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Nonpolarity: An Intermediate Stage on the Road to Multipolarity?

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GLOBAL political forecasting, given the difficulty of its empirical testing, is often on the periphery of those working in diplomacy. In light of the growing number of challenges facing foreign ministries, many international relations practitioners believe that it is more important to deal with current problems and that the task of thinking about the future is best left to those in academia, who have more time for intellectual constructs and abstractions.

Nevertheless, even amid the difficult conditions presently facing Russia, when it is even more difficult to plan out actions and reactions in advance, it seems relevant to pose the question: What if the current models and trends that we regard as generally correct and inevitable are not quite right?

One such dogma is our conviction that the unipolar world of the past 30 years is a thing of the past to be replaced by a multipolar world order. But what cannot be ruled out is that we are losing sight of important parallel processes that are capable of changing the course of events. History knows examples when some invention – for example, the steam engine or the internal combustion engine – changed the vector of human development.

An analysis of recent events shows that new planetary scale factors related to climate change, pandemics, digitalization, artificial intelligence, and space exploration are gaining momentum. They will undoubtedly affect the course of global development and likely entail corrections of our current forecasts. This will certainly affect international relations, which have recently become totally unbalanced. Such forces may cause a deviation from the predicted development vector of the world architecture: On the path to multipolarity, it may be necessary to go through an intermediate stage of “nonpolarity” – and it may last for decades. Moreover, it may be that after this intermediate stage, the new multipolarity will look entirely different.

Nonpolarity does not mean that the leading world powers or regional centers of attraction – the US, China, India, Russia, Brazil, the EU, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and South Africa – will disappear. They will remain. But circumstances may arise and conditions may be artificially created that make it so that potential “poles” or authoritative regional states will have no time for global affairs, and many of them will not be able to effectively promote the principles of multilateralism. The “poles” may cease to be attractive development models for neighboring countries to emulate, and they themselves will not be interested in solving their neighbors’ problems.

The Ukraine situation has demonstrated the subordinate status of the EU. The EU is losing its status as an independent decision-making center, thanks to the will of the American-fed elites. Japan finds itself in a similar situation: It is rapidly disappearing from the global political map, dissolving in the geopolitical plans of the US in the so-called Indo-Pacific region.

A characteristic feature of many countries categorized by political scientists as “middle powers” is the increasing inability of ruling circles to solve national problems. It is clear that many are mired in corruption or populism and can no longer ensure the well-being of their citizens, let alone leadership in

regional or global affairs. The elites' withdrawal and disengagement from resolving international problems is evident; they are barely able to stay in power. But we should also consider that this "inaptitude" is a derivative of new problems whose solution is fundamentally beyond the power of these states alone.

In such a situation, there is objectively growing demand for more effective global governance mechanisms.

In general, it is possible that one sign of nonpolarity will be an institutional vacuum in the sense that none of the associations will be capable of elaborating the global rules of the game and achieve their implementation.

There is no clarity about the direction of development of space programs, which can affect the social, energy, and even military development of states if one of the players secures total domination.

A separate topic is the digitalization of society, which means not the penetration of relevant technologies into everyday life but their impact on social foundations. The mass use of personal communication devices and the assimilation of social networks and artificial intelligence increase the polarization of opinions, the radicalization of views, the atomization of society, and external control over people.

All countries face these fundamentally new circumstances. Russia, too, will inevitably have to go through this difficult stage. Global uncertainty complicates forecasting. If we are to project nonpolarity onto our longterm interests, we should already be working on possible responses to the emerging challenges of today.

There are plenty of arguments in support of the concept of nonpolarity and even more counterarguments. This article does not attempt to prove anything. It seems that the most important task is to attempt to formulate even now the questions that life itself may soon pose to us. It is possible that we will have to look for answers completely on our own, relying on our own strength in the absence of effective global governance institutions and without the cooperation of other countries, which will be busy addressing their own problems.

Priorities of Modern Russian Diplomacy: Between the UN and a "Rules-Based Order"

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Keywords: UN, UN Security Council, UN-centric world order, "rulesbased order," multipolarity

AMID the current international turbulence, there is a lot of talk about necessary changes to the foreign policy courses of certain countries. Such changes are impossible without qualitative adjustments to the diplomatic toolkit, the driver of a state's foreign policy. It is natural that today's Russian diplomatic service is also undergoing both regional and functional evolution.

This article will focus on the key challenges facing Russia's foreign policy and on methods of adapting Russia's diplomatic service to them, using the example of promoting one of the key ideologies of Russian diplomacy: the UN-centric world order.

The multipolarity of the modern world order is not an ideological cliché promoted by the “revisionist powers” but a fact.

The objective logic of the rejection of the concept of the “rules-based order” is not based on respect or lack of respect for international legal norms; after all, at the heart of any sustainable system of international relations is a normative framework that its members strive to follow. The problem is which of the players within this system are involved in subsequent normbuilding.

The dilution of the mandate of executive bodies of international organizations – the UN Secretariat, the offices of special envoys and special representatives of the secretary-general, and the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons – must be prevented through a sensible and balanced membership fee policy and close attention to administrative and budgetary issues.

Under the current conditions, the priority should be not to create parallel organizations and forums but to adapt the system to the current challenges of a polycentric world, including by expanding the representativeness of the UNSC. Russian diplomacy is focusing on making sure that efforts to expand the composition and improve the working methods of the UNSC do not affect its ability to respond effectively and promptly to contemporary challenges and threats.⁹ Russia also stresses that the final draft of UNSC reform should enjoy the broadest possible support (ideally by consensus), while attempts to change the composition of the UNSC or the practice of using the veto right through a vote with a minimum threshold, including within the General Assembly, will only diminish the UNSC’s authority.¹⁰ Thus, for Russian diplomacy, the only real solution is intergovernmental negotiations held at UN Headquarters in New York aimed at the painstaking and gradual elimination of differences between parties in an attempt to reach consensus and preserve the existing architecture of the UN-centric world order.

The UN Secretariat, with the support of Western countries, has recently been actively promoting the concept of a “nexus” of humanitarian emergency response, international development assistance (IDA), and security.

According to the proposed concept, based on data from meteorological services, governments are able to prepare the population of affected areas for possible relocation by providing them with the essentials they will need in advance. Relevant pilot projects were launched in Bangladesh, Somalia, and Ethiopia (with a combined budget of \$33.4 million) when these countries were facing flood risks.

While the aforementioned concept is logical, the linking of traditionally separate areas of UN activities, guided by different mandates and overseen by different organizations, contributes to the proliferation of bureaucracy within the UN and the introduction of topics traditionally unrelated to humanitarian emergency response, such as the protection of sexual minority rights or the issue of climate change.

The trend of departing from UN-centric structures in favor of limited membership formats can also be observed in the sanctions policy of Western states

The growing importance of the force factor in contemporary international relations makes it especially important to continue dialogue and preserve existing arms control platforms. An indisputable priority of Russian diplomacy today is the promotion of security initiatives on the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the prevention of the militarization and weaponization of outer space, and the development of confidence-building measures in problematic regions.

Today, in a world where two concepts that are in effect mutually exclusive – the UN-centric order and the “rules-based order”²⁶ – are experiencing a de facto clash, the global priorities of Russian diplomacy can be divided into two conditional tracks. First, it is the strengthening and modernization of the UN and its key principles, both on the platforms of this organization and in bilateral relations, by maintaining the

principles of multipolarity, equality, nondiscrimination, inclusiveness, respect for the Charter and the established system of division of spheres of activity among various UN institutions, etc. (this work should be done in all areas, from arms control to international humanitarian activities). Second, it is the promoting of Russian narratives and strengthening of public relations through cultural, public, and educational diplomacy, where today we can observe the reform of the institutional basis of Russian diplomacy and the enhancement of the role of the Foreign Ministry – visible, for example, in the Concept for the Russian Federation’s Humanitarian Policy Abroad,²⁷ signed in September 2022. The role of nongovernmental actors and innovative methods of diplomacy is increasing in this area. These two trends should complement each other and work effectively to promote the key conceptual foundations of Russia’s foreign policy, especially amid today’s global uncertainty.

Russia Will Lead the Fight for a Just International Economic Order

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Keywords: new international economic order, Group of 77, OPEC, Socialist International, South Commission, WTO, Russia-EU Energy Dialogue

THE new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, approved by Russian President Vladimir Putin on March 31, 2023, explains the basic principles, strategic goals, and priority areas of Russia’s foreign policy.

It also applies to trade, economic, financial, and investment ties. The Concept states that the Russian Federation will take necessary measures to enhance its presence in world markets, increase non-resource-based, nonenergy exports, and ensure the geographic diversification of economic ties in order to redirect them to states that pursue a constructive and neutral policy toward the Russian Federation, while remaining open to pragmatic cooperation with business circles of unfriendly states.

Another task mentioned is to reduce the dependence of the Russian economy on the unfriendly actions of foreign states, primarily by developing a depoliticized, safe, and secure international payment infrastructure independent of unfriendly states and by expanding the use of national currencies in settlements with allies and partners.

All this should serve to eliminate the vestiges of dominance by the US and other unfriendly states in global affairs, thus ensuring equitable access for all states to the benefits of the global economy and international division of labor, as well as to modern technology.

The idea of a new international economic order was first articulated in the early 1960s, when dozens of states emerging from the ruins of colonial empires spoke of the need for the former metropolitan countries to provide the newly independent countries that had gained political sovereignty with opportunities for successful economic growth. Achieving this objective required a fundamental change in the rules of the game established during the colonial era with respect to world trade and financial and investment relations.

The Western states switched the negotiations from the track of direct bilateral contacts, where it was necessary to provide clear answers to the questions of leaders of developing countries, to the track of multilateral negotiation formats under UN auspices.

Western leaders brought to the forefront of negotiations with African and Asian countries a number of authoritative and flexible polemicists, mainly from among leaders of the Socialist International (SI), who were admittedly very convincing in the role of advocates for the interests of the newly independent countries and sincere friends of the Third World.

The leaders of the Socialist International sought to position themselves as “honest brokers” in the brewing conflict between the US and the developing countries. They urged the parties to seek a mutually acceptable compromise by addressing two problems simultaneously: reviving the economy in the North and developing the economy in the South.

The implementation of a common, coordinated policy enabled the Western countries in the 1970s and 1980s to successfully resist attempts by the developing countries to negotiate a review of the uneven playing field between the former metropolitan countries, the collective West, and the former colonies. The discussion became increasingly entangled in issues of technical logistics.

To give new impetus to NIEO slogans in this situation, a new organization, the South Commission, was established in 1987 at the initiative of Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania and a veteran of the African national liberation movement.

In that period, however, the leaders of the South Commission, like those of the G77, underestimated the importance of the need to join forces and agree on a common line of action with Moscow. One must admit that the Soviet Union was often wrongly included in the geopolitical space of the North together with the Western countries.

The movement for a revision of the international economic order was channeled toward technocratic, depoliticized schemes that were increasingly developed in the West and pushed through UN organizations, including specialized agencies.

Today, it is important to take note of these historical lessons.

From the late 1980s to the early 2010s, the agenda of the international economic order changed dramatically as the focus shifted to concepts of synchronizing the efforts of various groups of countries, creating dialogue platforms, and enhancing the potential of the World Trade Organization.

The G77, which now includes 134 countries, once again aspires to leadership in creating a new, more balanced and just economic order.

The new international order, in the opinion of the American expert, should not be limited to the US and its traditional allies, but must be open to any country that can and will help attain its common objectives.

Russia has the potential and the intellectual basis to become a leader in the movement to develop tools for a new international order.

Efforts to bring together a wide range of states and international and regional organizations and associations that would be willing to join forces with Russia on the issue of a new economic order should be continued. This applies to associations such as OPEC and OPEC+, the SCO, BRICS, and integration arrangements in the CIS space.

Cooperation with countries of the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Latin America should be developed. It is important to ensure the success of the Second Russia-Africa Summit (St. Petersburg, July 2023) and start preparations for such events with representatives of other regions, including in Asia and Latin America.

Missiles as an International Security Problem: A Mad Race or Cooperation in Dealing with Challenges?

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Keywords: Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), nonproliferation, export control, intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), intermediate-range nuclear weapons, tactical missiles, multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), missile defense, air defense, Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty), Hague Code of Conduct (HCOC), global missile nonproliferation regime, global control system for the nonproliferation of missiles and missile technology (GCS)

AMBIGUOUS events are taking place in the missile field that, considering modern realities, are rather difficult to assess in their entirety. They could have major ramifications for the formation of the global security architecture in the future, as well as for determining Russia's role and place in it.

Missiles have long been part and parcel of national defense and security doctrines and in recent years have had an increasing role. The increasing technical sophistication, effectiveness, speed, accuracy, ranges, and ability to break through missile and air defenses make missiles an appealing means of defense and deterrence for many countries. For some countries, missiles are also a geopolitical tool.

The use of rapidly advancing information and communication technologies, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and other scientific and technological achievements makes missile systems more effective and diversifies their functions.

Unlike nuclear weapons, which are mainly a means of deterrence and need top-level political approval to be used, missiles have no legal or moral restrictions on them and can be used in a conflict of any kind and scale, from a local clash to a war between regional or global rivals.

