, Russia would soon fall apart into small principalities, very much like in the 13th century. That did not happen; [Russia] slowly but surely rose from the ashes thanks to the efforts of our people, including the hands and brains of our outstanding diplomats. Certain forces in certain Western capitals cannot accept this. And that is why our diplomatic work is so tense.

Alexander Nevsky: Diplomat, Warrior, Saint

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THE JOURNAL International Affairs has created Alexander Nevsky: Diplomat, Warrior, Saint – a documentary film to commemorate the 800th birthday of Alexander Nevsky.

"Wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul...." Those are the first words in Life of the Holy Blessed Prince Alexander. They are also the first words of the film, which tells without deceit about the prince's life journey.

Rus was devastated by Tatar-Mongol invasions, as confirmed by not just Slavic but also West European chronicles. Kiev was practically desolate; towns and villages were burnt down. It was then that Pope Gregory IX got the idea that the lands inhabited by "a wild tribe, enslaved by even worse pagans, the Tatars" could be easily subjugated. The occupation of Rus by Catholic monastic orders began, and they came not only for the land and material benefits but also to try to subdue the people spiritually by

implanting the Catholic faith. While the Golden Horde regarded other religions as a kind of higher power and believed that enslaved peoples would thank their gods when their Church was spared and thus pray for the invaders who allowed them to keep their faith, the Pope needed the complete submission of the Rus people, of both their souls and bodies.

The filmmakers along with Doctor of Science (History) Roman Sokolov, director of the Institute of History and Social Sciences of Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, invite the viewer to “St. Petersburg’s most historic part” – the very spot where the army led by Birger, a future ruler of Sweden, came ashore. Birger sent an envoy to the prince in Novgorod with the words, “Resist if you can. Know that I am already here and will capture your land.” The prince gathered his retinue and, after praying in the Novgorod Cathedral of St. Sophia, came out to meet the invaders. Alexander’s main trump cards were the element of surprise and ... divine help.

According to Roman Sokolov, it was this victory that gave Prince Alexander his famous honorific epithet “Nevsky,” which became attached to him in the early 15th century.

Historians have broken at least as many spears in their disputes over the Battle on the Ice as were broken in the battle itself. The filmmakers look for answers to these questions, searching for ancient historical truth. The secrets of Alexander Nevsky’s tactics and strategy are revealed by Mikhail Myagkov, Doctor of Science (History) and a professor at Moscow State Institute (University) of International Relations (MGIMO). When the large invading army formed a wedge, also known as a “pig,” and went on the offensive on the ice of Lake Peipus (Chudskoye), Alexander allowed the knights to advance further and then he surrounded them from the flanks. The Livonians were trapped.

Yevgeny Yemelyanov, chief artist of the Military-Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineers, and Signal Corps who created the evocative drawings for the film, invites viewers to reflect on an artistic diorama dedicated to the Battle on the Ice. The diorama was created based on the chronicle of those years and clearly shows how Prince Alexander planned the battle and how brutal it was.

Majestic Lake Chudskoye keeps its secrets to this day. The only “rock,” or rather a small cliff not far from the coast, was demolished in the early 20th century because it hindered navigation. The stone fragments found at the lake bottom helped establish a more precise location of this significant battle.

Prince Alexander Nevsky is a warrior, diplomat, and saint of the Russian land.... These three hypostases of his person are inseparable, for they all worked for the good of the Motherland. Following Alexander’s death, Metropolitan Kirill II proclaimed: “The sun of the Russian land has set!” Throughout his short life, Prince Alexander was a defender of Rus and its interests, and now he is the patron saint of soldiers and diplomats – today’s defenders of our country.

Today, interest in the Holy Blessed Prince is genuine. From our perspective many centuries later, Alexander Nevsky’s deeds appear increasingly meaningful and relevant. He is now also known as “The Name of Russia.” The prayer to the Holy Blessed Prince Alexander Nevsky now sounds even more relevant: “You, who defeated the enemy regiments and drove them away from Russia’s borders, bring down all our enemies visible and invisible.”

Abai

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BEFORE the war, Abai sewed Astrakhan hats for colonels and generals, which exempted him from the draft. It stayed that way until early 1943, when keeping able-bodied men from combat service became inadvisable. Abai was assigned to transport ammunition by horse and cart. He worked conscientiously, and by the time Soviet forces entered Germany, he had been awarded three medals: two for

Meritorious Service in Combat, and one for the Liberation of Warsaw, where he had never actually set foot. This was standard practice for those toilers who served honorably but were not directly involved in combat.

