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Greetings to Current and Former Russian Foreign Ministry Staff on Diplomats' Day

Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation

DEAR FRIENDS,

Please accept my warm greetings on the occasion of your professional holiday, Diplomats' Day.

The Russian Foreign Ministry has a glorious record of faithful service to the Motherland and of protecting its interests in the international arena. Relying on the traditions of the past, Russia's diplomats befittingly perform their professional duties today.

We largely credit you for developing mutually beneficial ties with our partners on all continents. Our diplomacy helps uphold the lawful rights of Russian citizens and compatriots abroad and facilitates the settlement of regional conflicts and crises and, most importantly, plays a major role in creating favorable external conditions for the steady progress of our country.

The situation in the world is becoming more turbulent and tense. This certainly requires additional and persistent efforts to ensure strategic stability and counter arising threats and challenges. This especially includes our bid to receive comprehensive, legally binding national security guarantees from the US and its NATO allies. Naturally, consistent, systemic work to strengthen the supremacy of international law and the UN's central coordinating role, to create a fair and stable multipolar world order remains fully topical.

I am convinced that the staff of the Foreign Ministry will continue working efficiently, doing all it can to consolidate Russia's position in the world arena.

I sincerely wish you success in your work, and good health and all the best to respected veterans of the diplomatic service.

Message of Greetings on Diplomats' Day

Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

COLLEAGUES, FRIENDS,

Today, we are celebrating Diplomats' Day. First of all, please accept my heartfelt congratulations on the occasion of our common professional day, no matter where you work – at foreign missions, the Foreign Ministry's regional offices, or the central office.

Diplomats' Day was established by President Putin's executive order 20 years ago, on October 31, 2002. It helps preserve and enhance the Foreign Ministry's best traditions, spreads knowledge about our profession, and strengthens respect for diplomatic work.

It is deeply symbolic that we are marking another milestone – the 220th anniversary of the Foreign Ministry (September 8 (20), 1802) – this year as well. Notably, the history of the foreign policy service goes well back in time, largely in lockstep with the stages of the development of Russian statehood. Specifically, the date of our holiday goes back to the earliest documented mention of the Ambassadorial Prikaz – Russia's first department in charge of foreign relations – in February 1549.

We are rightfully proud of the fact that the glorious annals of Russian diplomacy boast numerous brilliant victories and outstanding names. In our daily work, we try to borrow the best from the treasure trove of the diplomatic art of our great predecessors, such as Alexander Gorchakov, Andrey Gromyko, Yevgeny Primakov, and many others.

In all times, true patriots have worked for our foreign policy who have fought for the common cause, including, if necessary, with weapons in their hands. The feat of our comrades, employees of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, who fought on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War, serves as an enduring moral compass for us all.

Colleagues,

Today, relying on our experience and rich traditions, the diplomatic service remains at the forefront of efforts to promote and protect the interests of our Motherland in the international arena. It contributes to ensuring the country's security, creating a favorable external environment for dynamic domestic development, improving the level and quality of life. We invariably strive to promote a constructive agenda that is designed to unite our efforts with our like-minded partners for the sake of finding a fair solution to common international problems based on achieving a fair balance of interests.

This policy is based on generally recognized norms of international law, primarily the UN Charter's goals and principles, and enjoys broad support among the international community. This helps us expand mutually beneficial and equal cooperation in a variety of formats with most of the countries in Eurasia, Africa, and Latin America. Not just in words, but in actions, we are contributing to the

formation of a global “belt of neighborliness,” which is necessary if we want to maintain overall stability and strengthen Russia’s international positions.

The complexity of the modern world and mixed nature of ongoing developments puts high demands on diplomats. So, always, and particularly today, it is important to keep up with the times, to constantly improve ourselves, and to skillfully combine traditional diplomatic art with new approaches and methods. This is the key to the effective fulfillment of the ambitious goals that the president has set before us.

Much of our success and productivity depends on a strong and dependable home front. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank your families and friends who share with you all the difficulties and sometimes the everyday inconveniences of our trade, including extended business trips to countries with challenging military-political situations and harsh climates.

Of course, on this day we commemorate our veterans who generously shared their expertise and opened the door to a great diplomatic future for us. Dear veterans, I bow to you for your tireless work to ensure the continuity of time and generations of diplomats working in the building on Smolenskaya Square.

Colleagues, friends,

On this remarkable day, I would like to wish you all good health, prosperity, and new successes for the benefit of Russia.

Happy holiday!

Crisis of Trust: The Search for New Approaches to Nuclear Arms Control

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THE OUTBREAK in 2020 of the coronavirus pandemic coincided with a sharp deterioration in relations between Russia and the leading NATO countries, headed by the US. For the first time in the 30 years since the end of the Cold War, officials and experts have started expressing fears about the possibility of an armed conflict between the parties.

In this situation, arms control measures are especially important, starting with measures to ensure confidence and stability. The assertion that the arms control process is the most important factor in strengthening international security and that the very survival and well-being of humanity depend on its success has become widespread among politicians and experts. Nevertheless, leading experts in the field are increasingly convinced that the entire system of international legal regimes and agreements is collapsing, with no available and implementable formulas for normalizing the situation.

A crisis of mutual trust has been unfolding, and overcoming it is the top priority. Joe Biden's immediate desire to extend the New START treaty for five years with no additional conditions, announced even before he took office, shows his desire not to jeopardize relations with Russia in the area of strategic stability, despite all his other rhetoric. This treaty is the last of 10 key international treaties that served as pillars of the architecture of world nuclear stability that started taking shape in 1968 with the approval by the UN General Assembly of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons – probably the most universal treaty in the world.

Russia and the US now have 90% of the world's nuclear warheads, so it is up to them to set the tone and the rules. If both sides return to a constructive dialogue, removing the sanctions-focused rhetoric from their arsenal, the issue of limiting even hypersonic weapons would be on the agenda.

Today, there is a general understanding in the arms control community that the traditional arms control mechanism, which has been gradually disintegrating in recent years, may soon collapse altogether. This mechanism, aimed at maintaining strategic stability, is undoubtedly in crisis.

Russian diplomats need to look for common ground and mutually acceptable solutions, primarily on arms control, since the world's stability directly depends on it.

Brussels and Paris believe that Russia has not gone through a democratic transition, with lustrations and bans on professions, as East European countries did. This leads to radically different approaches to most international problems and the very essence of global processes. This is a fundamental clash of ideologies, which, despite cooperation in certain areas, is developing against the backdrop of constant competition between Russia and the leading Western countries.

The emerging competition in the deployment of novel nuclear weapons and the continuing collapse of the traditional arms control mechanism require innovative approaches to deter and control these processes in the future. New types of nuclear weapons and the looming collapse of arms control are prompting rather innovative approaches to future arms control efforts. It is also fundamentally important that

future agreements do not move toward concepts of “multilateral deterrence” but rely on agreed-upon principles and legal responsibility.

The only obstacle to completely replacing the New START treaty or creating a “New START Plus” treaty is the clear reluctance of the other major nuclear powers (three of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council) to enter into any negotiations or discussions on limiting their nuclear weapons. But it is hard to dispute the claim that China’s emergence as a major nuclear power will be the biggest challenge to the future of arms control. China is actively upgrading its nuclear triad, possibly moving toward a “launch on warning” strategy, and it could double its nuclear capability within 10 years.

It is extremely unlikely that Moscow would agree any time soon to include its “substrategic” nuclear weapons, in addition to all its strategic weapons, in future agreements, even though the US has been demanding that ever since President Barack Obama signed the New START treaty.

It is logical to assume that, despite the lack of reaction from the US, Russia has the right to persistently promote the idea of a declaration by at least the five official nuclear powers reaffirming the historic joint statement of the US and the USSR at the Reagan-Gorbachev Geneva summit in 1985 that “nuclear war cannot be won and should never be fought.”