Missiles are an important component of space weapon arsenals. Near-Earth space is being actively militarized, used, among other things, to deploy communications, control, and global positioning systems. The US military considers space a potential operational domain and predicts by 2035 a transition from the purely logistical use of space to direct warfare in space and from space, including in the interests of global missile defense.

More countries are acquiring medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles, including missiles that can reach Russia. At Russia's southern border, these include India, Iran, North Korea, China, and Pakistan. And Japan, South Korea, and Turkey have started developing such missiles.

The Western demonization of Iran's missile program is a separate issue. The US and its allies use all forms of pressure to neutralize it. Iran's missile program is the reason for current US efforts to build a missile defense system for the Middle East that apparently is planned to be a key element of a security system for the region.

The conflict in Ukraine has highlighted the growing role of tactical missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) of various types. Ukraine is being supplied today with vast quantities of missiles and UAVs. There are estimates that in 2022 the US and its allies provided Ukraine with more than 70 multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), a minimum of 5,500 antitank rocket launchers, and about 1,700 man-portable

air defense systems. The total number of missiles supplied with these systems ran into tens or possibly hundreds of thousands.

A separate issue is the illegal acquisition of missile systems by nonstate actors, including terrorists. The international community may end up paying a high price for flows of missile systems and other weapons onto black markets through Ukraine.

Legal bans on designing and test-firing nuclear weapon delivery vehicles imposed by the UN Security Council on North Korea and Iran have failed to compel these two countries to suspend their missile programs – the latter have simply become illegitimate. Moreover, the bans have been perceived as unbalanced moves, as the council has put no such prohibitions on any other state.

Clearly, the diversity of technical and tactical characteristics of missiles rules out the possibility of a universal formula for dealing with all missile control issues.

The former strategic stability formula based on the principle of nuclear parity between two poles has become obsolete and even somewhat discredited because it has enabled Western countries to strengthen themselves in other areas and expand their zones of influence for a long time without any serious consequences for themselves.

But regardless of how the current situation develops, it is essential to organize a dialogue mechanism within the UN framework to address the entire range of missile control issues. Moscow could put a proposal to that effect before the UN secretary-general and offer to spearhead this work. This would enable us to put the Missile Dialogue Initiative, from which we have been barred lately, under the aegis of the UN. It would also enable us to take action to expand the agendas of annual meetings of the HCOC subscribing states and to enlarge their range of participants. Today, these meetings increasingly focus on the North Korean and Iranian missile programs, while many countries possessing missiles, including Brazil, China, Pakistan, and Israel, do not participate in them. To stimulate discussion, we could draft a UN General Assembly resolution on missiles in all their aspects and put the draft before the assembly's First Committee. It should be our chief message that there can be no winners in a missile race. The unrestrained stockpiling of missiles would inevitably erode national economies and consequently bring about large-scale poverty while undermining international security by whipping up tensions between adversaries. Searching for solutions through constructive dialogue is the only alternative. It should be an inclusive process with a transparent agenda. It is important for the international community to develop a practice of dialogue on missiles.

Changes on the Western (Diplomatic) Front

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DURING its centuries-old history, Russian diplomacy has addressed many complex, challenging tasks. However, the challenges facing it now are unique and largely existential in nature. The policy of isolating Moscow that Western countries have pursued since the start of the Ukrainian crisis has transformed into a policy of inflicting a “strategic defeat” on our country, by which more and more advocates of this policy mean the disintegration of Russia in its present form.¹ As Anatoly Antonov, Russia’s ambassador

to the US, rightly noted, the question of wiping the Russian state off the world map is being raised.² Needless to say, preventing this scenario is a key goal of our country's entire state apparatus, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In order to successfully stand up to such pressure, we must radically revise the current approach toward diplomacy with the West. Over recent decades, during the post-Soviet period, Russian diplomacy in this area has gone through several phases. At the first stage, in keeping with the political leadership's directives at the time, the essence and concept of the country's foreign policy under the new conditions were clearly formulated, as was its position in dialogue with countries of the collective West.

There was a feeling that with the end of ideological confrontation and the rapid spread of the Western values model, the art of diplomacy was becoming a thing of the conflict-ridden past. Within the "rules-based order" that was taking shape at the time, Washington assigned diplomats in other countries the role of mouthpieces for the will of the hegemon, rubberstamping at international organizations decisions that it had already made.

Moscow's abandonment of "Kozyrev-style" diplomacy in the second half of the 1990s was the first step toward scrapping the system of coordinates that was being imposed on it by the West. Granted, at the time, Russia was still dealing with economic difficulties and domestic ideological disagreements and did not have enough global allies to provide an alternative to Washington's version of the world order. China – for all its critical attitude toward Western politics – was still following Deng Xiaoping's foreign policy guideline of "hide your strength, bide your time" and largely betting on integration into international economic institutions. India and other significant players were focused on regional issues. This geopolitical loneliness was a major factor in Russia's inability to prevent the expansion of NATO and its aggression against Serbia.

Moscow's attempt in the 2000s to put aside certain, albeit fundamental disagreements with Western countries, focusing on a positive agenda in areas such as expanding financial and energy cooperation, combating terrorism, addressing environmental issues, etc., was shamelessly used by the US to strengthen its "unipolar moment."

The reaction of the US and NATO to the European security dialogue that Russia proposed in 2021 clearly shows that the West was reluctant to participate in a constructive diplomatic process and viewed its initial consent to separate negotiating tracks only in the context of its traditional tactics of playing for time, which was quite predictable. The Biden administration, while hinting at the possibility of dialogue, in reality started to demonstrate bloc thinking from its very first months in office – in particular putting forward the idea of a "summit for democracy." This concept, which in spirit and format is reminiscent of Washington's projects during the most strained periods of the Cold War, clearly demonstrated the US and allied commitment to the final, global revival of bloc thinking, logically preceding the radicalization of the West's course toward multivector opposition to Russia. As a matter of fact, the second such summit, held on March 28-30, 2023, has shown the total inability of Western leaders to realize the perniciousness and destructiveness of coalition-building policies that are bringing the world to the verge of a large-scale and dangerous confrontation. This initiative explicitly confirms that the US and its partners have lost the skills of diplomatic interaction with their opponents and have gotten used to a comfortable existence not burdened with excessive reflection in a circle of like-minded wards – and they are completely unwilling to change this situation.

The events of 2022 have shown that the space for using traditional "soft power" mechanisms is extremely limited by the ideological and civilizational frameworks of the societies and countries against which those mechanisms are used. It took the West only a few months, if not weeks – with the silence of civil society – to cut off most channels via which the Russian "soft power" model could be used.

At the same time, of course, dialogue with Western experts is still relevant. But let us be honest: Our previous considerable efforts to get our position across to Western experts (by inviting them to Russian conferences and organizing various bilateral platforms, among other things) have not really paid off. Except for a handful of principled and independent experts, much of the expert community in Western countries took a rather uncritical view of the anti-Russian course of their governments, disseminating propaganda slogans in their articles and reports, and even taking part in developing restrictive measures, including against Russia's international affairs scholars.

Diplomatic and innovative foreign policy tools in the struggle for the hearts and minds of peoples of the former "third world," combined with the focused and proactive efforts of research institutes that analyze Western trends on a daily basis, can produce results. But first, all Russian foreign policy actors, especially the expert community, must mobilize their resources and shed the starry-eyed notions and illusions of the past. A long, drawn-out geopolitical game is beginning in which each and every element is critically important and no foreign policy player can afford to be careless or naïve anymore.

Russophobia: The Roots and the Crown

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Keywords: Russophobia, xenophobia, Eurasia, East, West, Russia – a unique civilization

FROM an analytical perspective, Russophobia is not all that different from other social phenomena. Like other forms of xenophobia, Russophobia operates on two levels: public fears and state policies. The boundaries between these two levels are often relative, fluid, and subject to change.

The authors suggest that Russophobia is a significant yet specific form of xenophobia, which represents a rejection of something foreign, unfamiliar, and therefore potentially dangerous to the established way of life in a given society. This perceived threat may be viewed as endangering the very existence of the established order of things.

Consequently, given the present tumultuous events and developments, it is not surprising that Russophobia today is the comprehensive dismissal of Russian culture, way of life, mindset, and the overall life paradigm of the entire Russian super-ethnos. Presently, Russophobia also represents a unique manifestation of domestic/existential fear concerning Russia's recovery from its "lethargic sleep" – or, as it has been labeled in the West, "Moscow's revisionist foreign policy."

The term "super-ethnos" is becoming increasingly common in everyday communication. How do Russians understand it? It refers to a community of people who share the same language and are united by a common history, moral principles, and values. The Russian super-ethnos is a multinational culture spread across a vast territory but united by the use of Russian, one of the most developed languages in the world.

We will mainly talk about Russophobia as a political component of the same age-old confrontation between the collective West (the collective South exhibits no such tendencies) and Russia. It is essential to remember that for Western elites, Russophobia plays a significant role in their global confrontation with Russia – the largest country in the world by area and the richest in natural resources. Russophobia has specific instrumental functions in their political practice. For example, it is currently being used by

the Western “permanent political class” (as defined by American sociologist Steve Turley) to divert the attention of the masses from the collective West’s escalating chronic internal crises, which are becoming increasingly systemic and chronic.

Given the current circumstances, Russophobia is a convenient yet temporary tool for diverting the attention of the general public in Europe away from their actual, everyday concerns. It is worth acknowledging that the current heightened attention of Western public opinion makers to the “instrumental” importance of Russophobia appears to be objectively grounded, given the fear of the collective West of Russia’s reemergence as a geopolitical power. Such an outcome was predicted in the past by prominent intellectuals like Hamish McRae³ and Walt Rostow.

The authors suggest that Russophobia has a long-standing anamnesis with roots that can be legitimately traced back to the Middle Ages.

LIKE any social phenomenon, Russophobia exists in a specific national space. This space’s tone is determined by a particular European nation’s historical memory – in this case, relations with Russia. We can say that the typological characteristics of Russophobia coexist and interact with the national characteristics of the behavioral patterns of the European peninsula’s nations. Therefore, we believe that Russophobia can be categorized into several historical and genetic subtypes:

- (1) The “failed great power” complex. It is exemplified by Poland.
- (2) Impaired historical memory or flawed sociohistorical experience is another type of Russophobia, which could be characterized as “transient” or migratory in origin. In this case, Russophobia is “exported” through migration to other countries and continents.
- (3) Russophobia as a substitute for an absent economic agenda. This type of Russophobia is not uncommon. It is often driven by ruling groups attempting to divert the attention of the general population from real issues that they are unable to resolve for various reasons.

The marginalization of Europe in the global arena and the increasing socioeconomic, ethnic-demographic, and migration problems seem to compel the political elites of this relatively humble territory to focus more on their domestic affairs and pay as little of their precious attention to Russia as possible. And when the Euro-happies eventually come knocking at the Kremlin’s door, asking for a piece of bread, one could respond with the words of Emperor Alexander III: “When the Russian Tsar is fishing, Europe can wait.” Everything should have its price, including Russophobia.

The EU’s Global Ambitions: The Maritime Agenda

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Keywords: European Union, “blue” economy, global actor, international ocean management, sustainable development, “blue” partnership.

THE European Union is steadily increasing its participation in shaping the global maritime agenda and asserting itself as a leading international player, setting key trends in the development of ocean governance. This trend can be seen in many EU conceptual and policy documents.

The EU is already a leader in certain maritime-related initiatives – for example, the response to climate change [6]. In particular, along with Ecuador, Kenya, and New Zealand, it has initiated the global forum “Coalition of Trade Ministers on Climate.” Its launch was announced on January 19, 2023, at the annual World Economic Forum in Davos [7]. Based on the above, the areas of activity that, from the EU

viewpoint, may contribute to the further strengthening of its global position in the maritime sphere are of particular interest.

The EU intends to assume a global leadership position in the preparation and dissemination of new standards. New technologies (artificial intelligence, blockchain, quantum technologies, cybersecurity, sensitive and specialized data, digital currencies, chemicals), related products and services, and green developments (hydrogen production, energy storage, offshore wind energy, sustainable transport) are identified as priority areas for this task. The EU believes it has the necessary expertise “in establishing internal rules” – de facto “international standards” – that can form a solid foundation for its plans. In essence, according to the information presented in 2021, the EU is ready to take on the role of a global pioneer in this area (see Paragraph 5, as indicated above) [8] and in a wide range of other areas.

It can be assumed that the EU is ready not only to develop and implement new requirements but also to identify environmentally problematic areas that, in its opinion, need to be regulated.

THE EU assigns the “blue” economy a special role in ensuring future stress resilience. Within the blue economy framework, it becomes possible to preserve marine ecosystems for economic use, develop ecosystem services, and so on. At the same time, the reports emphasize that many megatrends (climate and environmental issues; biodiversity loss; greenhouse gas emissions; unsustainable consumption of raw materials, energy, water, food, and land use; ecosystem depletion; shifts in the global order in terms of maritime defense and competition for maritime space) will also have a detrimental effect on the marine economy.

IN THE current phase of its maritime policy, the EU continues to step up efforts to initiate a new order of regulation of international maritime economic activities. Its documents emphasize that it is well placed to participate in this process by virtue of having necessary experience in developing a sustainable approach to ocean governance and possessing the toolkit to address links between the internal and external aspects of security.