By early 1944, the need for horse-drawn transport had fallen, since ammunition was now being transported by powerful Studebakers received through the Lend-Lease Act. By some miracle, Abai remained on the duty roster; apparently, they had simply forgotten to eliminate his job. This redounded to his benefit. The commanders always had a team of horses on call for various small deliveries. And for street battles in German cities, a cart was simply indispensable.

One day, Abai was plodding alongside his cart in a column of the Katyusha division to which he was attached. The cart driver was walking alongside a new horse, named Dunka. This clearly was such a smart, hardworking, and hardy animal that he couldn't allow himself to sit in the cart, saving her strength for more important future tasks. A vehicle had broken down along the way. The captain told everyone to keep moving.

"You'll be under the command of Sgt. Maj. Tishchenko," he directed Abai, who was unsure what to do next. "Carry on."

Abai saluted and set off to catch up with the column. He soon heard shooting behind him and turned the cart around without a second thought. A major battle raged before him. A group of German soldiers hiding in ambush in a nearby grove, spotting easy prey, began to surround the vehicle. On one side, the Nazis had gotten so close that a grenade would have been enough to finish off the defenders. Sizing up the situation, Abai rushed in and ordered Dunka to lie down in the ditch while he began to lay down crossfire with his machine gun, managing to cut down at least three of the enemy.

"Crawl toward us, they're going to make another charge!" the captain shouted to Abai. "Do you have any spare magazines?" he asked hopefully.

Abai was a thrifty man. His pouch contained no less than five fully loaded magazines, which he doled out.

The enraged Germans attacked, but they unexpectedly took a savage kick in the teeth and had to fall back.

"One more attack, commander, and we won't make it through," said one of the soldiers.

"I can see that!" he snapped. "Who will blow up the car?"

"I will, commander," replied the driver, whose duty it was in fact to do this in an emergency.

To this Abai began melodically reciting something in his own language. Everyone listened to him attentively, although no one understood a word. Abai finished, and the Germans began their crawl.

A tank appeared in the road. The young lieutenant on board quickly assessed the situation and began to spray bullets at the closest Germans. He then fired two exploding shells at the fleeing enemy. The rest were dealt with on the spot. The Russians who still had one foot in the grave began to come to their senses.

"So, what did you ask of your God?" inquired a thuggish-looking guy, clearly a former criminal.

"I asked Him to send a tank," Abai answered with a serious tone.

The tank crew was the first to laugh.

Once the pace began to slow, the tank began to take the banged-up Katyusha into tow. The captain approached Abai.

"Where's your old cart? We need to get the dead out of here."

Abai rushed to the side of the road. Dunka, still doing her combat duty, lay safely nestled between the cart and the slope of the road.

Three men were dead. All the others were injured – two seriously. They were placed on top of the tank. The captain and Abai were the only ones not to receive a scratch. As the infantry marched by in an endless column, they helped load the corpses into the wagon. The tank crew doffed their helmets and fired a salute from their guns.

After turning over his grievous cargo to the orderlies, Abai hurried to the army warehouses: Dunka had run out of feed. “The warehouse head is not a good man; he only gives straw. Dunka must eat hay or grain, not just straw,” Abai complained.

Fully loaded to the nines, they set off on their way back. The captain collapsed on the fragrant hay and fell asleep: The last few hours had taken their toll. A car from counterintelligence arrived in the evening and took him away. Lively digesting the events of the day, the division quieted down, not expecting anything good yet to come.

The division still had to make it through fierce battles at Seelow Heights and in Berlin itself, where it lost more than half its men. Abai had to mop quite a bit of dust and sweat off himself and Dunka before Victory came.

Abai received his beautiful shiny new medal, the Order of the Red Banner, and wore it everywhere, delicately running his fingers over it from time to time. When the time came for demobilization, the sly captain called him over and handed him a rather interesting document, printed on Army Headquarters letterhead, with a real blue seal and someone’s signature from the top brass: He had somehow managed to sneak this paper out while he was there. It stated that Private of the Guards Abai, a participant in the heroic storming of Berlin, in recognition of his valor and heroism, was awarded a horse (Dunka), to be placed in his possession as private property. All military and civilian services were requested to render [Abai] all possible assistance along the route [home], according to travel orders and food allotment certificates.