Restrictions on strategic warheads for long-range naval cruise missiles or bans on nuclear-armed cruise missiles are unlikely. The Russian side has historically insisted on limiting long-range cruise missiles during negotiations, despite the American side’s resistance, but this problem is unlikely to be resolved at this time.

The new US ballistic missiles are expected to take about three minutes to reach Russian targets, and hypersonic cruise missiles follow unpredictable trajectories, significantly complicating their early detection and interception. Such a threat raises the possibility of a preemptive strike by Russia, with a corresponding inevitable revision of the nuclear arms use doctrine, which would, of course, sharply increase the threat of nuclear escalation during a conflict.

Nonstrategic nuclear forces are vital to Russia for countering US and Chinese conventional capabilities in line with the regional deterrence strategy. For the US, tactical nuclear weapons demonstrate the connection between American nuclear forces and the security of their Trans-Atlantic and Asian allies, as well as the US readiness to defend them under the notorious “extended deterrence” doctrine.

To allay Russia’s concerns about any future US plans to create space-based weapons, as well as to neutralize American accusations that Moscow has been developing anti-satellite weapons systems, the two states could theoretically agree

to ban the testing of such weapons, which are traditionally tracked by “national technical means.”

RUSSIA, the US, and NATO remain locked in the paradigm of traditional military, political, and diplomatic competition and confrontation. Nevertheless, this does not absolve us from looking for ways to establish a dialogue that does not harm national interests and from engaging positively with the US and leading Western powers on key international issues. The relevance of this approach was once again highlighted by the imperative of global cooperation in combating the coronavirus pandemic.

The nuclear arms control process will continue in a bilateral Russia-US format. Adding the three other official nuclear powers, despite calls to do so, remains unrealistic, although efforts to ensure the active involvement of China, France, and the UK in these processes need to continue.

The primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security rests with the US and Russia. It is fundamentally important not to pause the process of reducing the military threat and to keep proposing innovative solutions to urgent problems of sustaining the arms control process.

Scylla and Charybdis: The Self-Determination of Peoples Versus the Territorial Integrity of States

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LIKE Odysseus, who fell into the clutches of Scylla after escaping the whirlpool Charybdis, countries that have escaped the threat of losing territory as a result of foreign invasion are facing the threat of disintegration from within. The ancient epic by the great Homer about the adventures of the hero Odysseus, who finds himself between a rock and a hard place, involuntarily comes to mind when considering the perennial international legal dilemma about the relationship between the principle of the territorial integrity of states and the right of peoples and nations to self-determination.

Experience shows that the principle of self-determination is subject to double standards and often politically exploited by certain groups to achieve their economic, social, ethnocratic, religious, and other narrow, sometimes purely selfish goals that contradict the original purpose of this vital international legal and (in most cases) constitutional provision. And it is for these untoward purposes that

the artificial “collision” of this principle with the principle of territorial integrity is often used.

For centuries, the world political map was shaped by the partitioning and repartitioning of the territories of states, and these processes took place during short armed conflicts and protracted wars that fit perfectly into the understanding of international law, which did not prohibit them. Attempts by the emerging international community to delegitimize aggressive wars failed.

It is noteworthy that the section of the Final Act devoted to the right of peoples to decide their own destiny – i.e., their self-determination – begins by referring to the obligation of participating states to always act in accordance with the norms of international law, including those relating to the territorial integrity of states.

The territorial integrity (inviolability) of a state is directly related to its sovereignty. Meanwhile, neither the former nor the latter should, in our opinion, be made absolute. The possibility of limited sovereignty has for many years been the subject of active scientific debate in Russian literature.⁶ There is also ambiguity regarding the territorial integrity of the state. On the one hand, this principle is a fundamental norm of international law, without which the existence of sovereign states is unthinkable. This seems to invite the conclusion that the violation of the principle of territorial integrity (regardless of whether such a violation is forced or voluntary) a priori deprives the state of its sovereignty.

Humanity, having “ridden into the 21st century in the chariot of globalization” (Igor Lukashuk), has faced globalization’s ominous manifestations, such as US attempts to build a unipolar Pax Americana according to its own blueprint based on national egoism; gross interference in the affairs of other states for various, including obviously far-fetched reasons; relentless pressure from NATO and the European Union on Russia, Iran, China, and other countries that are pursuing independent foreign policies; attempts to revise many international institutions and norms, including those existing under the auspices of the UN; and a general growing negative attitude toward the world order that emerged after World War II.

Under such conditions, it seems especially important to save wellproven institutions and constructs from destruction and to protect international law from the erosion of its basic values.

According to Polish authors Władysław Czapliński and Anna Wyrozumska, “in practice, the principle of self-determination was subordinate to the principle of territorial integrity.” The exact opposite viewpoint was also expressed, according to which “as the previous world system collapses and a new one is forming, the principle of respect for the territorial integrity of states loses its original value.” Prominent English researcher Alfred Cobban proceeded from the fact that, after

many former colonies had gained independence and created their own statehood, the principle of self-determination is losing its relevance.

When approaching the issue of self-determination, it is important to avoid any kind of absolutization and to consider this principle only in close connection and interaction with other basic principles of international law – primarily the principle of territorial integrity, whose development was driven by the processes of the formation of national states, their entry into the international arena, and the inevitable rivalry for territory as the material basis for their existence and development.

Matthias Hartwig, senior research fellow at the Max Planck Institute in Heidelberg, conducted a thorough study of the Advisory Opinion on Kosovo issued by the International Court of Justice. Carefully, step by step, he analyzed the course of events preceding the Court's consideration of the case, the genesis and development of the conflict, the process of preparing and adopting the Opinion in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244, as well as its impact on the modern context of international law in terms of the correlation of the principles of self-determination and territorial integrity. Hartwig forms a maximally objective assessment (rare for Western authors), and draws attention, in particular, to the often "unnoticed" circumstance that the NATO military operation against Serbia in 1999 was launched "without authorization of the use of force by the UN Security Council," whose resolutions (1160, 1199) were addressed to all parties to the conflict equally and condemned "all acts of violence by any party, as well as terrorism in pursuit of political goals by any group or individual."

Methodologically significant for properly understanding the problem of the correlation between the right of peoples to self-determination and the principle of the territorial integrity of the state is the approach proposed by Vladislav Tolstykh, who links (following British researcher James Crawford) the essence of self-determination with "one of the key issues of law" – the definition of the essence of the state, "the right to be a state." In that light, the Russian scholar's approach to the principle of territorial integrity seems very logical.

The author of one of the latest textbooks on international public law believes that the aforementioned principle "does not operate in the domestic order and does not bind domestic political forces striving for independence." At present, peoples who do not have statehood are able to acquire territory by exercising their right to self-determination. As Tolstykh notes, this presupposes the recognition of a people's interest in state existence, and that interest must receive international support. Any nation can achieve de facto independence; at the same time, its interest in statehood is not subject to protection by international legal means. "Independence may be achieved by peaceful means with the consent of the parent state, or forcibly as a result of armed struggle."

Does the UN Internet Governance Forum Have a Future?

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IN 2025, Russia will host the United Nations Internet Governance Forum (IGF). The IGF is an annual forum that, for all its strengths and weaknesses, is the most important event for discussing any problem that exists in cyberspace. IGF 2025 will be an outstanding event because it will be the 20th anniversary meeting of the IGF, and more importantly, it will shortly precede the 20-year review by the UN General Assembly of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

The construction of an international information security system and the solution of the inextricably related problem of the internationalization of Internet governance are key aspects of Russia's national security policy.