Notably, the EU-Canada agreement provides for enhanced cooperation precisely in those areas where the EU is at the forefront, most notably: the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity on the high seas; combating marine pollution; supporting the Paris Agreement on Climate Change as it relates to the oceans; preventing unregulated commercial fishing in the Central Arctic; strengthening cooperation in ocean governance; ensuring safe and decent living and working conditions at sea; and combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

FOR the EU, cooperation with China in areas related to the use of the sea opens up new opportunities for developing the blue economy as well as for solving global and regional problems, including adaptation to climate change, ensuring maritime security, and other issues. China, for its part, is working out its own formats for maritime cooperation.

A PRELIMINARY assessment shows the growth of the EU’s global ambitions and the expansion of its interests in forming an international ocean governance system. The logic of the EU consists in presenting the world community with justification of the unconditionally necessary joint solution to global sea use problems, with the understanding that only the EU possesses the necessary set of proven governance practices and competencies in this field.

In pursuing its global maritime ambitions, the EU follows several separate lines of action. The first of these is related to the promotion of international biodiversity, the sustainable blue economy, and other concepts within the framework of sustainable development, which were legitimized internationally in the UN General Assembly resolution of September 25, 2015, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” The implementation of the blue economy concept is integrated into the EU’s overall development vision, including activities aimed at meeting its global ambitions. Their

algorithm includes the development and implementation of new approaches to the management of the world's ocean resources, their justification, practical testing, as well as international legitimization with subsequent consolidation at the global level while ensuring the leading position of the EU.

As we can see, the systemic activity of the EU and its practical experience in terms of goal setting, formulating and breaking down complex tasks, as well as developing conceptual and planning documents, are of considerable interest for scientific analysis and subsequent use in implementing the maritime policy of the Russian Federation.

New Developments in the Persian Gulf

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THE unprecedented escalation of the international situation in 2022 along the axis of confrontation between the US (the collective West) and Russia makes the parties to the conflict particularly interested in luring over to their side countries in the Middle East, primarily the Persian Gulf – a region that is very important to the global economy. Amid tough sanctions, stable energy prices are becoming increasingly important to Russia, making its relations with oil-producing countries in the region strategically vital. The effective format of interaction with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, in particular Saudi Arabia as part of the OPEC+ deal, creates opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation.

In this situation, the US is adopting a more assertive foreign policy in ensuring security, fostering military-technical cooperation, and leveraging diplomatic tools to change the positions of countries in the region on several sensitive issues for Washington.

Russia is closely watching the US's diplomatic activity and taking steps to protect its interests in the region. In this context, several important events have taken place recently: As part of the UN General Assembly session, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held a meeting with the UAE foreign minister and a meeting with members of the GCC troika (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Oman); in early November, Lavrov visited Abu Dhabi. Several summit meetings were held: In St. Petersburg, UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan met with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and several days later, in Kazakhstan, the Russian president met with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. Prior to that, there were several contacts with the Islamic Republic of Iran. On August 31, 2022, the Iranian foreign minister visited Moscow, and on September 3, a telephone conversation took place between the [two] foreign ministers.

The world public has paid closer attention to the region following a series of successful international events, the most recent being the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, which also had an impact on regional politics.

During Washington's active interference in regional problems in the Middle East, local actors accumulated a long list of grievances against the US that they preferred not to vent. Despite the declared goals of establishing democracy, which was supposed to bring prosperity and peace to the region, in reality, the Middle East became even more destabilized and chaotic than before the concept of democracy in the Middle East was proclaimed in 2003-2004.

The current situation shows the evolution of the US role in the region from a unipolar dominant position in the Middle East, with the possibility of directly influencing the positions of countries on issues that are important to Washington, to the status of first among important regional players with whom countries in the region do not always agree on sensitive issues. Nevertheless, partnership with Washington remains vital for ensuring the security of the Gulf monarchies, which by definition will now allow US influence in the region to fall below a certain level.

AT THE same time as the US changed its priorities in the Middle East, new actors emerged in the region. Saudi Arabian, UAE, and Qatari leaders began to leverage significant financial reserves as a tool to influence politics inside and outside the region, which before long gave them the status of key actors in Middle East politics. The turning point was the Arab Spring: Qatar was the beneficiary, and the UAE and Saudi Arabia, aware of the need to resist political Islam and revolutionary changes in the region, sought to balance its policies.

THE “wave of normalizations” that started in August 2020 with the signing of the Abraham Accords had a visible impact on the transformation of regional security foundations. The agreements showed that Israel has a solid level of relations with countries in the region, based on a similar vision for regional security and the perception of Iran’s proactive policy as a threat.¹⁵ The two Gulf monarchies, with US mediation, not only recognized the existence of the Jewish state but formed a tactical alliance with it, aimed primarily at counteracting Iran.

THE cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which is affecting regional development and making itself felt in countries of the region from Yemen to Syria, Bahrain, and Lebanon, remains a key regional issue.¹⁸ A significant factor in this confrontation is the pro-Iranian Houthi movement, which is not only continuing to resist the operation by the Arab coalition to resolve the Yemen crisis, but has shifted the focus of the confrontation, carrying out attacks on Saudi territory.

RUSSIA has always been a reliable partner of the Gulf states in ensuring security in the subregion. For example, in July 2019, Russia made public its Collective Security Concept for the Persian Gulf. This document was then updated with input from its Arab and Iranian partners and in 2021 distributed at the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly and submitted for consideration to the capitals of the Gulf states.

A CERTAIN decrease in the turbulence in the Persian Gulf region can be attributed to several factors that have emerged there over the past decade:

- (1) multilateralism, arising from the trend toward diplomatic interaction
- (2) the more active involvement of non-Western extraregional players and the weakening of the US’s role
- (3) the emergence of new centers of power defining regional security boundaries
- (4) regional détente and prospects for dialogue between long-standing conflicting parties.

Overall, the ongoing changes in the Persian Gulf are taking place in accordance with Russia’s vision of security in the region. However, closer ties between Moscow and Tehran, with Iran not being deeply integrated into the regional security system, may in the short term impede Russia’s dialogue with the GCC countries. Washington will continue to put diplomatic pressure on the Gulf countries as they are actively building rapprochement with non-Western powers such as China and Russia, but this pressure will not necessarily mean that they will stop diversifying their ties with the outside world and strengthening their independence.

The Special Military Operation in Ukraine: A New Patriotic War – Scattered Thoughts

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Keywords: Ukrainian conflict, Russia, the West, NATO, SMO

THE events of recent years have clarified a lot; the West has taken off its mask to demonstrate to all that the containment of post-Cold War Russia has always been its strategy. It wants to dominate our country in disregard of the basic principles of the UN Charter and the results of World War II.

The time has come to state bluntly that the West has taken the path of war in hopes of destabilizing Russia and replacing the people in power with its puppets – in other words, to finally solve the Russian question. Moreover, this confirms what Russian diplomat and poet Fyodor Tyutchev wrote in the mid-19th century: Russia “by the very fact of its existence denies the future of the West.” Our existence as a country very different from them is their main problem. We are a stumbling block, even if we do not interfere in their affairs. They are the meddlers.

Our history is full of ups and downs: The Time of Troubles, invasions from the West, perfidious elites. But we have survived. We have always found the strength to save our country, keep our faith, and remain loyal to our historical calling.

Russia has been “canceled” because it stirs up twinges of conscience in the West. It has canceled our contribution to world culture; it has canceled Dostoyevsky, the Gospel for deChristianized Europe; and it has canceled Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Chekhov, who inspired European and world literature, whose works are a reflection of our Motherland, its fields, forests, rivers, and the soul of our people.

Fully aware that depriving people of their history and culture is a sure way to destroy them, Kiev and its de facto Western allies supplemented their military threat with a threat to our historical identity. They encroach on our Great Victory; they force Russians to share their ancestral land with neo-Nazis and to interact with them. They are determined to avenge the defeat of their Nazi ancestors in the Great Patriotic War and post factum rehabilitate Nazism as a product of their Western civilization.

Today, we have good reason to say that we were attacked in 1994, when NATO adopted its expansion decision. It is no wonder that George Kennan said that “expanding NATO would be the most fateful error ... in the entire post-Cold War era.” This revived the logic of confrontation with Russia.

The Maidan and the coup d'état in Ukraine marked a turning point: Containment entered an acute phase. As before, Russia did not act in haste: It took the will of the people – in Crimea and Donbass – into account. It wanted to give the new Ukrainian leaders a chance. How did they respond? With preparations for war with Russia backed by massive Western support! As if Kiev had no other problems. In fact, it was the only post-Soviet republic that failed to regain its Soviet GDP level.

Europe should know that confrontation was not our choice; they should not blame us for their problems.

Everyone needs to realize that our breakup with the West was inevitable and very much needed. We should thank them: They helped us abandon the road that we were following by inertia. Our Western orientation was leading nowhere. Having exhausted the resources of normal development, the West turned to the ideas of “transhumanism” and all sorts of antihuman rubbish, which is not as harmless as it appears. We hope that sooner or later everything will normalize. America will have to resign itself to the status of one of several leading powers, and the West – to the status of one of several regions of the world that is not dominating and living at the expense of others.

If the West is a military ally of Kiev, it should say so; it should explain everything, including possible threats to its own security, to its electorate. They are acting at their own risk, and people should be aware of this.

We cherish diplomatic relations just as much as our vis-à-vis do. We are ready to sever diplomatic relations with unfriendly and openly hostile countries. This is logical; this cannot and should not be excluded. Nobody should be shocked if this happens.

Aggressive nationalism in any form never does any nation any good. It flourished in Europe between the wars, and we know how that ended. We are being led back into the future. We have no common path with Europe as we know it now. We will fight to ensure its worthy future in full accordance with the ideals of Enlightenment. Over the past two centuries, Europe has been rapidly and progressively losing its devotion to those ideals. Our grandfathers and fathers fought for Europe and those principles. Now it is our turn.

Ukraine has demonstrated its failure as an independent state. It was a product of the Soviet system and could exist only as part of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the disintegration of the Soviet Union was its first disaster. Today, we are witnessing the second. Ukraine took the same path as Germany before it: from a failed state and, after the Treaty of Versailles, through Weimarization, to the triumph of aggressive nationalism and a national disaster. The only difference is there is no nation – only a repressive state that uses criminal methods.

It seems that the American elite feel good only when others feel bad. They are spoilers, meddling everywhere in the world (including in Russia); they interfere in the domestic affairs of other states after neglecting their own. We cannot and must not accept this.

France: From Pension Reform to a Crisis of the Fifth Republic?

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Keywords: higher retirement age, Macron, parliamentary elections, NUPES, Art. 49.3 Constitution of France, The Republicans, The National Rally parties

AS COULD be expected, discussions of a higher retirement age that began in France in 2023 stirred up wide-scale protests across the country. After several failed attempts to draw the National Assembly, the lower house of the French parliament, to her side, Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne, supported by President Emmanuel Macron, had no choice but to rely on Article 49.3 of the Constitution of France and sign the pension reform into law in circumvention of parliament.

THE majority of the expert community and citizens of the French Republic have long understood that the pension system is in need of reform. The population of France is growing older: In 2020, people over the age of 65 represented 20.5% of the country's population; in 2019, their share was 20.1%; in 2018, it was 19.7%. In the last 20 years the share rose by 4.7%.¹ The process accelerated after 2011, when the postwar baby-boom generation reached retirement age. The number of young and middle-aged people is gradually shrinking: In 20 years, the share of people between the ages of 20 and 59 in the total population of France dropped by 4.4%.

Migrant flows cannot improve the demographic situation. The state of the French economy and the rising social tension do not and cannot attract migrants, at least not in the near future. On average,

those who have settled in France are 35 years old, which means that most of them have already started families.

There is another no less important factor: Life expectancy has increased considerably in the last few years: Today it is 79.3 years for men and 85.2 years for women.⁵ People over the age of 75 constitute about 10% of the total population, which is 2.4% more than in 2000. It should be said that among the EU countries, French workers work the fewest hours (1,680 hours a year on average, a reduction of 14% compared to 2000).

These statistics mean that maintaining the pension system (to say nothing of developing it) is a heavy burden on the French economy. Every year, France spends about 320 billion euros of its budget (about 15% of the country's GDP) on pensions. Only Italy and Greece spend more as a percentage of GDP.

In 2016, the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of France (INSEE) published a big demographic report from which it follows that, if preserved, the current trends would require major structural changes to the economy.⁶ It is no wonder that back in 2017, Macron included pension reform in his presidential program (albeit promising not to raise the retirement age) and comprehensive changes in labor legislation.

THE reform was launched to unify the system of pensions, which previously consisted of 37 pension regimes for various professions and categories of people – in short, it was too complicated. From that time on, those who work in the system of public transportation (including railways), in power and gas supplies, the Bank of France, notaries, etc. will be equated with the general pension regime. The authors believe that the previous special regimes for many categories were perceived by the French as unfair⁸ and did not correspond to changes that had taken place in these professions in recent years.