Abai ended up with no rival suitors: They had all been killed in the war. Only now Ainur had been married for six months to Abai’s school friend Khalil, who was demobilized due to injury without even earning any special distinction. Abai left Dunka to help the young folks, then left on a party assignment to restore the coal mines of Donbass, where he soon earned another medal. It was there that the awards he had not managed to receive earlier began to “catch up” with him. At the local commissariat, he was awarded medals for the Capture of Berlin and for Victory Over Germany, as well as a medal highly respected among soldiers – For Courage – which he had earned in battles at Küstrin bridgehead. On commemorative days, when Abai wore his service jacket, people marveled at the number of medals and invariably asked what he had been during the war. His answer was always the same: “I was a Russian soldier. A private of the guards.”

Evacuation of Soviet Government Staff From Germany and Its Satellites

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THE AGGRESSION of fascist Germany and its satellites required a radical restructuring of the Soviet state machine. Both the central and foreign offices of the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID) were instructed to look for possible allies in forming a future anti-Hitler coalition. But the NKID was shorthanded.¹ In the first days of the war, many of those who worked in the central office volunteered for the front, while those who were working abroad in European countries were taken prisoner by German fascists and their satellites.

The issue of exchanging Soviet civil servants outside the USSR for citizens of the opposing side inside the USSR was raised in the very first days of the war. Alexandra Kollontai, the highly respected Soviet ambassador to Sweden, persuaded the Swedes to mediate talks on exchanging Soviet citizens for foreign nationals.² In practical terms this was no simple task: The number of Soviet citizens on the exchange list was eight or even 10 times bigger than the number of foreigners in the Soviet Union. The fascist armies were advancing toward Moscow at an alarming speed, which made the talks even more difficult.

ARCHIVAL documents related to the events of 1941, numerous and very detailed reports and analytical notes that Soviet organizations stationed abroad sent to Moscow, show Stalin's astounding maniacal mistrust of the Soviet foreign services that he himself had set up and controlled. It is not my intention to criticize the Soviet leadership; I am merely affirming the high level of awareness and outstanding analytical skills of the Soviet diplomats and intelligence personnel who risked their lives to warn Moscow about imminent aggression.

In the months before the war, Soviet and German diplomats were working and living in an atmosphere of foreboding and gloom. Most of them knew that war was inevitable.

By the end of May, practically all German economic and trade representatives and the families of German diplomats had left the country.

Moscow insisted on an "all for all" arrangement. Knowing this, representatives of the Soviet Embassy in Berlin stated that none of them would leave Berlin until all Soviet citizens were allowed to leave Germany.

The exchange procedure and the lists of people to be exchanged were discussed in Moscow with the envoys of Bulgaria and Sweden every day, often twice a day. During these tough talks, the sides agreed to the outlines of the procedure and possible exchange dates.

TIES with the satellites of fascist Germany were ruptured on the first day of the war. The scenario of the evacuation of Soviet diplomats was the same everywhere. In the early morning hours of June 22, the Soviet ambassador was summoned to the foreign ministry, where he was informed about the war and told that he should vacate the embassy building immediately to "avoid unfriendly incidents." Telephone lines were cut; police were stationed at entrances; and diplomats were told to remain in the embassy. Anti-Soviet rallies organized in the center of the capital city marched to the embassy buildings, windows were broken, and the press joined in by writing a flurry of anti-Soviet articles.

It is noteworthy that at meetings with top NKID officials in Moscow, only the ambassadors of Romania and Vichy France attempted to vaguely explain the underlying motivations of the actions of their governments. But the Soviet side did not receive any intelligible answer to People's Commissar Molotov's request for specific grievances.

BY EARLY July, after difficult talks, the mediators finally arrived at a procedure for verifying the documents of those who would be exchanged, specifying the exchange locations and the timing of this complex operation. Moscow's main demand of "all for all" was accepted. The fascist authorities accepted the lists of Soviet citizens interned in Germany and the occupied territories drawn up by the former Soviet Embassy. It was agreed that they would be brought to Berlin in a couple of days where the Soviet consul accompanied by a Swedish diplomat would be allowed to meet them.