The reason for the emergence of this issue is that the US practically has a monopoly on the Internet, which is a global system. Most countries have demanded the internationalization of Internet governance.

It was stated at the WSIS that the Internet, which is the core of the information society, has ceased to be purely a research and educational tool and has become a generally accessible global tool. Therefore, Internet governance must be high on the information society's agenda. Organization of the use of the Internet at the international level should be multilateral, transparent, and democratic, with the full participation of governments, private companies, civil society, and international organizations. There must be guarantees of the fair distribution of resources, general accessibility of the Internet, and its stable and secure multilingual functioning.

The WSIS has recognized that all governments have equal rights and duties in governing the Internet and in seeking to ensure its secure and stable functioning.

On the basis of decisions made at the WSIS Tunis phase, a multilateral body, the Internet Governance Forum, was established in 2006 as a framework for debating a wide range of issues.

Paragraphs 73-78 set guidelines for the IGF's activities. The forum was officially founded on July 18, 2006, the day it was established by then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Annan also set up a body to organize IGF activities, the

Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG). MAG's 40 members are appointed by the UN secretary-general for one-year terms from among government figures, businesspeople, and members of civil society and technological communities. A MAG member can serve for a maximum of three one-year terms. In addition, countries that have hosted and countries that will host IGF meetings enjoy an automatic right to have representatives in MAG.

The IGF held its first meeting in Athens from October 30 to November 2, 2006. No more than 1,000 people took part in the meeting, which, in addition to plenary sessions, included 36 specialized events. The next meeting, held in Rio de Janeiro in 2007, included 84 specialized events. Subsequent meetings have had approximately the same number of specialized events. The Rio meeting was attended by 1,363 delegates from 109 countries. The 10th meeting in João Pessoa, Brazil, in 2015, brought together 2,137 people from 112 countries. Remarkably, nearly half were Brazilian, while only 40 people or 3% of the total number of delegates represented Eastern Europe.

The IGF is effectively a discussion platform and does not make proposals or recommendations.

Russia has invariably stood, and continues to stand, for the unconditional implementation of the Tunis Agenda, including proposals for internationalizing Internet governance, and expanding the role of states and ensuring their equal rights in this process.

It may be appropriate to put the extension of the IGF's mandate on the agenda of the next, 20-year review, to be made in 2025.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has made significant proposals for reforming the IGF and vesting it with new functions, which he formulated in a report titled Roadmap for Digital Cooperation.

These reforms may spur discussion about the internationalization of Internet governance and lead to this issue being taken up by UN bodies other than the IGF, primarily ITU, one of whose key tasks is to seek the stable operation of the Internet. Holding IGF 2025 in Russia shortly before the 20-year review will definitely help put the secretary-general's proposals into practice.

Russia-US Relations Under Joe Biden: Hopes and Reality

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A YEAR ago, the 46th US president stirred up diametrically opposed emotions and expectations in the unprecedentedly polarized and divided US. Supporters and fellow Democrats viewed the new president as an incredibly experienced leader who would consolidate the nation and return it to leading positions in the community of nations aligned with the values of the “collective West.” Biden’s critics and opponents who sympathized with Donald Trump spoke of the new president as an anachronism who could not make a decision on his own and was controlled by party functionaries. Opinion in the rest of the world was similarly divided. Today, however, we can say that, as usual, the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

On the one hand, the 46th president and his administration immediately tried to stabilize the situation in the US, which was reeling from the pandemic, racial conflicts, and outbursts of violence.

On the other hand, his efforts to “unite the nation” did not save it from further polarization.

Biden’s actions with respect to Russia are just as ambivalent and contradictory. It should be said in all fairness that the pace of the overall degradation of bilateral relations has somewhat slowed compared to during Barack Obama’s second term and Trump’s presidency. The New START treaty was extended, Russia and the US submitted a joint resolution on cybersecurity to the UN, and personal contacts between the two leaders and talks on strategic stability have intensified. That, plus the absence of a large-scale exchange of sanctions, should have stirred optimism, yet real reasons for complete satisfaction are few and far between.

Today, anti-Russian rhetoric is behind many successful careers, bestsellers, and the budgets of many projects. In fact, demonizing Moscow has become an industry that unites politicians, businesspeople, journalists, and part of the creative class.

Interparliamentary dialogue with Moscow that had been fairly active in the past has been reduced to an absolute minimum. Attempts by Russian lawmakers to visit Washington to explain their position to their counterparts are, in most cases, flatly rejected or thwarted.

MEMBERS of officially registered and unofficial lobbyist groups – all sorts of committees, councils, associations, etc. – actively and persistently work with legislators and government officials. Most of them are patently Russophobic, some for ideological reasons, in the context of dialogue between Russia and the US. In Washington, the positions of avowed Atlanticists, liberal interventionists, and neoconservatives who insist on containing Moscow, etc. are still strong.⁸ In other

cases, these groups are inspired by the ethnic interests of Ukrainian, Baltic, and other diasporas that are closely connected with the governments of their countries of origin. In recent years, alliances of our compatriots in Washington have been mercilessly suppressed and discredited to prevent them from conveying their opinion to the public.

Think tanks, which traditionally play an important role in the American system, have become a lobbying tool. Unlike research centers in Russia, most think tanks in the US are dependent on the positions of their donors (including, sometimes, even foreign states), they cooperate with specific political forces, and their ideological hues are clear and reflected in the analyses and recommendations they send to Congress.

THE FACT that in 2021, the Washington establishment started adopting a more realistic perception of Moscow and its potential is cause for cautious optimism. Strange as it may seem, the idea of Russia as a “dying country” facing imminent demise prevailed in the US for a long time. The public was invited to “think about Russia after Putin.” Certain strategists optimistically predicted a future split between Russia and China that would push Russia to the “side of good.” Recent events in the world and in Russia’s foreign and domestic policies have sobered up some people.

It should be said in all fairness that there are very professional and smart state figures in the American leadership: William Burns, John Kerry, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks, and of course US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, who led the American delegation at the January talks with Russia. The approaches of these politicians and diplomats are frequently far removed from our approaches, but they at least seek an honest and productive dialogue. On the other hand, Deputy Secretary of State for political issues Victoria Nuland will continue to play a significant role in dialogue with Moscow, since she is responsible for European security issues. It should be said that her unauthorized and voluntarist acts and statements during the 2014 Ukraine crisis pushed, together with other factors, the situation to the point of no return.

THE BOTTOM LINE is that the Russian-American dialogue is significantly influenced by a group of officials and diplomats who are loyal supporters of NATO-centric ideology and who have already contributed to the degradation of bilateral relations.

Talks with the US are absolutely indispensable: Dialogue is always better than an arms race, even if it looks unavoidable. Our expectations should be formulated clearly and soberly, and they should not be set too high. The bilateral meeting in Geneva and the meetings of the Russia-NATO Council and the OSCE Permanent Council have clearly demonstrated that, as expected, American diplomats intended

to draw out the process as long as possible and deprive the dialogue of any meaning by citing the “unshakeable” principle of Euro-Atlantic solidarity and hinting that the discussions themselves were a concession to the Russian side.

It should be said that experts have finally acquired a more objective idea of Russia as a big world power to be treated seriously. Conclusions, however, may vary.

But unfortunately, a realistic view of the state of affairs is not enough to lessen the confrontation: It will continue.

Prospects for Russia-Bangladesh Cooperation: On the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations

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ON JANUARY 25, 2022, the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of Bangladesh will mark a significant date: 50 years ago on this day, less than a year after Bangladesh declared its independence, diplomatic relations were established between our countries.

The Soviet Union’s recognition of Bangladesh paved the way for direct bilateral political dialogue. In March 1972, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder and first president of Bangladesh, visited Moscow, where he met with General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Leonid Brezhnev, Supreme Soviet Presidium Chairman Nikolay Podgorny, Council of Ministers Chairman Alexey Kosygin, and other officials.