The results were unexpected and atypical for the French political system. In 2001, Lionel Jospin, the then-prime minister of France, changed the political calendar: From that time on, parliamentary elections followed almost immediately (a month and a half) after the presidential election. This was done to avoid “coexistence”⁹ between a president and prime minister who belonged to opposing political parties. By that time, this had already happened three times in the history of the Fifth Republic, and every time it caused a lot of problems for the state mechanism and its functioning. It was expected that parliamentary elections organized immediately after the presidential election would give the newly elected president a parliamentary majority and a chance to implement his program.

This worked for 20 years: Jacques Chirac in 2002, Nicholas Sarkozy in 2007, François Hollande in 2012, and Emmanuel Macron in 2017 won parliamentary majorities. In 2022, Macron became the first president to lose parliamentary elections.

Macron's seemingly wise and justified decision in 2020 to move the pension reform to the second presidential term ultimately played against Macron. The key reform is being carried out without the parliamentary majority and amid a rapidly deteriorating economic situation. The opposition, on the other hand, found itself in a favorable situation. First, it can use the social tension caused by the pension reform that bypassed parliament to promote its own political aims inside the country. Second, if it comes to power, it would be free to push the reform aside.

The regional aspect of the protests is very significant and highly illustrative. In Bretagne, for example, 3.5% of the total population take part in public protests; in the departments Indre-et-Loire and Creuse, the figure is 3%. This is much higher than in the central cities. This is a major political challenge to Macron, who received the biggest share of support in the central cities and financial centers and encountered a lot of problems in the periphery. Whether the pension crisis will grow or whether the authorities will stamp it out depends on the extent to which Macron and his government will broaden their parliamentary majority and improve their positions on the periphery. In any case, the events of the

first months of 2023 mark a noticeable transformation of the political system of France and the coming to power in the medium term of members of today's opposition more realistic.

Democracy and Spiritual and Moral Values

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Keywords: democracy, autocracy, religion, morality, culture, multiculturalism, postmodernism, intercultural dialogue

THE development of democratic institutions has gone hand in hand with the evolution of human ideas about spiritual and moral values, natural rights, freedom, justice, and systems of government. It has also been simultaneous with the development of civil (written) law.

IN THE pre-Christian era, Greek and Roman philosophers such as Gorgias, Aristotle, and Marcus Tullius Cicero put natural law above written law. Polybius and Cicero, among others, believed that the state was an embodiment of human beings' innate desire to live together and that therefore it had a natural origin. They saw the state as the key institutional guarantee of rights and freedoms. Ancient philosophers such as Polybius and Cicero also were the first proponents of the separation of powers.

However, on the whole, social ailments such as corruption, oligarchic tyranny, and anarchy made philosophers in classical antiquity critical of democracies that existed in their time. They saw democracy as a tool and not as an objective of social development.

The natural rights concept was elaborated on in the teachings of Christianity, which arose in Palestine in the first century A.D. through the cultural interaction of Jews, Greeks, and other peoples [2, pp. 384-398; 6, pp. 102-129, 239-265].

Christianity has set the path of development for nearly all European countries. It laid the basis for cultures and states. The Ten Commandments and Christian morality have underlain legal systems and secular laws in Europe. For many centuries, European countries have been ahead of countries of other continents economically and in terms of social organization. Christian values have also formed the foundation of the Russian state ever since Saint Vladimir, the grand prince of Kiev, Christianized Kievan Rus in A.D. 988.

Christian ideas of freedom have provided the basis not only for culture and the arts but also for scientific and technological development and have prompted responses to new challenges such as environmental pollution, artificial intelligence, and today's supposed new values.

THE global moral climate began to change significantly in the 21st century. The US and Europe entered the era of postmodernism, a movement devoid of a dominant idea and moral guidelines [13, p. 31]. The 21st century has failed to live up to the expectations of the international community. Increasing material welfare, rising education standards, better general services, and the growing share of the middle classes in various societies in the latter half of the 20th century were expected to produce greater demand for high art [3, p. 35-36]. Instead, the art and culture market is overflowing with mediocrities, and the modern individual is becoming a consumer primarily of kitsch mass culture.

The abuse of digital technologies puts technical resources above humanitarian values. Human beings become marginalized. They start to have unnatural desires and inclinations, no moral guidelines, and are incapable of making responsible decisions.

Behind today's moral crisis in the West is the gradual betrayal of Christian spiritual and moral values that began during the Renaissance and Reformation.

Protestant philosophers who lived during the Enlightenment, an era of flourishing secular knowledge, exaggerated the capacity of human reason and put human-made laws above God-given natural human rights.

But present-day liberals stick to the old idea of freedom unconstrained by any moral norms. They advocate a model of rational human and governmental behavior that is relative, unlike the model of human behavior based on moral and cultural traditions.

Today's political and economic antagonism between Russia and the West has deep roots and stems from different spiritual and economic civilizational codes. The Russians rejected heresies that ultimately led some European countries to Protestantism practically as soon as they made their way into Russia.

Social ladders and filters also play an important role as institutions affecting the quality of the elites and the competence and professionalism of people, including key decision-makers.

THE world is a diversity of nations, cultures, traditions, and religions, and there is not a single purely monoethnic or monoreligious country. Therefore, seeking to create a monoethnic or monoreligious state, which is a policy in some of the former Soviet republics, is an exercise in futility

The imperialist colonial system began to fall apart in the 20th century. Most of the former colonies opted to build democratic systems, and it was intercultural dialogue rather than divisions between states and communities that were put at the top of the agenda. And, besides, nationality is a somewhat arbitrary concept.

It seems that the US and Europe are seeking to avoid any sense and substance in their cultural policies. For example, it is proposed to replace the terms "mother" and "father" in identification documents with "parent one" and "parent two," and the pronouns "he" and "she" with "they."

Multiculturalism has also affected Western foreign policies, which are dominated by lies and double standards. Nevertheless, the US and European countries insist that other nations adopt their notorious new values and their ideas of democracy and cultural identification. For example, the European Court of Human Rights has considered it possible to recommend that Russia legalize same-sex marriages

Historical experience shows that the church should, on the one hand, be independent of politics and the state but, on the other, play an important part in the spiritual and moral life of the individual and society [15]. Besides holding worship services, the functions of the church include philosophical assessments of the essence of humankind and the world, spiritual and moral education, and charitable activities. Measures to modernize higher education systems in the European Union through the so-called Bologna Process, a process aimed at uniformity and standardization, has also failed to produce good results [12]. The scope of educational services has been enlarged at the cost of quality. In effect, higher education based on Bologna Process principles is market-oriented secondary vocational education. The humanities and subjects with strong spiritual and moral aspects receive insufficient attention because of their higher cost, but they are essential to the development of the individual, civil society, and people's capacity to make responsible decisions.

BRICS Enlargement Prospects

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Keywords: enlargement of BRICS, candidate member countries, New Development Bank (NDB), BRICS Plus, South-South cooperation

THE appearance in 2006 of the organization known today as BRICS was met with skepticism by analysts and experts in the West and in the association's member countries themselves. Skeptics pointed out a host of seemingly insurmountable obstacles – the vast geographical distances between some of the member countries, territorial disputes (between China and India), ideological rifts, mutually incompatible political and legal systems, and finally, major cultural differences [12, p. 17]. Nevertheless, over its 17-year history, the group has shown stably increasing mutual economic interaction and has become a pillar of the emerging multipolar world order.

BRICS can effectively deal with tasks of any scale and in any field owing to the multilevel institutional infrastructure that it has developed over this period: annual summits, ministerial conferences, a parliamentary forum, and conferences bringing together national security officials, as well as representatives of chambers of commerce, research institutes, and youth leaders. The institution of the New Development Bank (NDB) and a reserve currencies pool in 2014 was a landmark in the group's history.

BRICS has become an integration association that is very appealing to many developing countries. Its main advantages over other similar groups are openness, inclusiveness, and equality. The group has never been an elitist structure where one needs to earn high status. Nor have there ever been any attempts within BRICS to limit the sovereignty of its members or partners or to force them to sacrifice national interests for some supposed common objectives.

BRICS has never taken the attitude of "you are either with us or against us." It has always emphasized that any nation has an immutable right to choose its own development path and to build independent relations with a range of other actors.

VARIOUS sources name Argentina, Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey as the likeliest candidates to seek accession to BRICS. Practically each of them is a major power in the world economy in terms of nominal GDP, which means that their accession bids would be successful if they applied to join.

In view of current major global changes, BRICS enlargement is an objective necessity and long overdue. This necessity stems in part from positive economic forecasts for developing countries that are determined to pursue independent policies but primarily from the emergence of new global economic decision-making centers and the consequent loss by European and transatlantic associations of their monopoly.

The unique nature of BRICS enables it to optimally meet the requirements of the emerging world order. Transparent and equal cooperation among BRICS countries differs from obsolete, opaque, and asymmetrical cooperation arrangements used by Western powers. BRICS's enlargement would confirm its status as a representative, inclusive, open, and transparent association and an influential center of the nascent world order

Naturally, the enlargement of any integration association entails difficulties and risks. In fact, the BRICS Plus format itself may have political reverberations as it may provoke hostility to BRICS from the West,

which does not tolerate any competition. There already is a prime example – unprecedented economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the EU, the US, Britain, Canada, and other Western countries. Moreover, the accession of new states to BRICS might give rise to a conflict environment within the group – for instance, due to long-standing sour relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia or Turkey’s current frictions with those two nations. Thus, the task of finding new ways to resolve disagreements among its members will arise. At the same time, relations between Algeria and Egypt have generally always been friendly and are harmonious in practically all areas – political, economic, social, cultural, and security-related affairs. Their accession to BRICS may greatly benefit the group.

Nonetheless, all potential negative points would be insignificant compared to the massive positive and healthy effect that the further quantitative and qualitative evolution of BRICS would undoubtedly have on world development. BRICS was created as an equitable, transparent, and inclusive system and as a unique model for international cooperation, and it is essential to make sure that it remains so.

Digital Sovereignty in International Relations

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Keywords: digital sovereignty, state sovereignty, international information security, cybersecurity

IN THE global digital transformation age, the principle of state sovereignty has acquired an extra, digital dimension. Digital sovereignty, which in the broadest sense means the independence of a country in its digital domestic and foreign policy, is becoming a key criterion for measuring a country’s viability, security, and economic status. To better understand the nature of digital sovereignty, it is essential to fully understand the concept of state sovereignty in general.

In political science, there is consensus that the sovereignty principle was given the determining role in world politics by the Peace of Westphalia, a treaty that was signed in 1648 and laid the basis for what is known as the Westphalian system, a world political system that has served as the basis of international relations ever since.

Sovereignty has never been a static category. It has evolved. Today, besides control of a country’s territory, it includes other components such as control of a nation’s territorial waters, airspace, and currency.

Today’s level of technological development and the radical economic, social, and political changes caused by the global digital transformation make digital sovereignty extremely important.

Studies of digital sovereignty are part and parcel of an analysis of general technological sovereignty, which is understood as ensuring independence in scientific research, setting standards, and safeguarding physical technological infrastructure. Many researchers also link digital sovereignty to information security. Digital interference in the domestic affairs of a state as a violation of state sovereignty is a separate issue and is explored by both Russian and foreign researchers. The connection

of digital sovereignty studies with technological aspects of economic research that emphasizes the importance of digital technologies as part of the fourth industrial revolution should also be mentioned.

Another feature of European academic discourse is the prominence given to the concept of the digital sovereignty of the individual, meaning the security of personal data, the protection of the individual from negative information, from disinformation, and from surveillance capitalism – the collection of personal data by giant information technology (IT) corporations to use it to influence the preferences of users.

Chinese scholars have introduced the “Internet sovereignty” concept into academic discourse, meaning the right of the state to establish rules for its national Internet segment that correspond with national interests and traditions.

US scholars have for a long time criticized the digital sovereignty principle as being effectively, in their view, a form of censorship [23] and, moreover, have continually been hyping the idea that the Internet is a common domain of humanity like the open seas or outer space and must remain outside the sovereignty of any state. These points remain a feature of American foreign policy discourse; although, over the past few years, the fragmentation of the Internet and interference in US internal affairs – topics related to sovereignty issues – have been figuring prominently in American academic discourse and in the political rhetoric of US officials.

It is also important to highlight several specific features of digital technologies that make it impossible to simply extrapolate the category of sovereignty from the real to the virtual space. These characteristics include the transborder character of information and the prominent role of private companies and individuals in content creation. The difficulty of drawing borders for state jurisdiction over online data is one of several factors that should be considered when defining the digital sovereignty concept for international law.

Anatoly Streltsov, an influential Russian scholar, argues that the information and communication technology (ICT) environment cannot legally be considered an international relations entity, since devices and means of communication; local computing networks; information systems; digital identifiers existing in space and protocols for their interaction; as well as the entities ensuring the coordinated functioning of dedicated devices, networks, and systems as parts of the global ICT environment are seen as part of the territory of a state, which means that the concepts of state sovereignty and state jurisdiction can be extended to the ICT environment. Some of the opportunities provided by digital technologies make it difficult to unequivocally link data, software, etc. to the territory of a specific state. Drawing digital boundary lines is also made difficult by the large volumes of transborder data.