The fate of Soviet citizens not included in the exchange lists was tragic. Only a small group of sailors from among those serving on support vessels that the Soviet Union had bought from Germany returned home. Their lives were spared by their Soviet international passports; other sailors had only "sailor's documents." In August-September, those with international passports were exchanged for Germans across Bulgaria and Turkey. Other Soviet citizens were left in concentration camps. Women were kept in

Berlin, while men were transferred to a camp for interned persons in Wolfsberg Castle, in Bavaria, where many died; those who survived were blacklisted as internees and not welcomed home after the war.

THE FACT that Soviet citizens – diplomats and civil servants sent abroad by various agencies – returned home was the first wartime success of Soviet diplomacy. When the fascist hordes were approaching Moscow and the state's continued existence was at stake, the Soviet government fought for the interests of its citizens and won the battle.

A major role was played by Soviet Ambassador to Sweden Alexandra Kollontai, whose good relations with the Swedish government allowed her to persuade Stockholm to assume the role of mediator in the Soviet-German talks. Unfortunately, the active efforts of two diplomats directly involved in these complex contacts between two warring sides – Vilhelm Assarsson and Ivan Stamenov – were forgotten.¹⁸ The work of Turkish diplomats in the process of exchanging more than 1,500 foreign citizens in Turkey is also worthy of more careful study

Today, when marking the tragic anniversary of the outbreak of fascist aggression against our motherland, we should bear in mind that the Soviet diplomats who sought to prevent German aggression before the war began and to establish an anti-Hitler coalition as soon as it broke out contributed much to the final victory in that bloody war. At all times, the diplomatic service was and remains an inalienable part of our state and people. We must cherish the memory of the glorious past of our diplomacy as a confirmation of the continuity of our history, its great traditions, and an example to be followed by subsequent generations of Russian diplomats.

The USSR and Great Britain Before the Opening of the Second Front: Afghan Realities of Allied Relations

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THE RADICAL turn in the Great Patriotic War brought by the victories of the Red Army at Stalingrad and the Kursk Bulge forced the Soviet Allies in the anti-Hitler coalition to revise their positions on events unfolding at the Soviet-German front. The ruling circles of the United States and Great Britain realized that the time had come to think about postwar arrangements on the European continent. Absolutely convinced that sooner or later the Third Reich would collapse, Western politicians were worried about the postwar political situation in the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe.

The Western allies' double-dealing in relations with the Soviet Union became obvious at talks about opening a Second Front in Europe. Soviet intelligence had already informed the country's leaders that back in August 1943, the Anglo-American command had two options for a special operation of this kind. Today, information about the first option, codenamed Rankin, is known only to experts and historians. The West prefers to keep this information suppressed in publications intended for general audiences or, at best, mentioned in passing. According to this option, Great Britain and the US would immediately open a front in Europe if Wehrmacht resistance to the Red Army and the morale of German troops sharply declined, making the threat of a Soviet occupation of Germany real.

The Rankin plan called for establishing joint rapid deployment forces to stop the Red Army's westward advance; American troops were to occupy German territory as fast as possible to beat the forward Red Army detachments moving toward Berlin.

Another option, codenamed Overlord, of a landing in northern France has been described in detail in numerous history textbooks. In his memoirs, Pavel Fitin, head of the Soviet Foreign Intelligence Service

(SVR) during World War II (1939-1946), had the following to say about the concluding stages of the Great Patriotic War: "According to our information, it was for political rather than military reasons that the Allies had not opened a Second Front. They expected that the Soviet Union would weaken. As is well known, US and British troops landed in Normandy early in June 1944, when the fate of fascist Germany had been, in fact, determined by the Red Army's mighty offensive."⁶ Today, it has become abundantly clear that the Allies needed the Second Front to preserve their control over European countries.

This changed the nature of Allied relations within the anti-Hitler coalition.

Soviet representatives at the liaison center between the secret intelligence services of the Soviet Union and Great Britain (the "Contact" line), set up in Iran in 1942, reported to Moscow that the British, while paying lipservice to partner relations, had turned them into open rivalry. This led to an unacceptable disruption of Soviet-British contacts during the preparation and holding of the Tehran Conference (November 28-December 1, 1943).