It is encouraging that half a century later, our Bangladeshi friends preserve the memory of the heroic feat performed by Soviet seamen. Such respect for our shared history is praiseworthy.

Our foreign ministries have been holding regular meetings. The most recent talks between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abul Kalam Abdul Momen took place in July 2021 in Tashkent on the sidelines of the International Conference title “Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity. Challenges and Opportunities.” There are also bilateral consultation mechanisms between the two foreign ministries on international issues, including terrorism.

Our two countries are committed to the fundamental principles of international cooperation laid down in the UN Charter. The closeness and often coincidence of approaches to key issues on the global and regional agenda allow us to successfully coordinate our efforts at the UN and other multilateral platforms. For example,

Russia and Bangladesh oppose the glorification of Nazism, the deployment of weapons in outer space, and the use of information and communication technologies for criminal purposes.

Trade turnover between Russia and Bangladesh is steadily growing. In 2020, despite the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic, it reached a record \$2.4 billion. Figures for the first half of the year indicate this level will be surpassed in 2021. Wheat (400,000 [metric] tons in 2021), fertilizers (150,000 tons), metals, machinery, and equipment comprise the core of our exports. Apparel, knitwear, and seafood remain major imports from Bangladesh.

More than 6,000 Bangladeshi citizens hold degrees from Soviet and Russian universities. They are working in almost all economic and public sectors, government agencies, commercial organizations, and cultural associations. Our cooperation in education and training is very important, particularly in the context of training qualified staff for operating the Rooppur NPP. In 2021, 70 government-subsidized slots for free tuition in Russia were provided for students from Bangladesh.

Cultural exchanges contribute like nothing else to bringing our two nations closer together and promoting a better understanding of each other. Regrettably, in the last two years, the coronavirus pandemic has impeded work along those lines. Nevertheless, contacts continue.

The People's Republic of Bangladesh is an important partner of Russia in South Asia. Our relations are strong, and their potential is impressive. There is nothing hindering Russia and Bangladesh from developing their cooperation potential to the fullest.

Dialogue Between Civilizations and Prospects for Cooperation: On the 15th Anniversary of the Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group

Farit Mukhametshin, *Deputy Chairman, Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group, Doctor of Science (Politics)*

THE Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group (RIW SVG) was created 15 years ago, after Russia, on President Vladimir Putin's initiative, joined the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as an observer in 2005. The OIC (formerly the Organization of the Islamic Conference) is an international organization of Muslim countries with a total population of more than 1.5 billion. It was founded on September 25, 1969, and consists of 57 states, 49 of which are Muslim-majority countries. The RIW's first cochairs were Yevgeny Primakov and

Mintimer Shaymiyev, who laid the foundation for its activities and traditions. The RIW is currently chaired by Tatarstan President Rustam Minnikhanov.

The conceptual approaches laid out in the messages by the Russian and Saudi heads of state provided important guidelines for reports and discussions at the meeting. It is noteworthy that the similarity of our countries' positions on key issues of our time, as set out in these messages, came as a surprise to some attendees, since even official circles and the expert community are still wary of the new level of relations between Russia and countries of the Islamic world.

Vladimir Putin's address emphasized the importance of the fact that our countries have similar positions on many topical issues on the regional and global agenda. It stressed that Russia attaches great importance to fostering friendly relations with Muslim countries based on bilateral relations and in the framework of dialogue with the OIC.

The Saudi king underscored the importance of developing ties between Russia and Muslim countries, and highlighted the "qualitative leap" in the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Russia in recent years, which he described as "robust" and "historic."

The central theme of remarks by Saudi representatives was that cooperation between our countries – be it the implementation of bilateral agreements in various areas, visits, meetings, participation in joint initiatives, or efforts to resolve conflicts and overcome differences "to promote tolerance and better understanding in society" – helps consolidate international relations. They spoke about significant positive changes in Saudi Arabia, including its greater openness to the world.

A total of 46 participants spoke at the forum, including the group's Russian and foreign members, honorary guests, representatives of the clergy, scholars, and experts.

In-depth discussions were held on all issues on the agenda, including Russia's means of cooperation with countries of the Islamic world in resolving regional conflicts and crises and countering the threat of international terrorism and extremism, and issues of cooperation in trade, economic, scientific, technical, humanitarian, and other areas.

The key message of all speeches was a call for representatives and adherents of different faiths to promote dialogue, since wide-ranging cooperation and mutual understanding are crucial to peace and harmony. Russia's role in promoting relations with the Islamic world was highly commended.

Foreign participants in the meeting made substantive contributions, including Deputy Foreign Minister Waleed bin Abdul Karim (Saudi Arabia); Dr. Ali Al-Qarni, professor at the Prince Saud Al Faisal Institute of Diplomatic Studies; Dr.

Abdullah Al-Hamid, secretary general of the National Committee for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (Saudi Arabia); Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, chairman of the High Council for Islamic Affairs (Bahrain); Shoazim Minovarov, director of the Center for Islamic Culture, the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan (Uzbekistan); Syed Najibul Bashar Maizbhandari, chairman of the Bangladesh Tarikat Federation (Bangladesh); Hamid Shahriari, secretary general of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought (Iran); Ezzat Saad Al Sayed, director of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs (Egypt); and Ahmed Abbadi, secretary general of the High Council of Ulemas (Morocco), among others.

Another important topic was practical experience in fostering dialogue between Islam and Christianity in Russia. Speakers stressed Russia's openness to serious dialogue on pressing problems facing Muslims and Orthodox Christians, and Russia's constructive role in upholding the rights of Christians, as well as other ethnic and religious minorities in Muslim countries.

A separate session was devoted to problems and prospects of trade and economic cooperation between Russia and OIC countries. Unfortunately, the tremendous potential that exists in this area is not being tapped sufficiently because of bureaucratic barriers and red tape, as well as the lack of essential legislative and investment mechanisms.

The forum attendees stressed the OIC's special role in cooperating with Russia on a wide range of international issues, preventing conflicts in Muslim countries, and combating religious and ethnic intolerance.

It is noteworthy that some attendees proposed that Russia, in conjunction with several Islamic countries, could assume leadership in developing an alternative civilizational concept. The current situation in the world community necessitates the creation of a global order based on traditional spiritual values and collective responsibility amid the ongoing crisis of the dominant secular liberal globalization.

The Evolution of Russia's Foreign Policy Doctrine

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ACCORDING to many of our international relations experts, a presidential decree to approve a new edition of the Foreign Policy Concept of Russia will be one of the most significant developments of 2022. It will be the sixth doctrinal document in our country's recent history: Previous versions of the key diplomatic "manifesto" were issued in 1993, 2000, 2008, 2013, and 2016. The media treat them as routine events when in fact they offer us a unique opportunity to trace all transformations in the foreign policy thinking of the country's leaders and to analyze the events and trends of the last 30 years.

THE ADOPTION and publication of the Foreign Policy Concept (FPC), the most significant diplomatic document, is a product of the collective efforts of the entire state apparatus that is subordinate to the head of state. The Foreign Ministry plays a central and coordinating role in that process. It is more than just an attempt to present the key approaches of the country's leadership to the main global and regional problems in a specific historical period in order to construct an image of the desired future; it is a factual reflection of the changes taking place in international relations in general and in Russia's domestic policy in particular that determine its foreign policy activity.

Diplomats of the early 1990s faced the daunting political and psychological challenge of integrating Russia into the dramatically changed international milieu with minimal losses. The Soviet Union had been the main force opposing "world capitalism" on the global scale. New Russia had to get used to the ordinary role of a democratic country on a par with others.