Despite legal gaps and terminological differences, “digital sovereignty” is a phrase that has already become an inseparable part of political and academic rhetoric. Various interpretations of digital sovereignty are reflected in documents published by states and international organizations.

RUSSIA was the first to draw international attention to the significance of information sovereignty in the context of international information security. Since 1998, Russia has been advocating the creation of rules for the responsible behavior of states to prevent risks to international information security and has been pressing the international community to take action to avert information threats in the military, political, counterterrorism, and criminal law fields with due respect for the principle of the sovereign equality of states.

The US has developed a new approach to global governance of the information space: Due to growing competition from Chinese hightech companies and today’s fragmented digital reality, it will adhere to norms and rules in relationships only with friendly countries, while taking a maximally tough position when dealing with rivals. In the digital environment, The US increasingly prefers unilateral action,

including deterrence measures and shows of force, and uses “rules-based order” norms only in dealing with its allies. This is reflected in the “Declaration for the Future of the Internet,” issued by the US in 2022.

The large-scale restructuring of the world order in the past few years has given rise to growing tensions between key players in the global information space. The fragmentation of the World Wide Web, with differing ways of regulating digital technologies and ensuring digital security, gives rise to uncertainty that primarily serves the goals of the US as the world’s most powerful cyber player. But uncertainty is usually fraught with conflict and the threat of uncontrolled escalation. And the current increasing militarization of cyberspace makes this an even greater danger.

While digital technologies know no borders, the physical world is split into sovereign states, and mutual respect for each other’s sovereignty is a condition for talks among states on digital issues. Sovereignty may be the common denominator in international efforts to build information security guarantees that take account of the interests of all states.

Social Media and Information Security

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Keywords: social networks, social media, information confrontation, rules of responsible conduct

THE global technological revolution has fundamentally changed human communication capabilities. Since 2005, there has been a transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, from static to dynamic content (not just readable but also editable). Social networks have become the main platforms for interaction among Internet users.

SOCIAL networks serve first of all as platforms for receiving and exchanging information. They are unique in that they have a dual purpose. On the one hand, they are a catalyst for social and interpersonal communication development, as well as an influence tool. On the other hand, they are often used as a tool of information counteraction that changes the balance of power in the international arena and undermines international stability. Studying social media through the lens of threats to national and international security reveals key areas for improving Russian policy to neutralize these threats, as well as prospects for strengthening international cooperation in this area.

It is important to note that social networks have become especially popular in the era of globalization, which is characterized by the rapid transfer of information and the blurring of national boundaries in the information space. This enormous array of data allows individuals to obtain needed information in the shortest possible time. However, the endless information flow contributes to chaos in the digital environment and has a negative impact on human evolution. When the speed of new information is prioritized over its quality, its presentation is simplified. Instead of deep, multi-dimensional analysis, social media users get access to short, catchy, and often specifically targeted summaries leading to a one-sided perception of information and the formation of a clip mentality.

WITH increasing digital dependence, which does not disappear with age, a person instantly becomes a puppet in the hands of manipulators. There is a real threat of the destruction of society, its foundations, and value imperatives as mass information management intensifies. Certain “mental bookmarks” and

stereotypes get planted in human consciousness. Digital technology makes such attitudes more realistic. In particular, the use of deep fakes makes any information as realistic as possible.

“Soft power,” as one of the key elements of digital diplomacy, also relies on social networks, which, according to Olga Lebedeva, are a “powerful tool for communicating with the target audience.”⁶ On one hand, they expand opportunities for horizontal communication between authorities and citizens; on the other, their unscrupulous use leads to network and information wars on an unprecedented scale.

EFFORTS to counter these threats are being undertaken in parallel both at the national and international levels, and the level chosen depends on the specific risk groups and threats.

One area of cybersecurity is personal data protection. In Russia, the key element of personal data protection is the Federal Law “On Personal Data” No. 152-FZ of July 27, 2006, along with a series of laws and regulations adopted to support its implementation.

The legislation includes strict requirements for the localization of personal data in the Russian Federation.

At the international level, this issue is regulated by the Council of Europe Convention No. 108 of 1981 for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data and its Additional Protocol No. 2239 of 2018.

Ratification of the convention by the Russian side was delayed due to the fact that the Russian Federation tied its participation to the fulfillment of a number of conditions – in particular, exclusion from the convention of personal data processed by individuals exclusively for personal and family needs or related to state secrets as prescribed by national legislation. In addition, when ratifying the convention, Russia reserved the right to restrict access to personal data in order to ensure national security and maintain public order

The Council of Europe Convention is a regional instrument for personal data protection. Russia has consistently advocated the need to develop unified, universal, legally binding international legal mechanisms under the auspices of the UN regulating the protection of personal data and preventing its illegal dissemination and unauthorized access to it.

To ensure the effectiveness of Internet security mechanisms, the Russian Federation continues to focus on improving policies that counter information risks and threats at the national level, including through public-private partnerships.

The development of legally binding norms of responsible behavior under the auspices of the UN (based on the Open Working Group framework that provides a platform for the inclusive cooperation of the global community) will improve the security of social networks. A “code of conduct” focused primarily on individual states would reduce the likelihood of conflict provoked through the creation of hot topics, propaganda, and smear and disinformation campaigns.

On the 65th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations Between Russia and Ghana

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Keywords: Kwame Nkrumah, intergovernmental agreements, economic cooperation, scientific and technical cooperation, IGC

In 2023, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Ghana are celebrating an important anniversary: 65 years ago, Ghana Acting High Commissioner to the United Kingdom John Ernest Jantuah and Soviet Ambassador to Great Britain Yakov Malik officially agreed to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Since the declaration of independence by Ghana, its first president, Kwame Nkrumah, pursued a policy of economic independence and sought to reduce the influence of Western countries, especially the UK, which controlled key sectors of the economy and industrial production in the country (by the late 1950s, the UK accounted for 95% of foreign investment in the economy of Ghana). To that end, the young West African state set out to develop trade and economic relations with socialist countries.

In August 1960, the first intergovernmental agreements were signed, laying the foundation for the relationship: a trade agreement, agreements on economic and technical cooperation and on cultural cooperation.

Between 1962 and 1965, the Soviet Union provided full-scale technical assistance to Ghana for the construction of a 2 MW nuclear research reactor, isotope laboratory, and various auxiliary facilities, as well as the training of local staff.

From July 10 to July 25, 1961, a delegation of the government of Ghana, headed by President Nkrumah, paid a return visit to the Soviet Union. In a joint communiqué, the two sides confirmed the focus of the two countries on the implementation of long-term projects to strengthen trade.

In general, the period between 1961 and 1966 could be called the “golden era” of Soviet-Ghanaian relations, when ties between our countries were developing rapidly and the level of trust allowed for the rapid implementation of complex and expensive projects.

On February 24, 1966, a coup d'état in Ghana removed Nkrumah from power, and Soviet-Ghanaian bilateral cooperation essentially wound down. Soviet specialists were forced to leave the country, air traffic ceased, and the volume of bilateral trade dropped to almost zero.

In 1973, Ghanaians once again had the opportunity to go study in the Soviet Union, and the Association of Graduates of Soviet Higher Education Institutions was established. In 1975, the Soviet Cultural Center resumed its work; it enabled more than a thousand Ghanaians to complete Russian language courses in the 1970s and 1980s.

In October 2019, a delegation from Ghana, headed by President Akufo-Addo, took part in the first Russia-Africa summit, where a wide range of issues, including the signing of a number of agreements and memorandums and the intensification of direct contacts between economic operators of the two countries, were discussed during negotiations with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Special attention was paid to the development of scientific and educational cooperation.

The Ghanaian side confirmed its keen interest in developing the humanitarian aspect of relations during political consultations held by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov and Ghanaian Foreign Minister Sherman Botchway in Accra on February 9, 2021.

The Russian-Ghanaian Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation (IGC) has been operating since 2014 with the goal of increasing practical cooperation; its fourth meeting is to be held in Accra this year.

Cooperation between Russia and Ghana in the fuel and energy sector is worth noting. In particular, since 2006, PJSC LUKOIL has been implementing a hydrocarbons exploration, assessment, development, and production project at the Cape Three Points Deepwater block in the Gulf of Guinea.

Ghana is attractive to Russian businesses not only in terms of the development of local energy and mineral extraction but also in terms of the supply of Russian aviation and automotive products, fertilizers, agricultural products, and food products.

At the same time, the actions and reaction of official Accra to the processes taking place in Ukraine can be primarily attributed to the unprecedented pressure exerted on it by the collective West. With a weak economy and a growing budget deficit, Ghana is forced to turn to global creditors, who inevitably dictate the terms of the political game. Nevertheless, a certain optimism is inspired by the fact that in the current transformation of the world order, Ghana does not intend to break off its mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia, realizing that Russia is a key player in the economic life of the African continent.

African Meetings: On Sergey Lavrov's Trip to Africa

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Keywords: Africa, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's tour of Africa, South Africa, Eswatini, Angola, Eritrea, Mali, Mauritania, Sudan, Western countries

THE myth of the indestructible primacy of Western countries – former metropolises in world affairs, including on the African continent – is crumbling day by day, proving its groundlessness. The colossus's feet turned out to be clay, unable to stand the test of time. Today, the West is at a loss over Russia's practical steps to strengthen friendly relations with the states of Africa and the East in the name of international security and cooperation for the benefit of all peoples.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's January and February 2023 tour of the African continent was evidence of obvious shifts toward strong interaction with African states. Amid information lies surrounding the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, the minister explained to African leaders Russia's approaches to resolving the situation. According to him, "no mentoring visits, no hybrid wars that the West unleashes, including in Ukraine, will be able to stop the development of new centers of economic power, of financial and political influence."

Special attention was paid to preparations for the forthcoming second Russia-Africa Summit, to be held in St. Petersburg in July 2023.

The Russian Foreign Minister began his African tour on January 23 in South Africa. Lavrov was met by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and held talks with the South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Naledi Pandor, who stressed that she is proud of the excellent diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Moscow and Pretoria have much in common in foreign policy, including strong ties with Beijing and within BRICS. The meetings noted the positive trends of mutually beneficial multifaceted cooperation, including an increase in trade turnover, the intensification of parliamentary and interparty contacts, and

the expansion of scientific and humanitarian ties.⁴ The parties discussed peaceful nuclear development, as well as infrastructure projects and high technology exchange.

Lavrov's January 24 visit to Eswatini was the first since the establishment of diplomatic relations between our countries in 1999 and brought positive results. The focus of talks with high-ranking officials was on deepening political dialogue at various levels. It was agreed to intensify interparliamentary and interagency contacts, including regular "synchronization of watches" regarding international and regional issues of mutual interest.

During the visit, an agreement was signed on visa-free travel for holders of diplomatic and official passports, which will be an additional incentive for intensifying contacts between officials and the business community. There was mutual interest in signing a basic treaty on the foundations of friendship and cooperation.

The minister's meeting in the Angolan capital of Luanda on January 25 was as warm as those in the previously visited states, and had a traditional African flavor. Sergey Lavrov was received by Angolan President João Lourenço and held talks with Angolan Foreign Minister Tété António, attended by Minister of Telecommunications, Information Technologies, and Social Communication Mário Oliveira and Minister of Mineral Resources, Petroleum, and Gas Pedro Azevedo.

Angola holds a special place in Russia's foreign policy priorities. Before the collapse of the USSR, active political, trade, economic, and military ties were maintained with this country.

The minister's current visit consolidated the agreements reached earlier and confirmed the parties' intent to cooperate further in various areas. Moscow and Luanda noted the solid potential of the two countries to expand and increase partnership – in particular, in the areas of prospecting, exploitation of mineral resources, agricultural production, transport, and energy.

On January 26, the minister visited the State of Eritrea. This was the first visit of this level since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1993. The meetings took place in the capital city of Asmara, a sister city of Yekaterinburg.

Even though this country is generally far from the European political battle theater, it has literally entered into a diplomatic confrontation with the West. It is telling that on March 2, 2022, Eritrea joined Russia, Belarus, Syria, and North Korea in voting against a UN General Assembly resolution demanding that Russia end its Special Military Operation in Ukraine and withdraw its forces.

The minister's visit to Eritrea, although brief, was packed and brought expected fruit. Its results were succinctly and substantively reflected during a joint press conference with Lavrov's counterpart Saleh at the airport of the Eritrean city of Massawa, a sister city of Sevastopol.

In February 2023, Lavrov also made a major trip to the Middle East and West Africa. After Iraq, the Russian foreign minister visited Mali, Mauritania, and Sudan.

It should be noted that Russian diplomatic activity in the Sahara-Sahel region has increased considerably in recent years, as evidenced by Lavrov's visit to this part of the continent.

The large-scale information campaign launched by the French media against cooperation between the official authorities of Mali and Russian private organizations specializing in providing security services is still fresh in our memory.

At a press conference in Bamako, Lavrov noted that Russia will continue to provide "the necessary support to friends on a bilateral basis not only in matters of economic, commercial, and humanitarian development, but also in improving the combat efficiency of the Malian Armed Forces and training military personnel and law-enforcement officers."