According to reliable information at their disposal, the Allies knew that fascist agents were preparing terrorist acts against the leaders of the Big Three – Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill.

After interrogating the captured German officer, the British moved him to India to learn more about his ties and contacts. Under all sorts of pretexts, the British refused to let the Soviet side interrogate the German agent, even though Soviet intelligence badly needed to hear what the German agent had to say about subversive anti-Soviet activities of fascist agents in Iran.

Mayer's detention by the British undermined the special operation planned to neutralize the German spy network in Iran. According to operational information, between 30 to 80 German agents of Mayer's group disappeared.

Breakdowns in Soviet-British cooperation during the Great Patriotic War were not accidental. The British demonstrated the same concealed rivalry in Allied relations in neighboring Afghanistan, where they were joint curators of Bhagat Ram, an agent of the Indian Political Intelligence planted in Abwehr structures in Afghanistan.¹² Leonid Kostromin, a veteran of the Foreign Intelligence Service, wrote that Ram did a lot for Soviet intelligence: Soviet agents were aware of almost everything the Abwehr was doing in the region. He supplied timely and reliable information about the activities of German intelligence in Afghanistan and the instructions that were arriving from Berlin, and he helped identify all German resident spies in Kabul.

In September 1943, the British liaison department in Moscow officially informed the head of the Soviet Foreign Intelligence Service that Ram had been urgently recalled from Kabul to Delhi, where he was needed in view of Japanese spying activities. Thus, operational contacts in the Afghan bridgehead between the Soviet and British intelligence services were disrupted.

In March 1944, the Soviet spy station in Kabul insistently asked the head of British intelligence in Afghanistan to allow Ram to come to the Afghan capital for consultations on a planned special operation.

Contacts between the Soviet NKID and the British Foreign Office in Moscow and Kabul in summer 1943 also did nothing to strengthen allied relations in Afghanistan.

The Soviet People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB) had compiled a vast dossier on German agent Karl Rudolf Rasmuss: "Rudolf Rasmuss, about 55 years old, born into a merchant family in Hamburg. Arrived in Afghanistan on May 29, 1941; before that, served 18 months as commercial attaché of the German Embassy in Bucharest; earlier spent 27 years in India posing as a commercial attaché in Bombay and a consul in Calcutta. Speaks English and Urdu. Dispatched to Afghanistan to

organize intelligence and diversionary operations against the Soviet Union and India. Nicknamed Magister by the Soviet intelligence service.”

Immediately after his arrival in Afghanistan, the German diplomat began to stand out from other diplomats by actively pursuing contacts with members of the Afghan elite with ties to the ruling royal dynasty. His closest circle consisted of top military and civilian officials from power organs.

The British, likewise, were concerned by the scope of the clandestine activities of German agents led by Rasmuss in Afghanistan. In spring 1942, Alexander Lancaster, a British military attaché in Kabul, invited Soviet Ambassador Mikhailov to exchange information about the subversive activities of Germans and Italians in Afghanistan. He told Mikhailov that commercial attaché Rasmuss, the top spy, was supervising anti-Soviet activities in Afghanistan.

The deportation of German agents from Afghanistan was only the first step in Britain’s plan to capture Rasmuss. He never suspected that he was locked in Kabul, with the keys of his Afghan dungeon in British hands, so to speak. On the one hand, thanks to Ram and his people, the British blocked off all his routes in the Hindu Kush. This meant that he could not leave Kabul on his own initiative or on an order from Berlin without outside assistance. On the other hand, his official departure from the Afghan capital was possible only with assistance from the British, who were responsible for the safe travel of VIPs from Kabul to Delhi.

Rasmuss, with his dwindling number of agents and in view of the coming winter, was no longer a threat to the British in the tribal zone. Hindu Kush was impassable in winter, which meant that until spring 1944, no large-scale anti-British acts by Pashtuns instigated by German agents were possible. But the British must have taken into account the fact that Rasmuss was also being closely watched by Soviet intelligence.

The Soviet intelligence officer commented that after the rout of fascist Germany, Rasmuss would be tried by the Allies and convicted as a war criminal and that cooperation with Soviet intelligence and a decent life in postwar Germany was his only way out.

Kuznets was the first Russian historian of Soviet intelligence to suggest that Rasmuss had disappeared from Kabul in early November 1943. Other historians later agreed that Rasmuss hastened to leave Kabul almost immediately after his meeting with the Soviet intelligence officer.