Citizens of new Russia had no reason to think that about their country. In fact, in the new international community that Russia was striving to join, the place of leader and "messiah" was already held by the US. It, very much like the Soviet Union, believed itself to be a unique country – "the world's first state of triumphant freedom" and the "leader of world democracy." The US claimed to be carrying out a "historic mission" to support democracy all over the world.

After the Soviet Union's disintegration, the US bolstered its claims to global leadership. Given the balance of forces between Moscow and Washington in the 1990s, the issue of their rivalry could not be discussed.

President Yeltsin came to power under the slogan of "Russia's self-determination and separation from the USSR." So in the early 1990s in the Balkans, Russia had to demonstrate that Moscow supported the "self-determination of nations" principle in all international contexts. In fact, Russia's leaders supported the same principle inside their country – a dangerous and risky course.

In this respect, Russia's foreign policy was a reflection and continuation of its domestic policy.

Two years of economic disasters (1992-1993), an economic crisis, wage arrears on a massive scale, inflation, rising prices, and strikes were associated with radical liberal reforms. The left-leaning opposition accused the president of disregarding national interests and pursuing a policy in the interests of the West. The events of October 1993, when Yeltsin suppressed the opposition of deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, fueled negative attitudes toward the government.

Unwilling to alter the foreign policy course, the leaders tried to adjust official parlance. In early 1994, Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev, in his first remarks after the Duma elections, started talking about Russia's "special interests" in the former Soviet republics. No steps to increase activity in the CIS followed, yet his words symbolized a new trend: Under the pressure of public sentiment, the leaders finally realized that the ideological and theoretical components of Russia's foreign policy needed to be modified.

The Russian authorities tried to combine the logic of "democratic solidarity" and elements of liberal nationalism, with the unquestioned supremacy of the former. In practice, the course toward political coordination with the US and the EU countries continued, albeit with certain reservations and attempts by Russian diplomats to formulate demands.

In 1995, the election of the second convocation of the State Duma carried out under the new Constitution revealed that the president was losing popularity while anti-Western forces in Russia were gaining it.

The West took those trends into account in its own way and, in 1995, began openly discussing NATO's eastward expansion. Moscow assessed that as an attempt to pressure Russia and even as a latent threat.

In this situation, the authorities made a consciously symbolic replacement. The "too pro-Western" Kozyrev was replaced in early 1996 with Yevgeny Primakov, who had a reputation as a strong politician and moderate statist. The new Russian foreign minister spoke a lot about Russia's national interests, making them a constant refrain in his speeches and in his subordinates' remarks.

Primakov continued to talk about multipolarity as a world without a clear leader, yet the concepts of Russia maintaining equal "distance from" or "closeness to" the East and the West were not supported let alone officially discussed.

A foreign policy formula based on pragmatism and principles was finally found. It was principled in that it never doubted partnership with the West and pragmatic in that it relied on the logic of "selectivity" (resistance or partnership), which added

much needed flexibility to Russia's policy. Russia supported the US and the EU in some cases and declined to support them in others.

THE SITUATION in Russia and all over the world was changing. Having survived the default of August 1998, the ministerial chaos of 1998-1999 when six prime ministers followed one another (Viktor Chernomyrdin, Sergey Kiriyenko, Viktor Chernomyrdin, Yevgeny Primakov, Sergey Stepashin, Vladimir Putin), a series of terrorist acts that started the second Chechen war (the first Chechen war of 1994-1996 ended with the signing of the Khasavyurt Accord), and other no less shocking events, Russia entered the new millennium with a new president. On December 31, 1999, Yeltsin, in his New Year's address, presented Vladimir Putin as his successor.

In fact, many problems in their relations had been resolved. Russia and the West no longer perceived each other as a military threat; they no longer aimed strategic missiles at each other and no longer inflicted damage on each other "out of principle." Moscow accepted (but did not agree with) NATO expansion, growing competition with the West in the CIS countries, and the loss of interest in it as the main partner in arms control talks.

By the time Putin became president, the "negative" and "positive" elements in Russian-American bilateral relations had balanced out; this meant that relations were just as likely to grow stronger as they were to weaken.

Russian leaders' attempts to express disagreement with US and NATO policies were perceived in Washington as signs of Russia's rejection of the principles of freedom and democracy. Western journalists started to call Russia an "authoritarian" state. Certain Western and Russian journalists and experts started discussing the idea of regime change in the post-Soviet space – granted, not by force, as in Iraq, but by fanning antigovernment sentiments and inspiring antigovernment actions.

On February 10, 2007, President Putin was invited to the Munich Security Conference, where he openly raised objections to Western partners about their plans to expand certain elements of the missile defense system to Europe, saying it would negatively impact Russia's security. He warned that lack of compromise on this issue could devalue many positive results achieved in relations between Russia and NATO since 1991.

The West regarded Putin's objections as an "ultimatum" of sorts, but this was in fact an attempt by the president to draw NATO into serious discussions and negotiations with Russia. NATO, which obviously underestimated the fairly real danger of a break with Moscow, refused. In 2008, Putin's worst expectations were realized in the form of Georgia's attack on South Ossetia.

Military Strategy, Foreign Policy, and Diplomacy: The American View

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A YEAR has passed since the inauguration of US President Joseph Biden from the Democratic Party, but debates over the previous American president's military-political strategy, foreign policy, and diplomacy have lost none of their relevance.

Max Boot, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, noted how in his campaign speeches, former president Donald Trump firmly stated his intention to revamp America's Armed Forces, extend more benefits to veterans, and win back world respect for America. At the same time, Trump pushed for increasing military spending by the US and other NATO member states; promised to send more American troops and weapons to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria; and vowed to give responsible commanders significantly more liberty in carrying out military operations. By 2017, Donald Trump as president had already increased military spending by almost 20%.

Meanwhile, during a press conference at the White House, President Trump accused the Pentagon of waging war for the benefit of the American military-industrial complex and told his generals bluntly: "You are all losers. You no longer know how to win. I wouldn't go to war with you people."

It would be no exaggeration to say that President Donald Trump garnered little favor among the nation's generals. John Bolton, the president's former National Security Adviser, wrote in his memoirs that many of Trump's national security decisions were guided by politics more than strategy, foreign policy, or the objective functions of defense.

During the Trump presidency, right-wing American conservative circles posited and began actively pursuing (primarily against Russia) a political vision of a world based on rules that blatantly contradicted international law.

Some American experts believe that the changes initiated by the Trump administration were supposed to help establish a world order that would be favorable to American interests, American values, and those of other free and open societies. Yet, at the same time, American policymakers will need new ideas about how to enhance their country's role on the world stage, as well as new thinking in relation to such states as China and Russia, unless they intend to enable the further militarization of American foreign policy.

The prominent American diplomats William Burns and Linda ThomasGreenfield⁸ provide a detailed critical assessment of the shortcomings of US foreign policy and

diplomacy under the Trump administration in their article “The Transformation of Diplomacy: How to Save the State Department.”

An interesting complement to the aforementioned writings by American experts on a range of military issues, foreign policy, and diplomacy is a publication by Hillary Clinton, a former secretary of state who was the US Democratic Party candidate for president in 2016. Her article, “A National Security Reckoning: How Washington Should Think About Power,” raises a number of ideas about priorities to ensure US national security in light of the “ongoing crisis.” In particular, Clinton writes that the country is dangerously unprepared for a series of threats and multifaceted challenges from China and Russia.

Clinton has high regard for Biden’s efforts as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and praises his deep knowledge of US national security policy. She reacted positively to Biden’s decisions (which he made on the day of his inauguration) to have the US return to the Paris [Climate] Agreement and rejoin the World Health Organization. The list of priorities of the new administration also includes fighting the further spread of the coronavirus and restoring America’s position in the world.