On February 8, Lavrov traveled from Mali to neighboring Mauritania. In Nouakchott, he was received by the president of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Cheikh Mohamed Ahmed Ould Ghazouani, and he held talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, and Mauritians Abroad Mohamed Salem Ould Merzoug. Considering the proximity or convergence of the approaches of Moscow and Nouakchott to key global and regional issues, mutual interest was stated in establishing closer foreign policy coordination.

Lavrov concluded his African tour on February 9 in Sudan, where he was received in Khartoum by Chairman of the Supreme (Sovereignty) Council Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Deputy Chairman Mohamed Dagalo. He held talks with Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Al-Sadiq Ali.

At a joint press conference with Acting Foreign Minister of Sudan AlSadiq Ali following the talks, Lavrov noted that “in addition to political dialogue and foreign policy coordination, we have many tasks in trade, economic, investment, and humanitarian cooperation. A number of Russian companies are working in Sudan, including in the field of mineral resources development.” Appreciation was expressed of the attention paid by the country’s leadership to their comfortable work, as well as the interest of Sudanese partners in attracting additional Russian investments.

Despite attempts by Western countries to show Russia in an unfavorable light to African partners and to preserve preeminence on the African continent at all costs, Lavrov’s visits confirmed the intention of African leaders to develop a comprehensive partnership with Russia.

The New York Times published an article titled “*South Africa and Russia Are Old Friends. A War Isn’t Going to Change That.*” It notes that South Africa has leaned toward its long-standing alliance with Moscow, causing officials in the US and Europe to erupt with indignation. And the Russian foreign minister and his South African counterpart joked and smiled together at a news press conference.

Western media outlets are not the only ones closely watching the minister’s meetings with African partners. Immediately after Lavrov’s visit, Western “experts” were sent to the same African countries to reduce the popularity of the Russian foreign minister.

Commenting on the hysterical, unhealthy behavior of Western countries, Lavrov gave the following assessment of their actions: “The fact that Western colleagues with such persistence (I would say ‘impudence’) chase around the world almost weekly, demanding condemnation of the Russian Federation, speaks of several things. First, if they are trying so hard, it means that they feel that they are in the wrong and that they need to constantly remind all states of different continents that they are to speak from anti-Russian positions. Second, if our Western colleagues applied even a thousandth of their current efforts to convince the countries of the world to speak in favor of the immediate implementation of the Minsk agreements, there would be no need for our Special Military Operation.”

It is becoming clear that the collective West is afraid of Moscow’s growing influence in Africa and cannot let go of its colonial past. The former metropolises use methods that are far from diplomatic to counter Russian initiatives, thus demonstrating their impotence to the whole world. However, the results of Lavrov’s tour show that even if Europe and the US are not ready to put up with Moscow’s growing influence on the African continent, they will not be able to destroy the strong bonds of friendship established in the postcolonial period.

Russia and Armenia: 195 Years After the Turkmenchay Treaty

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Keywords: Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, alliance, cooperation, interconnectedness of interests, peacekeepers, regional security

THE unprecedented external challenges facing Russia today mean we must focus on not only the main front of these challenges but, considering their interconnectedness, other areas that have both functional and regional dimensions.

In this context, the Caucasus area of external challenges is not the main one, but neither is it secondary. The situation unfolding in the region in recent years is highly dynamic, so it is extremely important to record its interim results as often as possible to better understand its development vector. Today's geopolitical picture of the South Caucasus is very multifaceted. It is difficult even to single out separate aspects of this complex issue, as everything is so interconnected in this relatively small region. Nevertheless, as a rule, to start putting together the whole picture, it is necessary to single out the most essential piece of the puzzle. Although small, it may bear the conceptual and ideological load of the whole picture. In this sense, contemporary Russian-Armenian political relations are an essential element of the entire set of issues related to the development of the geopolitical situation in the Caucasus, regardless of the size of Armenia's territory and population and its economic potential. Russian-Armenian relations are important, because any current result in the development of these relations is also an intermediate result of the 300-year policy of Russian state and military officials, the heroism of thousands of Russian soldiers and officers in building the Transcaucasus into the security architecture of Russia and its people, whatever form this policy might have taken over the centuries.

The dynamics of Russian-Armenian relations, presented in a fairly concise form, probably creates a picture that they are absolutely idyllic. To a certain extent, this assessment seems appropriate if the task is to provide a general description of bilateral cooperation. At the same time, an in-depth, comprehensive study of the topic often brings to light issues of concern or misunderstanding on one side or the other. Some of these issues have been successfully resolved by joint efforts, some have lost their relevance over time, and some remain unresolved, fostering rumors, speculation, and conspiracy theories. And if they are left unnoticed, ignored, or neglected, all the promising plans laid down in the key agreements, all the mutual obligations of the parties, all the mantras about alliance and strategic partnership will be appropriate at best for being voiced at diplomatic receptions, at the risk of losing all practical and ideological meaning.

THE present stage in the development of Russian-Armenian relations is connected with the coming to power in Armenia of opposition forces and the election of Nikol Pashinyan as prime minister. A number of experts link the domestic political changes in Armenia to the launch by Yerevan of what they call a complementary or multivector foreign policy.

Considering the events that led to the new government coming to power in Armenia, Moscow's general attitude toward "color revolutions," and the lack of experience in mutual relations between the new political elite of Armenia and the Russian political elite, the element of trust in bilateral relations was somewhat lost. At the same time, Moscow maintained complete political neutrality both during and after the "color revolution" in Armenia. In the end, experts believe, Pashinyan failed to build a trusting and fully productive dialogue with Moscow on account of the Armenian prime minister's frantic oscillations between East and West and his appeal to Russia to "adjust" to Armenia's new, postrevolutionary realities.

The persecution by the new Armenian authorities of their political opponents – in particular, the arrest of the second president of the republic Robert Kocharyan and the initiation of criminal investigations

into other representatives of the previous administration – have not gone unnoticed, either. Expressing his concern about this matter, Sergey Lavrov noted that these events ran counter to the vows of the new Armenian leadership to refrain from persecuting their political predecessors, and expressed hope that the situation “will still take a constructive path.”

Even though media coverage of Russian-Armenian relations noticeably deteriorated after Pashinyan came to power in Armenia, political contacts in bilateral relations have not changed significantly. High-level meetings of the leaders of Russia and Armenia have helped neutralize or partially mitigate the emerging problems in bilateral relations that have been largely caused by the impulsive decisions of the new Armenian authorities.

THE events taking place around Ukraine today far exceed the geographical limits of the Special Military Operation. And the new world order and the new architecture of Eurasian and global security in general will be built based on its outcomes. In this context, the future of Russia-Armenia relations is largely a derivative of the inevitable transformation of the system of modern international relations.

Despite all the socioeconomic problems of the post-Soviet period and the complexities of domestic and foreign policy development, Armenia survived the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, defended its agency as a significant actor in regional politics, and thus remained a natural and traditional ally of Russia. This is largely to the merit of the previous generation of Russian and Armenian politicians and diplomats, who, despite all the inconsistencies of post-Soviet realities, understood the strategic interconnectedness of the national interests of Russia and Armenia and proceeded from this when building bilateral relations and regional policy.

Today, Russia is a great power, with great possibilities. But any great country needs allies. In fact, to a certain extent, their quantity and quality determine the greatness of the country on the world stage. The multifaceted challenges facing Russia today make it obvious that it cannot rely solely on its Army and Navy in today's reality. Under the conditions of the predicted long-term turbulence in international politics, Russia needs real allies who would be able to ensure that interconnected national interests are served in important geopolitical and geoeconomic areas and at the same time free up Russian resources for their concentration in other critically important areas.

The dramatic events of 2022 should finally dispel the illusion that it is possible to unite everyone again! Some civilizational rifts – which, in the context of the national identities formed in recent decades among a number of peoples, within which Russia is, at best, a temporary fellow traveler – can no longer be bridged.

Therefore, it is important to try to preserve what is still possible around us! To try to save those who still have the strength, ability, and desire to draw closer to Russia! To preserve those who feel their spiritual unity with everything that is the pride of the Russian cultural, historical, and civilizational heritage! Only then is there hope that those who no longer see any strategic advantages in an alliance with Russia will close ranks as well.

How Russia Opened Its Consulate in Crete in 1860

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Keywords: Russian diplomacy, Dendrino, Cretan Greeks, Catholicism, Turkish officials, monetary aid, geopolitical plans of Britain and France, preservation of Orthodoxy

RUSSIA has done a lot to help Greece become an independent state, providing decisive and freely given aid to the people of Greece to save Greek lives and protect Greek interests over the centuries. This is a fact of history. Russian diplomats who served in the Greek provinces of the Ottoman Empire spared no effort to support and encourage Orthodox Christian Greeks. These diplomats did so not only in their line of duty but out of their own convictions and sympathy toward coreligionists. The work of the Russian consulate that opened in Crete in 1860 is one of the best examples of the above. Russian diplomats saved Cretan Christians from extermination, prevented their conversion to Catholicism, and thus preserved the canons of Orthodoxy in Crete.

According to information received by the Russian Foreign Ministry from various sources (mainly from illegal agents working in Turkey), by 1860, Catholicism, actively promoted among the Greeks in Crete (at that time part of the Ottoman Empire), had become a threat. About 10,000 Greeks had already adopted Catholicism, and the conversions were only gaining momentum. To stem the tide and return Cretan Greeks to the sphere of Russia's influence, St. Petersburg needed a clearer picture of what was going on and, consequently, a Russian consulate on the island.

Crete, as a strategically important island in the center of the Eastern Mediterranean and key crossing point of the Gibraltar-SuezDardanelles maritime corridors, had been of interest to Russia for centuries.

According to archival documents, except for during Russian-Turkish military conflicts, Russian diplomats were present on the island from 1784 to 1917. In 1784, Catherine II sent Karl Otto Spalchaber to the island as the first Russian consular agent. The mission functioned until the Russian-Turkish War of 1787-1791. The second stage of Russia's diplomatic presence on the island (known as the Russian vice-consulate period) began immediately after the war. For the next 50 years, Russia was represented by outside agents (all of them foreigners): from 1800 to 1827, by Austrians M. Bertrand and d'Herculle; from 1830 to 1853, by P. Toron, from the Netherlands.

After the Crimean War, to protect its interests as well as restore its lost positions and the scope and nature of its foreign policy toward Turkey, Russia needed a representative officially and fully recognized by the Ottoman Empire. To that end, the Russian Foreign Ministry decided to appoint an official diplomat as head of the official mission of Russia on the island. Spiridon Dendrino, an experienced Russian diplomat of Greek origin who had been serving as consul general in Ioannina, was chosen.

The consular flag of Russia, sanctified by the Venerable Mikhail, Bishop of Kidonia, was officially raised in Chania on April 23, 1860 (N.S.), accompanied by cannon shots. Governor-General Ismail Pasha and the diplomatic corps (the consuls of France, Austria, Greece, the US, Great Britain, and Sardinia had been warned well in advance). The event attracted the attention not only of the consuls but also of people of all classes and estates, who gathered to congratulate the Russian consul. Aware of the importance of the event, people from towns and villages came to Chania to watch the raising of the Russian flag, an event they had been eagerly awaiting. Those who lived in the island's center, far from the densely populated coastal regions, found it hard to believe that Russia was in fact accrediting its agent to the island. They sent their emissaries to Chania to know the truth but refused to believe it until they saw the Russian flag raised at the Russian mission.

Having arrived in Crete, the newly appointed consul, as instructed, assessed the situation, which turned out to be worse than expected.

Fully aware that Greeks were embracing Catholicism to avoid infringements on their rights by the local Turkish authorities, Dendrino set out to persuade the pasha to opt for moderation in relations with the Greek Orthodox population. The Russian consul established good relations with Ismail Pasha, who was

very bothered that quite a few subjects of the Ottoman Empire entrusted to his care were seeking French protection. Dendrino succeeded largely because of his clearly formulated position.

Due to the credibility Dendrino had acquired among the Turkish and Greek nobility, the pasha, when dealing with Greeks, considered what the Russian consul had to say about them. In fact, Dendrino repeatedly pointed out that the use of force against the Greek population of the island would negatively affect the positions of primarily the Turkish authorities. The pasha was probably just as interested as Dendrino in avoiding conflicts and other trouble on the island with the help of the mediation of the Russian consul between the authorities and the local Greeks.

In his reports, Dendrino insisted that Russia should provide material support for the local Greek community to supply Greeks with a strong moral platform, and he even spent his own money to that end. He especially insisted that local churches be supported with money for icons, ecclesiastical vestments, articles of worship, and church vessels. He was convinced that a considerable part of the wealth of the richest monasteries in Crete (actively plundered anyway) should be used to open schools for boys and girls in the three biggest cities – Chania, Candia, and Rethymno – which would operate on money allocated by the Russian government.

France relied on the propaganda of Catholicism to draw the island into its own sphere of influence and further consolidate its firm positions in Crete and the region. It was practically the only state with direct commercial interests in Candia. Every year it bought huge amounts of olive oil transported from Crete to Marcelles and other French ports by sea. For political reasons, France relied on its representatives to closely follow what was happening on the island.

Britain and France were convinced that they could implement their plans by destabilizing the island; possible repercussions of full-scale conflicts and the fates of the Christian population of the island were pushed aside as unimportant. Dendrino's activities from the moment of his arrival in Crete, aimed at maintaining calm and stability in the island, was not well received by a certain political party in Greece, whose views, expressed in several Greek newspapers, had an extremely detrimental effect on Crete.