In his special report of July 6, 1944, Mikhail Allakhverdov, the Soviet resident spy in Afghanistan, offered certain details related to Rasmuss’ departure from Kabul. The British did not arrest or at least intern the German spy in British India, despite having every opportunity to do so. British intelligence apparently still needed him. Accompanied by a British liaison officer, he was moved to Peshawar, a small city at the border of British India, and then on to the port of Karachi. He traveled in comfortable conditions; in conversation with his companion, Rasmuss reproached Britain for showing extreme carelessness in establishing allied relations with the Russians. He was convinced that now not only the Germans but also the British and the rest of Europe were on the brink of disaster. In Karachi, this “former Afghan prisoner of the British who had spent five months in detention” was put on a steamship of a neutral country bound for Europe.

We do not know whether he reached Germany or left the ship in a foreign port. Some researchers insist that he reached Berlin and even sent several telegrams to Bhagat Ram whom he still believed to be his most valuable agent and whom he wanted to warn about the pit into which he had fallen.

Moscow decided to replace the staff of the Soviet intelligence station in Afghanistan. On June 22, 1944, station chief Mikhail Allakhverdov, known among Soviet diplomats in Kabul as Counsellor M. Almazov, was recalled to Moscow. As instructed by the Soviet Foreign Intelligence Service, the new Soviet resident spy in the Soviet diplomatic mission in Kabul did not hasten to establish contacts with Ram.

Pavel Fitin, head of Soviet intelligence, commented that contacts with the British were weakening; they were latter suspended soon after the Second Front was opened.⁴⁴ In the victorious year 1945, a reset in Allied relations was inevitable.

The Vietnamese Lesson for a New Era

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ALEXEY VASILYEV has written a new book. Those who know him as a scholar and expert on Arab affairs, Doctor of Science (History), member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), and honorary president of the RAS Institute of Africa that he has directed for many years may be surprised to learn that this book is devoted to Vietnam. The author titled it *The Vietnam War: Why the Americans Lost** [in Russian].

However, there is a simple explanation. In his younger years, Alexey Vasilyev started his journalism career in Vietnam as a staff correspondent of the newspaper Pravda. It is worth noting that he was sent there at the height of the war that the US had unleashed against Vietnam's long-suffering people in the 1960s.

Now, decades later, Alexey Vasilyev returns to his recollections, reports, comments, and other materials that were published at the time, as well as notes and interviews with many participants of those events. As he comments in the preface, the book "is my tribute to our people who directly or indirectly participated in the war on the Vietnamese side. Without them, Vietnam's victory would have been impossible, and the war would have dragged on for who knows how long."

In this context, he adds: In the cursed 1990s, many Russian fans of the US tried either to forget or to justify the US policy in Vietnam. The same is even happening today.

The book is fairly voluminous and diverse. For example, here are the titles of some of its chapters: "From Hanoi to the Ho Chi Minh Trail," "Our People in Vietnam," "Haiphong," "The Front Is Everywhere" and "Vietnamese Muses and the War." Featured topics include: "Johnson's personal war," "Henry Kissinger vs. Le Duc Tho," "Nixon under siege," "Hoping for Vietnamization," "Compromise, bombing, compromise," "A postwar war" and "Victory!"

A major part of the book consists of rather extensive records of once top secret [Soviet] missile crews, pilots, radio engineers, sailors, engineers, and doctors preserved "thanks to the enthusiasm of a group of Russian veterans of that war" that the author was able to get hold of.

I will try to single out some points in the rich diversity of themes and storylines of Alexey Vasilyev's book that will help the reader of this review navigate and better understand the message of this years-long work and appreciate its value.

The author starts from square one to introduce the reader to the history of events around Vietnam, if only because historical knowledge, especially about distant countries, is not the strongest suit of the current generation.

The most prominent and influential newspapers of the 20th century were Pravda (USSR), The New York Times and The Washington Post (US), Le Monde (France), The Times (UK), and Renmin Ribao (China). Nothing could match them in terms of the size of their audience and number of citations. For example, the Americans labeled Pravda commentators the "Kremlin's mouthpieces." So Alexey Vasilyev became not only a war correspondent, who knew firsthand what a bombing raid was like, but at his young age reached the pinnacle of high-profile international journalism, with the whole world paying attention to the words coming from the pages of his newspaper.