Clinton herself is more concerned about convincing China, which poses a military threat, to join nuclear arms treaties. She also voices concern that, at a time when US forces are fighting costly wars in the Middle East, China has invested its resources in developing relatively inexpensive weapons, such as antiship ballistic missiles, which pose a serious threat to expensive US aircraft carriers.

Indeed, any future development on the part of China, and its growing influence on other countries, poses a threat to American hegemony. The world is entering a new historical era that is characterized by sharper conflict between the world’s two largest economic powers. Much is riding of the wisdom of our politicians.

“Information” as a Substance of Individual Being

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A KEY TREND in the modern development of humankind is the emergence of the information society “in which information and the level of its use and availability are radically changing the economic and sociocultural conditions of human life.”¹

General interest in using global information infrastructure is growing. The field of application of automatized control systems based on information and communication technologies (ICT), technical assets, and technological systems is steadily widening.

In short, ICT is radically changing our way of life. ICT helps us access vast amounts of information accumulated by humankind and creates conditions for its use for the benefit of humanity. But the growing number of available information sources and the “virtual” nature of social interaction also make it difficult to assess the reliability of information, the social consequences of using certain information technology products, and increase the dependence of an individual’s being on the sustainability and security of the technical assets that form the ICT environment.

“Information” became a category and object of research and scholarship in the 1940s, with the development of technical means of communication and control.

ICT, which relies on computers, communication networks, and networks and communication systems to automate the preparation, processing, transmission, and dissemination of information, led to the emergence of the concept of “digital data” in scholarly parlance. But the concept of “information” as a factor of the life and being of the individual has not yet been studied.

In this article, I propose a humanities-based concept of a philosophical category of “information” as a substance⁷ of individual being that expresses, on one hand, the transformation of objective reality (material being) into mental processes and emotional experience (abstract being), and on the other hand, the transformation of mental processes and emotional experience (abstract being) into the purposeful volitional activity of the individual to change the environment (material being).

Information and individual being. “Information” as a concept is not new. Back in the 1930s, it was used to denote “communication about the state of affairs or somebody’s activities; news about something.”

From this standpoint, “information” determines an individual’s conception of “something” in his or her inner “being” (“knowledge”) and provides, through volitional activity, the possibility of forming necessary ideas “about the state of affairs or somebody’s activities” in other individuals in the outer being (communication).

“Knowledge” is emotionally “tinged” perceptions associated with a change to the surrounding reality and disruption of the homeostasis of inner being reflected in the space of an individual’s ideas. These perceptions are associated, among other things, with the purposeful volitional activity of an individual and the volitional activity of other individuals (or natural factors).

Information in the form of “knowledge” as an inherent substance of inner being comprises emotionally “tinged” feelings stirred up by changes to objective reality and reflected in the space of ideas of an individual.

The outer being is formed by the totality of the processes of an individual’s interaction with the external environment, including the social environment, to ensure metabolism and restore the homeostasis of inner being.

Information in the form of “communication” as a substance of the process of the interaction of the individual and the environment (including social environment) is the ordered set of signs, gestures, and symbols that in the perception of members of the social unit creates “knowledge” that promotes joint activities to meet the needs of the individual.

“Digital data” as a new form of information existence appeared thanks to the widespread use of information and communication technologies that automate the processes of transmitting, processing, storing, and disseminating information in order to increase the efficiency and quality of social interaction. These technologies are the totality of the methods, means, and algorithms of processing information in computing and communication devices, systems, and networks.

ICT that automate the gathering, processing, transmission, use, and dissemination of “digital communications” and “digital knowledge” help the individual maintain the homeostasis of inner being, identify homeostasis disruptions, as well as get an idea of the methods and available means for taking volitional action to restore homeostasis.

The following main trends of ICT development stand out.

First, technologies for automating the control of technical devices and mechanisms in various areas of social interaction oriented, in particular, on the robotization of processes: the production of goods, transportation services, armed struggle, protection of physical objects, etc. The use of these ICT significantly enhances the transformative impact of the individual’s volitional activity on the environment. Second, technologies for modeling based on processing the “digital data” of intellectual activity (thinking, cognitive, and creative activity) of an individual in the realm of selecting partners for social interaction, including social units (groups) of civil society, religious associations, and potential family partners; preparing and transmitting mass information; supporting educational processes; supporting decision-making in the management of organizations and their structural units and organs of state power; enforcing laws; and ensuring national security and other goals.

The conflict potential of ICT-based social interaction is increasing even more due to its objective “unreliability” as a space for social interaction. The steadily growing number of constantly updated software used in the ICT environment, as

well as the multitude of unscrupulous partners, exponentially increase the number of “vulnerabilities” that might be exploited to violate “justice” in social interaction. This can be called “the curse of complexity.”

“Digital data” and the ICT environment comprise a new, artificial sphere of social interaction. “Digital data” can acquire the properties of a substance of individual being only when reflected in the form of “information” or “communication” in an individual’s inner or outer being, respectively.

Personal Data Protection as an Element of Ensuring International Information Security

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TECHNOLOGICAL development and increasing global information interdependence have led to rapid growth in the speed, scale, and intensity of the use of the digital space. As information and communication technologies continuously improve and spread almost instantaneously among both developed and developing countries, entire sectors of the world economy are transitioning from the conventional to the virtual environment.

However, while contributing to the progressive development of nations, the digital revolution is also refining new forms of the illegal use of the information space and contributing to an increase in the level and complexity of crime.

The swift adaptation of cybercriminals to humanity’s online transition, with the ever-increasing threat of the violation of the right to privacy and the need to protect personal data from illegal collection and processing, has become a new reality. At the same time, the old criminal methods in the field of information and communication technologies (ICTs) are evolving significantly, impacting the safeguarding of international information security (IIS) as a whole.

To date, the only legally binding international agreement on personal data protection is the 1981 Council of Europe Convention 108 for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data and its 2018 Amending Protocol (CETS No. 223). As of the end of 2020, Convention 108 has been ratified by 55 countries: 47 Council of Europe member states and eight states from other regions. In 2021, the international community marked the 40th anniversary of this Convention.

Russia signed the Convention in 2001 and ratified it in 2013, accompanying the accession procedure with several declarations.

By the end of 2021, 15 states had ratified Amending Protocol 223 to Convention 108. It has been signed by 28 countries. The Russian Federation signed Protocol 223 on October 10, 2018.

Another illustrative example of the use and in fact exploitation of the subject of personal data is the 2001 CoE Convention on Cybercrime (the Budapest Convention).

Personal data protection became a crucial issue during the drafting of the Second Additional Protocol to the Budapest Convention, dedicated to the enhancement of international cooperation and the disclosure of electronic evidence.

Given the numerous previously identified instances of the US government's explicit, habitual access of the personal data of EU citizens, on the one hand, and the conclusion of a framework agreement for the protection of confidential information between the EU and the US (The EUUS Privacy Shield), on the other, the parties to the Budapest Convention identified the need to legally consolidate provisions on personal data protection in the text of the Second Additional Protocol.

As a result, the wording of a separate article on personal data protection is a compromise negotiated with a wide range of countries with different legal systems, providing for rules and procedures for international cooperation in the field of criminal justice based on and verified by CoE standards.

The global IT industry plays a key role in meeting all personal data protection requirements. Transnational Internet giants often refuse to comply with the requirements of relevant state authorities regarding rules for the protection, collection, and processing of personal data, thus entering into direct confrontation with laws of the host country and dictating their conditions. Unauthorized access to citizens' personal data processed by information service providers extraterritorially with the refusal to localize data in the territories of concerned states also poses a clear threat.