Dendrino consistently supported the disagreements between the British and French representatives to exploit the geopolitical ambitions, traditional rivalry, and the lack of trust that existed between the two powers, as well as the conflict of interests on the island: Each side was trying to establish its influence on the island. Dendrino, for his part, called for the collective maintenance of order on the island.

By way of summing up the retrospective history of the Russian consulate in Crete established in 1860, we can say that the Russian presence on the island halted the massive conversion of Greeks from Orthodoxy to Catholicism, prevented numerous deaths of peaceful people, and restored Russian influence among the Greeks. They retained their contacts with Orthodox Russia and felt its support. The professionally staffed Russian consulate in Crete consolidated Russia's positions in Turkish and Greek affairs and in the Great Game between the world powers in the Eastern Mediterranean that would later unfold and continue until the disintegration of the Russian Empire. After the events of 1917 in Russia, the Russian mission in Crete was closed.

Italian World War I Veterans as an Element of the Social Basis of a Totalitarian State

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Keywords: Italy in World War I and World War II, PSI, Mussolini, squadristi, the Italian Fasces of Combat, the National Fascist Party

ANY armed conflict is a tragedy. It brings destruction, loss of life, and suffering. Therefore, in today's world, which has proclaimed the ideas of humanism as a moral guideline, any decision that runs counter to those guidelines is perceived critically. The strong emotional tinge of this perception cannot be ignored: It affects the feelings of those involved (directly or indirectly) in such grave events. At the same time, human relationships are built on more than just emotions; they are deeply rooted in history and rely on political conditions that must be considered during conflict settlement. The military phase is followed by a period of return to peaceful life in which reintegrating war veterans is a far from simple task.

The fascist regime in Italy is a vivid example of one path such a policy could take. It appeared in part due to a recurrence of the aggressive mentality of World War I. Fascism as an organized movement is associated with resentment by part of the country's population of the weak domestic and foreign policy of the government that functioned amid the growing influence of leftist ideas. For this reason, social radicalism was perceived as a tool for consolidating power structures amid social and political decline – a more or less common postwar phenomenon in other countries. In Italy, however, fascist ideas fell on more fertile ground.

Russian historian Boris Lopukhov, who writes a lot about Italian fascism, has commented that this political phenomenon was inspired by the sentiments of some war veterans who closed ranks "due to their shared hardships and sufferings, defeats and victories, grief and sorrows caused by deaths of friends." For a fuller understanding of the scope of this phenomenon, we should analyze the Italian political, economic, and social context, as well as its evolution, which began before the war.

A militant great power conscience was developing in the country associated with the desire of the elites to include Italy in the ranks of the leading powers and secure access to foreign markets. Their intentions were manifest through colonial expansion, the success of which was consolidated by the Italian-Turkish war of 1911. This energetic policy came at the cost of a lot of forces and means, and gave rise to populist statements that the country was overpopulated and, therefore, needed new territories.

The problem of war and peace divided Italians into those who preferred neutrality and remained loyal to the Triple Alliance and those who wanted their country to join the Entente on the battlefield (interventionists). There were few of the latter among members of Parliament, yet, supported by influential circles that wanted more military orders and more colonies, they managed to gather huge crowds at rallies and demonstrations and finally turned the tide in their favor.

Benito Mussolini, the future prime minister of Italy who had started his political career in the ranks of the Socialists, condemned militarism and his country's colonial policy. In 1914, after changing his views and voicing support for the war, he was excluded from the Socialists. Lev Belousov, a highly respected researcher of Italian fascism, commented that the war inspired Mussolini with its rampant violence, which he had been glorifying for a long time and which was incompatible with neutrality.

In his book *The Awakening of Italy*, Luigi Villari, an Italian diplomat of the fascist period, wrote that the declaration of war did not paralyze Italy's economy and trade. On the whole, the nation demonstrated staunchness in the face of numerous wartime deprivations. But over time, the people and the army grew increasingly weary in the absence of obvious successes at the front. Life in the trenches, long periods at the front, and inadequate supplies demoralized the army. The fighting spirit was undermined by considerable losses at the front without any impressive achievements.

After the war, Italy, one the victors, got less than had been promised. Unprecedented loss of lives and huge material losses were an even bigger disaster. The main branches of Italian industry fell into decay.

People who had fought for what they had thought would be a better life found themselves on the side of the road. Economic decline, social tension, and financial chaos were accompanied by a profound political crisis that manifested itself in the extreme instability of power structures.

From the very beginning and until they came to power, the fascists relied on armed paramilitary units (squadristi) as a tool of political struggle. The idea was prompted by soldiers returning from the front and especially by the "daredevils" (arditi): young people who had performed extremely dangerous combat missions as part of Italian Army assault units.

Demobilization significantly raised the unemployment level. Many demobilized soldiers were stung by the fact that the state was doing nothing for them who had shed blood for it. The war changed the political leanings of many of them. They had gone to the front with left-wing radical ideas but adopted extreme right-wing ones upon returning home.

Mussolini understood and shared their feelings. Mobilized in August 1915, he had had experienced life at the front firsthand.

The fascists made violence a method of political struggle. The use of weapons and firearms, group rather than individual attacks, and clashes with enemies planned in advance like military operations became more or less commonplace yet remained episodic for some time.

Intellectuals inspired rather than traumatized by the war formed a special category. As a true romantic, poet Gabriele D'Annunzio sought to present himself as a hero: He had flown on dangerous missions, been involved in risky marine operations, and had fought in the battles of the Isonzo and on the Karst Plateau. For him, the war did not end with the peace agreement.

Influential industrialists and landowners could not impose their ideas on the masses at the national level, but their financial resources allowed them to play important roles behind the political scenes. But they had no force to change the situation in real terms. They found that force in the squadristi, whom they hired to guard their property. In fact, their functions were much wider; they were used, in particular, to settle disagreements with the Socialist and Catholic movements. Although the fascist units were confronted by organized and close-knit proletarian groups in the cities, their arbitrariness had a much broader scope in the countryside.

Mussolini's personal popularity was a huge asset. He consolidated it through real acts and gradually gave power to "moderate" fascists who did not approve of the violence of the *rasas*, thus hoping to bring order to the ranks of his supporters and transform them into a "great party," a firm foundation of his future government.

After coming to power, the fascists needed to discipline the squadristi: Some of their paramilitary units continued their independent actions that increased tension in the country.

As soon as the Duce was appointed prime minister, some of the *rasas* did not hesitate to express their displeasure with the new government. They challenged it and insisted that it had been thanks to their efforts that the country had become free from the liberal state, thus putting Mussolini's leadership in doubt. At this stage, acting together with law enforcement, it was still possible to get rid of unchecked aggressive and nonestablishment elements. But the new prime minister knew that violence, which had played a decisive role in his coming to power, would be needed for him to remain at the head of the government coalition.

The first period of their rule, which the fascists called the dictatorship over the old liberal state, was guaranteed in part by the MVSN. This was not yet a totalitarian state, which appeared somewhat later, in the mid-1920s. Nevertheless, the foundations for the repressive apparatus, a key institution of a totalitarian state, had been set up.

We can say that Mussolini relied on war veterans as the main driving force that brought him to power. His politics and philosophy relied on the use of violence to suppress reason, freedom, and law. At the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (1932), organized to mark the 10th anniversary of the March on Rome, the public demonstrated a lot of interest in the history of the squadristi. Blackshirts organized pickets and paid honor to “heroes” fallen in revolutionary struggle. In fact, fascism would have been hardly able to pave the road to power and keep it without the physical strength of this highly specific contingent, the financial support of the extremely reactionary segment of the middle class, and the ingratiating of the ruling structures.

Sergey Nikolayevich Lebedev Turns 75

DEAR Sergey Nikolayevich [Lebedev]!

The editors of International Affairs sincerely and wholeheartedly congratulate you on your 75th birthday!

You are known in the country and the world as a great Russian politician who has consistently defended the interests of our Motherland while serving as head of the Foreign Intelligence Service of Russia and, before that, working abroad for many years. The rank of Army General and the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary awarded to you are an assessment of your undisputed merits.

Today, as secretary general of the Commonwealth of Independent States, you are competently and professionally working to strengthen the Commonwealth in all aspects. Largely thanks to your efforts and initiatives, the CIS continues to develop dynamically, providing conditions for the equal and mutually beneficial cooperation of member countries.

We wish you and your family health, many happy sunny days, and many years of service to the Fatherland!

Vladimir Churov: Memory in the Context of the Diplomacy and Paradiplomacy of the Last 30 Years

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Keywords: Vladimir Churov, the Baltic states, Estonia

VLADIMIR Yevgenyevich Churov passed away on March 22, 2023. The editorial board of International Affairs expresses its sincere condolences to the family and friends of Vladimir Yevgenyevich. We will remember him as an energetic politician who made a significant contribution to the creation and development of a new Russia, a researcher who opened new pages in the history of our great Motherland, a patriot who loved Russia selflessly. We mourn him.

The work in St. Petersburg was an important stage in Vladimir Yevgenyevich's life. Establishing partnership relations between Russia and the EU was initially understood by all employees of the Committee on Foreign Relations as a complex process requiring novel approaches and solutions. Certain success was achieved in paradiplomacy, based on a high degree of mutual interest in cooperation and a

sufficiently effective mechanism of interaction at the regional level, where “national” political constraints are absent or mitigated.

Churov’s talents were manifested during preparations for the anniversary of the founding of St. Petersburg in 2003. Through Churov’s efforts, the so-called “European Route” was created, which connected historical sites of St. Petersburg that were related to Europeans – immigrants of countries that are presently members of the EU. “The Route” was supported by the EU both organizationally and financially.

While working in St. Petersburg, Vladimir Yevgenyevich did a lot for the establishment of the Baltic House Theater-Festival. At the theater, he was known as the domovoy, or house spirit, of the Baltic House. The term “soft power” did not exist back then, but Vladimir Yevgenyevich’s intuition led him to practical action in this area.

The years 2022-2023 saw the rekindling of a rather old discussion, I would say dispute, between Euro-optimists and Euro-pessimists. Strictly speaking, this dispute has been going on for over 30 years. I would like to note that Vladimir Yevgenyevich, like his older and younger colleagues, made the difficult transition from Euro-optimism to Euro-pessimism – i.e., he has always maintained the position of realism.

In the first 15 years of the new Russia, our optimism was based on the very real approaches of the newly emerging EU to cooperation with Russia. The Northern Dimension policy, which is of particular relevance to St. Petersburg, was also an important contribution to the optimists’ treasury. The participation of an EU mission in celebrations of the 300th anniversary of St. Petersburg, a clearly European city, was the climax of hopes for cooperation with the EU – and on equal terms. The following 20 years showed that our optimism was in vain, but were we the ones who changed? In my opinion, it was Europe.

A new period in Churov’s life is associated with his relocation to Moscow after his election in late 2003 as a deputy to the State Duma from the LDPR. In the State Duma, he was appointed deputy chairman of the Committee for CIS Affairs and Liaison with Compatriots, and in 2007, he was delegated to the Central Electoral Commission and elected its chairman. I had the honor to be an official assistant to Vladimir Yevgenyevich during this period and I testify that many approaches to cooperation with the CIS countries and compatriots turned out to be popular with Rossotrudnichestvo [Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation] and the Russian Foreign Ministry. Unfortunately, no common understanding of the problem of compatriots has been reached yet.

Vladimir Churov served two full terms, until March 2016, as chairman of the Central Electoral Commission and then moved on to work at the Foreign Ministry after having been awarded the rank of ambassador at large and then ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary by presidential decrees. Vladimir Yevgenyevich did not perceive his work at the ministry as a retirement sinecure; he carried out complex assignments of deputy foreign ministers and Sergey Lavrov himself. Being an experienced official and diplomat, Vladimir Yevgenyevich never disclosed the essence of his commissions, and only by the questions posed to me by my “teacher” could their political and diplomatic content be surmised.

Vladimir Yevgenyevich was a natural writer. Churov penned children’s popular science books on nautical themes Tales of John Silver and Tales of the Old Street Sweeper, published in Soviet times. Fundamental books on military history and historical geography came later. In 2005, The Secret of the Four Generals was published. Later publications include Journey with Artillery Guards Major General Vladimir Iosifovich Brezhnev From Budapest to Vienna (2010), The Basket with Old Theater Programs (2011), Love of Medals (magazine version in 2013), Journey to Morocco with Anastas Ivanovich Mikoyan (2015), University Meetings (2015), Globalization. International Humanitarian Standards. Russia’s Sovereignty

(2015, co-authored by B.C. Ebzeyev), The White General's Awards (2018), A Treatise on the Benefits of Marine Sciences (2020), Two Stories about Skobelev (2020), and Historical Notes of an Ambassador-at-Large (2020). Vladimir Yevgenyevich also authored several academic articles in leading Russian journals.

The Motherland commended Churov's public and diplomatic service; he was given the Order "For Merit to the Fatherland" Fourth Class, the Order of Alexander Nevsky, the Order of Friendship, the Badge of Honor "For Excellent Service. 20 Years," medals, and departmental awards. He was awarded the Imperial Order of St. Anna Second Class and the Imperial Order of St. Vladimir Third and Fourth Classes, and the 400 Years of the Romanov House Medal.