The book provides a wealth of recollections, including by those who helped our Vietnamese comrades counter the American aggression. This was done so covertly that, for example, Hollywood, which has made many films about that war – Apocalypse Now, Platoon, The Deer Hunter, Full Metal Jacket, The Green Berets, Good Morning Vietnam, and even Hair, a rock musical – had no clue! The big-name US directors and screenwriters who made these films did not touch on the subject of Soviet specialists' participation in that war. They simply had no idea. To them, the Viet Cong was the biggest force the Yankees were fighting. That is how secretive we were!

It is a good thing that several decades later, Alexey Vasilyev has revisited this subject. The author offers a key to understanding a strategy that could help our country reemerge as the world's leading power, even if in a world that is different – unique, to use Vasilyev's words – from that of the 20th century.

An inquisitive reader will find much more in this book than just the story of the US's past aggression against Vietnam. And that is what makes the book so good!

Timeless Russian Diplomats

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THE ASSOCIATION OF RUSSIAN DIPLOMATS (ARD) is wrapping up work on the first book in a multivolume work about Soviet and Russian plenipotentiaries and ambassadors.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs biographic information was first released in the form of the three-volume *Diplomatichesky slovar 1984-1986* [Diplomatic Dictionary (1984-1986)] – a very respectable and perhaps even outstanding publication. But it covered only a few of our most famous ambassadors. The limited information it provided brings to mind the catchphrase “Loose lips sink ships,” and the title page of each volume might as well have been stamped “For official use.”

The collection *Kto est kto vo vneshney politike Rossii* [Who's Who in Russian Foreign Policy], published in 1992, presented ministry employees more broadly (including even their children). But it said nothing about the professionalism of those who dedicated their lives to implementing the country's foreign policy. The names are there, but only their colleagues know what these people actually did. This second attempt comes across as a dry, monotonous, uninteresting, and tiresome collection of information from personal files or CVs.

But who are we talking about? These are our compatriots who served their homeland by participating in World War I, repelling the foreign intervention of 14 “civilizations” ... and preventing a worldwide apocalypse. This is about more than just the intertwining of periods and the continuity of several successive generations of diplomats; this is about the most active independent foreign policy of a country that faces constant and active outside interference.

Unfortunately, the book was published in a very limited edition. Nevertheless, the ARD tried to ensure that copies were sent not only to the cities and towns where our ambassadors were born (pleasing both regional libraries and the public, including in Crimea) but also abroad. Igor Demyanenko, head of the Consulate General of Russia in Kharkov, pulled off a diplomatic feat by putting together an exhibition with biographies of ambassadors from Ukraine who fought on the front lines.

The material in the book was used by the Kharkov City Council's Department of International Relations to create a 2020 calendar “Diplomatic Kharkov.” Thanks to Andrey Grozov, Russia's permanent representative at statutory and other bodies of the CIS in Minsk, the book found readers in Belarus, too. In addition, some Russian missions abroad donated the publication to universities in their host countries with Russian language departments. We also emphasize that, in a first for the Russian Foreign Ministry, *From Military to Diplomatic Front Lines* was included in the list of the 75 best publications of 2020.

The level of public interest in the book raised the issue of the importance of “declassification” – i.e., opening other little-known pages in the history of Russian diplomacy over the past 100 years, starting with the first Soviet plenipotentiaries entrusted with defending the interests of the new young state that had just defeated aggressors of all stripes.

One strength of Soviet and Russian diplomacy is its multiethnic character. Therefore, the book will deal a powerful blow to some local groups and government-affiliated circles in former Soviet republics that are trying to force their people to venerate forces responsible for destroying centuries-old ties with Russia.