In the course of updating the draft convention in 2021, Russian experts concluded that often the purpose of cybercrimes is not immediate enrichment but the theft of personal data and other sensitive information, such as credit card data theft. To ensure the protection of personal data, the Russian draft of the convention contains separate provisions on data protection (Article 56 of the draft), which introduces guarantees to ensure the protection of human rights and freedoms.

The new OEWG on ICTs and the Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes, established on Russia's initiative within the framework of the First and Third Committees of the UN

General Assembly, facilitate the launch within the UN system of an inclusive and transparent negotiation mechanism for establishing common international legal mechanisms for protecting personal data against unlawful and unauthorized access and dissemination with the participation of all UN member states in order to create a global IIS system.

Yuri Shafranik's Extensive Accomplishments: Former Russian Fuel and Energy Minister Turns 70

YURI SHAFRANIK has indeed accomplished a great deal in his life. He went from being a locksmith at Nizhnevartovskneftegaz [Nizhnevartovsk oil and gas production plant] to serving as Russian minister of fuel and energy, and the geography of his professional and political career includes the Americas, Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, China, and Australia.

But Shafranik personally believes that his main accomplishments are oil and gas projects that he either oversaw or took part in and that have helped increase Russia's economic might. Let's review some of the more significant of them.

Shafranik was the first to realize the importance of Vankor for Russia. Developing the field would mean "a very beautiful step into the future aimed at developing the Russian north," he said. In 2003, his Soyuzneftegaz group joined the project, optimized the group of shareholders, and prepared the basis for geological exploration. In those days, it was difficult to raise all the money needed for the project, but Rosneft helped take the "beautiful step into the future." Today, the Vankor project plays a key role in the development of eastern Siberia.

Initiating and participating in the Sakhalin-1 and Sakhalin-2 projects to develop vast offshore oil and gas fields in the Sea of Okhotsk near Sakhalin Island was a truly unbelievable accomplishment for Shafranik. The economic and sociopolitical situation in Russia in the early 1990s made the two projects challenging tasks. Russia's economy was reeling, and Sakhalin was one of its hardest-hit regions – it was even unclear whether the island would survive as an administrative unit.

Russia's first gas liquefaction plant, which is currently in operation, was set up as part of Sakhalin-2. Sakhalin-1 is an example of the application of cutting-edge technology. The Sakhalin-2 gas liquefaction plant became a symbol of three radical changes in Russia's oil and gas industry: the introduction of PSAs as the basis for international projects, a pivot to the East as part of the oil and gas sales diversification policy, and the launching of export-oriented gas liquefaction.

But what is most important, a formerly depressed area acquired a basis for fruitful economic development. Large industrial facilities, numerous new jobs, and substantial local government revenues literally brought Sakhalin back to life

Another project conceived by Shafranik is the Central Fuel Company (TsTK), which was established in 1997 with support from the Russian government and the Moscow mayor's office. It united the Moscow Oil Refinery and a network of filling stations in the city of Moscow and Moscow Province. Since its conception, TsTK has been consistently supplying Moscow and Moscow Province with fuel, bringing stability to the local fuel market.

Today, the Siberian Service Company (SSC), which emerged at that time, owns its own production assets and has a highly professional workforce. Through its seven affiliates, it is present in all key oil-producing regions of Russia. By 2019, SSC had invested more than \$1 billion in hightech production facilities in response to the growing needs of its clients.

Shafranik's public activity both at home and abroad is incredibly rich and diverse. A notable example of his work internationally is the RussianUS Commission on Economic and Technological Cooperation (the GoreChernomyrdin Commission), in which he co-headed the energy contingent.

Probably the only interaction format in which Russia and the US can still hear each other and jointly hammer out recommendations for their governments is the Dartmouth Conference, an unofficial nonpolitical dialogue forum for discussing key bilateral issues that brings together public and religious figures, scholars, and experts. Shafranik is its Russian co-chair.

Shafranik believes that the harder it is for politicians to reach agreement in our dramatic times, the more important it is to conduct people's diplomacy, involving broad strata of Russians and Americans in an effort to seek nonconfrontational solutions.

Domestically, Shafranik's main achievement as a public figure is arguably his role in creating the Union of Oil and Gas Producers of Russia. The union's current priority tasks include designing a mechanism for preferential terms, including tax concessions, for the development of new, hard-to-reach oil and gas fields in eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East.

Shafranik also participates in numerous charities. The one he is most closely involved in is Our Choice is Our Little Motherland, a support foundation for youth initiatives and healthy lifestyles.

Shafranik is also a record setter, as it were: The range of his activities is truly unparalleled.

We Must Halt NATO's Eastward Expansion

Sergey Ryabkov, *Russian Deputy Foreign Minister*

We certainly took a positive view of the Americans' willingness to address those issues on a bilateral basis. And we began by presenting to the Americans our draft documents – i.e., a bilateral treaty with the US and a multilateral agreement with NATO. We believe that the OSCE track is also an option. But there is one thing that we would be disappointed to see happen – namely, that the essence of our proposals would get drowned in talk about how there are various kinds of formats and that they should be used. Substance is of paramount importance to us. After all, this is a pressing issue: There is a serious escalation, and we must halt NATO's eastward expansion, the expansion of NATO infrastructure. Ukraine must be barred from ever joining NATO, and we must be given legally binding security guarantees – at least within the parameters and the boundaries that we had in 1997, when the Russia-NATO Founding Act [on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security] was signed.

I would like to stress that the US side has been informed in detail about our priorities, our preferences. A discussion is taking place, but it must be followed by concrete steps. Russia's demands – particularly with regard to what is needed for the diplomatic process to continue – have been presented to the Americans. We are ready to start working together right away, without pause or delay. Let's deal with this very serious issue here and now, as the Americans would say.

From all indications, the Americans believe that some kind of dialogue (not negotiations) should be conducted by practically the same teams that have been working on strategic stability for six months, which is why US Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman has become [my] vis-à-vis on the US side. We have known each other well for a long time. We once worked together on [reaching a deal on] Iran's nuclear program and were negotiating partners. In addition to being a first-rate diplomat and a topnotch professional, Wendy Sherman vigorously defends US interests. It will be far from smooth sailing, anyway. We are ready for that. In fact, this is what our work is all about – seeking points of convergence even in the most difficult situations.

My comment is that as far as we are concerned, the experience of the 1990s was negative. The West repeatedly violated the verbal assurances and promises that the Soviet and then the Russian leadership had been given at the highest possible levels by various representatives of leading Western countries. Right now, I am not hypothesizing on what Moscow could or should have done in that situation. It's all

history now. There are no what-ifs in history. We have simply drawn lessons from that.

Would it be humiliating for the West to concede to Russia right now? I would like to ask those who are speculating on this issue, including in public, to consider whether it would be humiliating to Russia to concede to the demands that the West is making in an ultimatum-like fashion after all these decades of carrying out geopolitical projects in a space that has long been a zone of Russia's obvious, indisputable, and vital interests. These interests are indeed vital.

We in Moscow are committed to raising the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons. We have seen the opposite from the US in recent years: Nuclear weapons are increasingly viewed as battlefield assets. This is a dangerous, destabilizing trend that is undermining strategic stability.

We oppose escalation. We oppose conflicts, and we are not in the business of issuing ultimatums to anyone. Simple logic shows that we cannot accept what is happening, cannot swallow it, and cannot pretend that nothing is happening.

We oppose escalation. We oppose conflicts, and we are not in the business of issuing ultimatums to anyone. Simple logic shows that we cannot accept what is happening, cannot swallow it, and cannot pretend that nothing is happening.

As for "Russia's desire to expand to the borders of the USSR," such aims, approaches, and ambitions are completely ruled out. I believe that this line of reasoning is similar to the views of cartoonish characters, especially from early James Bond films, who set out to dominate the whole world, walking around oak-paneled offices in creaking leather boots and calling each other "General Pushkin" and "General Gogol." It is in the same vein and looks very amusing.