The memory of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador V.E. Churov should be preserved in our diplomatic and expert work.

Anastasia Romanova: The First Russian Tsaritsa

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Keywords: Archimandrite Makary, P.Yu. Zakharin-Koshka, gold embroidery workshop, Kazan campaign, poisoning of tsaritsa

THE scholarly publication under review [Archimandrite Makary (Veretennikov). *Pervaya russkaya tsaritsa* [The First Russian Tsaritsa]. Sergiyev Posad: MDA, 2022, 124 pp.] is dedicated to the life of the first Russian tsaritsa, the wife of Tsar Ivan Grozny [the Terrible], Anastasia Romanovna, and is the culmination of years of research by Archimandrite Makary (Veretennikov), a resident at the Svyato-Troitskaya Sergiyeva Lavra [Holy Trinity Monastery named for Sergius of Radonezh], a scholar of the history of the Russian church. He has authored many works on Canon law, liturgy, biographies of important figures in the church, and lives of the saints. The author has more than 900 publications to his name.

The unique quality of this work is that its author is both a professional historian and a member of the clergy. Thus, Tsaritsa Anastasia Romanovna is presented by him not merely as an historical figure, but a spiritual one. Toward the end of his work, the author describes the tsaritsa's righteous life and considers the possibility that she met a martyr's death (by poisoning), leading us to contemplate the possibility of her ecclesiastical canonization.

It should be noted that this work by Father Makary is essentially the first scholarly biography of Tsaritsa Anastasia. For this reason alone, it holds special value for historians and, for that matter, all people who love their native history. This book is based on a rich array of primary sources, covering practically all available works that in one way or another concern not just the tsaritsa's life, but her times as well.

Of course, Anastasia Romanovna went down in history mainly as the spouse of Tsar Ivan IV Vasilyevich, the most major Russian statesman of the 16th century.

Tsaritsa Anastasia Romanovna and Metropolitan [of Moscow and all Rus] Macarius were able to impress on the young tsar that he must cease such actions and assume the role of the people's champion and judge. After an orphaned childhood and a wild youth, Tsar Ivan had finally found familial happiness. Anastasia tenderly loved him and understood him well. With a soft and caressing voice, she could bring him to his senses, steering him away from rash, thoughtless, and often inhuman acts.

The Englishman Sir Jerome Horsey, who was in Moscow at that time, wrote about Anastasia: "The Queen was so wise, virtuous, pious and influential that all who served her revered and loved her. [Ivan] being young and riotous, she ruled him with admirable affability and wisdom."

Archimandrite Makary (Veretennikov) is the first to examine the relationship between Ivan Grozny and Anastasia Romanovna through the lens of the special significance of their marriage, instead of merely focusing on the personality of her royal spouse. Archimandrite Makary notes that Tsaritsa Anastasia was not of royal blood; her marriage to the Tsar was based on a deep mutual love, not on political or dynastic advantage. Their union was not just a pivotal event in their lives, but the first sacral act of state to be solemnized by a sermon pronounced before the young newlyweds by Metropolitan Macarius.

Thus, Ivan Grozny became the first Russian sovereign to break with class tradition when he married.

Nevertheless, the tsaritsa's insufficiently illustrious background caused distress among the princes, who would call her a slave. Although in the 16th century there was no such concept, in the mentality of that society this marriage was seen by many as morganatic. Many think that this was the reason behind the tsaritsa's lack of acceptance by many of the Russian noble families of the time. It is conceivable that this lack of acceptance also led to her poisoning.

The author devotes attention to the children born of the tsar and tsaritsa. The issue of the male progeny of Ivan Grozny's first marriage is of particular interest. Almost all of them, except for the future sovereign Feodor Ivanovich, died under mysterious circumstances and, certainly, before their time.

The second son, Prince Ivan Ivanovich, by all accounts was poisoned. Granted, "agents of Western influence" (to use modern parlance) – i.e, the papal legate Antonio Possevino and the French envoy to the Russian court Jacques Margeret – attributed the violent death of the young tsar to the hand of his father, Ivan Grozny.

The beginning of Ivan Vasilyevich's campaign against the Kazan Khanate was greeted by the tsaritsa "with enormous grief, weeping bitterly." The sovereign bid parting words to his wife in typical fashion: "I, my honored wife, with hope in the Almighty and Most Merciful, and All-Generous and Human-Loving God, do dare and wish to go against these wicked barbarians and wish to suffer for the Orthodox faith and for the holy churches, not only to the point of blood, but to the last breath. For it is sweet to die for the Orthodox faith; it is not death to suffer for Christ, it is life eternal." As he left for the Kazan campaign, Ivan permitted his wife to grant mercy to the disgraced and "to set the prisoners free."

After Ivan's departure, the tsaritsa, according to a chronicler, "returned to her palace like a swallow to her nest," and announced that she would not leave her quarters until her husband returned and would pray for his health.

The tsaritsa sent the sovereign letters that were full of love and affection, and the tsar would answer in kind as often as possible.

A special place in this monograph is devoted to the tsaritsa's piety, her care and love for the Christian Church. Too little is known about this part of Anastasia Romanovna's life, which is told about in a very interesting chapter: "The Tsaritsa's Craft Room." Here, the empress led a cohort of seamstresses. The work carried out by this group was an important daily activity for Anastasia from the outset of her rule.

The tsaritsa, in spite of her youth, was a diligent housekeeper. It was by her decree that the Feed House was restored and filled with produce, and several other special structures were built: a Dry Goods House for storing grain, a Bread House for baking products from flour, a Kitchen for preparing various dishes, and a Tavern for drinks. All of these structures were erected near the palace, but were separated from the main Kremlin territory by a wall.

In general, Ivan Grozny had a rather unique relationship with his wife. For example, when embarking on the first campaign to Kazan in December 1547, he brought Anastasia Romanovna with him, thereby making her the first tsaritsa to take part in a military campaign. Granted, it was not fully implemented, due to a thaw and melting ice around Nizhny Novgorod. The tsaritsa seemed to be of some help to her husband in matters of foreign affairs as well.

Soon after his return from the Kazan campaign, the tsar became gravely ill and was close to death. The princes and boyars gathered around him entered a dispute about transferring the crown to the tsar's cousin, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, bypassing his son and heir, the Tsarevich Dimitry. This controversy reflected the antagonism felt by the nobility toward Tsaritsa Anastasia, because under the law she should have been the one to become ruler while her son was still a minor. Even those of the tsar's inner circle, Silvestr and Adashev, favored the transfer of power to Vladimir Andreyevich. But Ivan Grozny did not die; after he regained his health, he justifiably harbored suspicions against the boyars and others who had spoken out against his wife and son. Ivan saw this as blatant treachery against his royal line, and he especially rose to the defense of Anastasia.

A separate chapter of this monograph is devoted to the passing and posthumous veneration of Tsaritsa Anastasia. An examination of her skeletal remains and hair samples in 1963 established that, just as in the bones and hair of Tsar Ivan Grozny and their son Ivan Ivanovich, there was a level of mercury that far exceeded the maximum allowable amount for a human body, particularly in her braids.

Therefore, Tsar Ivan Vasilyevich's certainty that his wife was poisoned cannot be categorically disregarded today. In his speech of repentance before the [Zemsky] Sobor, when requesting permission to enter into a fourth marriage, Ivan IV said that he had lived lovingly with Anastasia for thirteen and a half years, but that "through inimical calumny and evil people's sorcery and poisoning, Tsaritsa Anastasia was taken."

In our opinion, this monograph by Archimandrite Makary (Veretennikov) dedicated to the first Russian tsaritsa is unique in many ways. Its significance is indisputable. The author has managed to not only paint a portrait of an exceptional personality about whom quite little was known before now, but also to reveal her rich spiritual side. He has, in essence, returned to Russia one of its most lovely daughters.

The True History of Ukraine

Keywords: Monograph A History of Ukraine, common history, the destruction of memory

THE monograph *A History of Ukraine* is a relevant and comprehensive work of scholarship based on an analysis of historical facts; events; causeeffect relationships between them; the activities of historical actors; and the political, social, economic, and cultural development of territories from the perspective of the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians. It is this position, which stands in opposition to active attempts to rewrite history and artificially divide and contrast the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, that corresponds to an objective and unbiased analysis of our common history.

The history of Ukraine is seen as an integral part of Russian history, and the lands that became part of Ukraine in 1991 are seen as the southwestern part of the Russian lands. This is how these territories have been identified for centuries in Russia itself and beyond.

The current widespread attempts by Western countries and the current Kiev regime to present Ukraine as an anti-Russian state that has existed for centuries have no historical or scholarly basis.

This position, expressed consistently throughout the monograph, resonates with the approach of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Of course, the period of Polish-Lithuanian rule could not pass without leaving a mark. Certain specific features emerged in the language and traditions of Russians in Southwestern Rus. The linguistic differences are not substantial, however. In addition, other parts of the Russian land had their dialects at different times. The same can be said of other peoples of Europe and Asia, where linguistic differences are often greater (for example, between the inhabitants of northern and southern China).

Throughout the entire period of Polish-Lithuanian occupation, an absolute part of the population and the overwhelming part of the elites of Southwestern Russia sought unification with Russia. This process began in 1503, when the lands of the former Chernigov Principality were reincorporated back into Rus. Most of the reunification took place in the 17th and 18th centuries and was completed in the 20th century. The fact that what was going on was a reunification, the gathering of Russian lands, was well understood in Russia back then.

Until the beginning of the 20th century, the people inhabiting these territories were considered all over the world to be part of the Russian people. And not only representatives of the Russian authorities but also the vast majority of the inhabitants of these lands were sure of this.

From the very start, Ukraine, which emerged as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and its authorities began to support Ukrainian nationalism. Initially, their main goal was to show that "Ukraine is not Russia" (that was the name of a book published by the second president of the country, Leonid Kuchma). Back then, history and ideology served as the main "battlefield." After the illegal coup in Kiev and the beginning of the Ukrainian civil war, the historical and ideological "battlefield" turned into a real one, with many thousands killed and tortured by the Kiev regime.

The strength of *A History of Ukraine* is its detailed analysis and debunking of myths produced in recent years by Ukrainian historians, politicians, and state officials on an industrial scale that have no basis in historical fact. The authors uncover the origins and causes of these myths, expose the mechanisms of their formation, and convincingly demonstrate the scientific inconsistency of Ukrainian pseudo-historical myth-making. Among the most well-known myths critically analyzed on the pages of the monograph are the concept of "Ukraine-Rus," the myths about "the Cossack state," "the Baturyn Massacre," "the Holodomor," "the Soviet-German war," and "the struggle of the OUN and UPA against the Nazis."

An important component of this scientific work is a historical analysis of foreign policy processes and the involvement of the territories of Southwestern Russia in these processes. The authors arrive at the substantiated and sound conclusion that for a considerable period of Russia's existence, its southwestern lands have been the object of its western neighbors' claims. As a consequence of aggressive actions by European countries, this territory became an arena of bloody wars. The resource-rich land was a coveted dream of many conquerors.

The monograph examines the causes and consequences of the occupation of the "peripheral" Russian lands by Lithuanian, Polish, Turkish, Austrian, and German aggressors, as well as the negative impact of the occupation regime on the political, economic, and sociocultural development of Southwestern Russia. The authors of the monograph pay close attention to the activities of collaborators and traitors – from Ivan Mazepa and Philip Orlik to Simon Petlyura, Yevgeny Konovalts, Stepan Bandera, and Roman Shukhevich – and the motives and outcomes of their betrayal for the people of Southwestern Russia.

One undoubted merit of the work is its comprehensive study of the history of Carpathian Rus in its various periods, including during its occupation by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Austria-Hungary, and its comparison of the social, economic, and cultural development of the territories of

Southwestern Russia, located within the Russian state, and that of the occupied lands of Carpathian Rus and Galicia.

The authors of the book have succeeded in revealing the causes, driving forces, and key factors, ideas, and consequences of the emergence of “political Ukrainism,” of the emergence and development of Ukrainian Nazism, its ideological similarity and closeness to Nazi ideologies, German National Socialism, and Italian Fascism. The book examines numerous instances of crimes committed by Ukrainian nationalists during the interwar period, the Great Patriotic War, and the postwar period, as well as crimes committed during the Ukrainian civil war that began in 2014.

This book is the first of its kind in the modern national literature and is a comprehensive and systematic presentation of the history of the lands that became part of Ukraine after 1991 and the peculiarities of their political, economic, social, and cultural development. The book can be of benefit to university students, scholars of history, and a wide range of readers. It prompts contemplation of the causes and consequences of certain actions, the patterns of historical development, and the geopolitical component of the history of Southwestern Russia, which for centuries was the object of Western expansion and its struggle against Russia.

Armen Oganessian Receives “Golden Pen of Russia” Award

Armen Oganessian, editor-in-chief of International Affairs, was awarded the Golden Pen of Russia award for the second time in the “journalism” category.

The award, the most prestigious among Russian journalists, was established by the Russian Union of Journalists and is awarded annually for outstanding professional achievements; long-term work in the national press, on radio and on television; and for active citizenship.