Unfortunately, it is not easy to find in Russia and beyond the works and memoirs of diplomats of the caliber of Yevgeny Primakov, Anatoly Dobrynin, Lev Mendelevich, Yuly Vorontsov, Yury Ushakov, Vitaly Churkin, Anvar Azimov, Sadyk Azimov, Pogos Akopov, Semyon Aralov, Yevgeny Afanasyev, Yan Burlyay, Alexey Vdovin, Sergey Vinogradov, Boris Govorin, Oleg Grinevsky, Andrey Gromyko, Yevgeny Gusarov, Alexander Dzasokhov, Leonid Drachevsky, Yury Dubinin, Alexander Kadakin, Mikhail Kapitsa, Grigory Karasin, Andrei Karlov, Yury Kashlev, Yuly Kvitsinsky, Sergey Kislyak, Vladimir Lukin, Valentina Matvienko, Farit Mukhametshin, Boris Pyadyshev, Alexander Saltanov, Alexander Troyanovsky, Oleg Troyanovsky, Vyacheslav Trubnikov, and many others. It is our duty to direct attention to the work of our leading diplomats and Soviet and Russian diplomats in general. We must also return the concepts of “anticolonial struggle,” “fraternal mutual assistance,” “opposition to imperialism,” etc. to the international lexicon. This terminology objectively strengthens Russia’s prestige in international relations.

The history of Soviet and Russian diplomacy has every chance of becoming another topic that provides ideological support for our compatriots and friends abroad.

The Hard Road to Tomorrow

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THE RECENTLY published monograph *Afghanistan at the Turn of the Century: A New Crossroads of Fate** [in Russian] by prominent Russian diplomat, eastern studies expert, and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Mikhail Konarovsky is of considerable interest and deserves special attention, especially given the relevance of the topic.

The sharp deterioration of relations between Russia and the West in recent years has affected the fundamental foundations of the modern world order and pushed the Afghan issue to the periphery of the attention of our media outlets and policy analysts. The recent appearance of new areas of conflict and instability along or near Russia’s borders that pose a real national security threat have also contributed to this development.

Konarovsky’s book – part scholarship, part memoir – offers a multifaceted picture of dramatic turning points in Afghanistan’s political development in the last decades of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century that the author witnessed firsthand during his many years of work in that country. Within this context, he also presents largely personal characteristics of key Afghan figures of that period: King Mohammed Zahir Shah, first President Mohammed Daoud Khan, and the leaders of the “pro-communist” People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan that seized power in 1978: Nur Muhammad Taraki, Hafisullah Amin, Babrak Karmal, and others (pp. 30-31, 34-36, 117, 328).

Konarovsky’s new book in a certain sense may be considered a continuation of his two previous books, *Strana gor i legend* [Country of Mountains and Legends] (1979) and *Doroga v sem tysyach dney* [7,000-

Day Road] (2014). The broad political and civilizational background of Afghanistan's history and its rich cultural heritage are well complemented by little-known or practically unknown episodes in Soviet-Afghan political relations and humanitarian and human contacts.

Of particular interest is the author's analysis of the complex and contradictory political processes during a new stage in Afghanistan's history in the early 2000s after the Taliban regime fell as a result of military operations of the Afghan Northern Alliance with direct support from international coalition forces. It paints a broad picture of attempts at consolidation by various political forces in the country – from the powerful pro-Western lobby of the so-called American Afghans in the emerging new ruling bloc of Kabul, political factions of the conservative clergy, and former mujahideen, to the remnants of promonarchist circles, leaders of national minorities, and influential regional figures actively seeking their share of power. It is through the same lens that the author examines the complicated process of the formation of new state structures at an emergency Loya Jirga (Pashto for "Grand Assembly"), as well as the adoption of a new national Constitution at the Constitutional Loya Jirga in late 2003.

The book assesses the destructive policy deliberately pursued by both Washington and the EU (despite statements to the contrary) to counteract Russia's return to Afghanistan and establishment of constructive economic and military-technical ties between the two countries at this new stage of development, and to prevent Russian businesses from providing outside financial assistance to Afghanistan.

The rather lengthy epilogue contains what is perhaps the main idea permeating the entire work: Despite the gradual development of modern political institutions and the foundations of civil society in Afghanistan, tribalism remains de facto dominant in all spheres of life, with all ensuing consequences. The persisting disunity of the national elites, their inability to make real and not just declarative compromises, as well as the significant focus on competing outside forces suggest that lasting stability in Afghanistan is unlikely to be achieved soon.

Among the book's indisputable merits are its carefully composed structure, its balanced assessments, the accuracy and subtlety of its observations, and its brilliant style. All this gives every reason to believe that this work by Mikhail Konarovskiy will take its rightful place among works devoted to the highly relevant Afghan issue and will receive well-deserved recognition from not only the professional community but also the general public.