I would like to stress that the sense of comfort that the West has experienced over the past three decades is false. It believes that the unipolar the world order will continue to exist for centuries to come, and that if Francis Fukuyama was wrong about his end of history prediction, he was only a little wrong, and that applying a little more pressure, especially on Russia, would open the way to truly global competition with China, which has risen so fast over the years.

We appreciate it and are grateful to Beijing for its clear-cut and unambiguous position on our proposals. We cooperate closely with the People's Republic of China in various areas. Our relationship is unique. It can be described as a comprehensive strategic partnership in the literal sense of the word. Our countries' leaders have an absolutely unique relationship. Our state administrations collaborate closely. We have extensive military cooperation. All of this will continue to deepen. Neither Moscow nor Beijing underestimates the risks that the West is creating for us. Some members of the Western group are waiting for the

command to “sic ’em!” while others are tugging at the leash. Let’s see what happens next.

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The other trend is the use, often for show, of narrow coalition formats to challenge and undercut the universal formats that have been established since the end of the war and that have been faithfully serving the international community – granted, not always effectively. Some aspects [of these universal formats] need reform, improvement, and adaptation to the fast-changing world, but they remain universal, and that is what is most important.

The Summit for Democracy is not something that can open a new chapter or even a new page. After all is said and done, it is the latest in a series of US attempts to divide the world into “them” and “us.”

Interview With Patriarch Porfirije of Serbia

It is an exceptional honor for me to be able to communicate with the readers of your well-known and influential journal. I am very grateful. I consider it my duty to take this opportunity to remind your readers of the many centuries of ties between Russia and the Serbian Church – and the church is nothing other than the entire baptized people of God.

Those who have represented the Russian Federation in Serbia as ambassadors have made their contribution to this exceptional relationship.

Of course, in recent decades, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has been playing a significant role in international politics and diplomacy. Unfortunately or fortunately (at the end of the day, God alone knows whether it’s one or the other), the Serbian people are all too often the focus of politics and diplomatic rivalries. Therefore, we always put a lot of hope in the speeches that His Excellency

Minister Lavrov makes at international forums or in the capitals of various countries.

Ever since the late 1980s, there has been the impression that the ethnic Albanian population is disciplined and unified in pursuing its political goals. This may be a natural effect of clan social structure. But it is a much more accurate explanation that the attacks you are talking about are caused by a combination of all the factors you have mentioned. There is one factor you didn't mention, though – the foreign factor. Perhaps none of the attacks have been incited or encouraged from abroad, but since July 1999, a blind eye has been turned to them whenever there was a need there to do so.

Our way – the way of our state, our people, and our church – is dialogue, peaceful coexistence, and respect for every person, for all positive human convictions. But this doesn't mean that the church is being relativist. With regard to the Kosovo and Metohija issue, that Serb promised land, the church and patriarch seek to directly, consistently, and in various ways influence the spirit of the times, the very essence of the Serb people, as well as the combined social, political, and cultural circumstances in the country, to ensure that the nature of the reasoning of the younger generations expressed in the maxim, "Next year in Prizren," remains a permanent paradigm.

Some parallels suggest themselves between spiritual life in Kosovo and Metohija and spiritual life in Europe – or in its western part, to be more precise. Many of the churches in the southern province of Serbia have been destroyed, looted, desecrated, and therefore are empty. There are many empty churches in Europe, too, with the difference that they haven't been destroyed or desecrated by people who reject Christ and His Church. Churches [there] that had been places of worship for centuries have been converted into restaurants, shopping centers, tourist attractions, dance halls, and similar mass entertainment facilities. That may be the source of the indifference to the destruction of churches and the sufferings of Christians in our part of Europe.

The martyrdom of the victims of that genocide, which was probably the cruelest and most inhuman but carefully planned and systematic attempt in modern history to exterminate a whole people, will also be commemorated by a worship service that all of us will hold during the regular spring session of the Holy Assembly of Bishops. The purpose of our planned meetings at Jasenovac and on other sites of mass execution of innocent people is to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit through prayer and Eucharistic worship and to be transformed. Because without Eucharistic worship, without prayerful immersion into the mystery of the Cross of Christ, into the mystery of martyrdom, and into the mystery of resurrection, a person today may suddenly become a merciless avenger. That would mean a new round in an endless circle of misfortune.

An Orthodox Christian who has been transformed by prayer never blames and never will blame descendants, children for what their parents did. Therefore, many people who are unfamiliar with the spirit and ethos of Orthodoxy are surprised at how much Orthodox Christians can forgive. Orthodox Christians will always be bearers of peace and friendship, never vengeance. Christians must use everything that has been granted to them for the sake of peace and mutual understanding.

Nine months after that earthquake in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia and the center of the diocese of Zagreb and Ljubljana, which I govern to this day, another devastating earthquake took place in Croatia, this time in the Banija region. For centuries, those lands were part of a border territory in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the so-called Vojna Krajina [Military Frontier]. Orthodox Serbs, who were its predominant population, defended that eastern border of Austria-Hungary against the neighboring Ottoman Empire. As a result of World War II and as a result of the tragic exodus of Serbs from the Republic of Croatia during the war in the 1990s, the ethnic structure of the local population changed considerably, and today Banija is a sparsely populated territory with no economic prospects.

Our church organized a collection of aid for the many victims. The earthquake happened in late December, so we focused on buying container homes to enable those left homeless to get through the winter. The natural calamity didn't discriminate between Catholics and Orthodox, and neither did our church when distributing container homes. There were jolts all the time; hundreds of minor quakes were felt for months, causing increasing anxiety and fear. Some churches were completely destroyed, and it was impossible to worship in others because of risks of collapse.

It can be said that in Montenegro, there exists a group of church delinquents – shady figures – who, I'm nearly convinced, don't even consider themselves priests or their association a church. In effect, they are just poor actors. They are led by a pseudo-priest who, as everyone in Montenegro knows, since his youth served in the communist secret police, who persecuted the church.

What they are up to today is something between a farce and a comedy, and there can be no doubt that in its final act, all the actors will admit that they have been involved in a tragicomic reality show. It's really hard to understand those who still support that project.

Our position on the issue of the Ukrainian churches is well known, and I'm sure that those of your readers who are interested in these matters are well aware of it, too. I only want to say that, despite the amazing ease with which the Constantinople Patriarchate disregarded holy canons, ecclesiology, the age-old order of the Orthodox Church and Sacred Tradition, we, as I'm convinced the Russian Orthodox Church, our sister church, don't cease to love the mother church

and hope and pray that the day will come, and as soon as possible, when those non-Orthodox, anti-church influences and non-church projects, which, as I can see, have done no good to anyone in Ukraine either, are renounced, and then all of us will return to brotherly love and to the pan-Orthodox work on all problems in the spirit of church unity.

I personally know several priests in our church in Belgrade and in other places who during the HIV epidemic were spiritual fathers in hospitals where AIDS patients were being treated. They led services every day and took Communion together with the patients, and they are still alive and well. How many priests would have survived the current COVID-19 pandemic if the virus were transmittable during Communion? Very few. So this is not an issue for us.

We will not change our position. We are supporting Metropolitan Onufriy and his church and will continue to do so.

I was recently shown a very interesting program that the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate published in Serbian through social networks. The program is instructive and thoughtful, and resonates with a certain segment of the population. One reason it is interesting is that it addresses some peripheral phenomena. In fact, in addition to other educational and missionary tasks, we are building a media system in our church to meet the needs of the modern individual who is surrounded by social networks. So the program that the sister church has made in our language is a valuable indicator of what we need to pay attention to when determining the content and nature of our programs.