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Summary

“The West Wants to Eliminate Our Country as a Significant Geopolitical Competitor”

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Keywords: confrontation between Russia and the West, Ukraine as a US puppet, Russia-Africa summit, path to cooperation with the EAEU and the CSTO

I have to agree that the concept of Western dominance promoted by the US and the countries in subjection to it does not imply the harmonious development of all mankind. On the contrary, we have to deal with the constant pursuit of military-political and financial-economic expansion by the Western minority.

Today, few people deny that the Americans and their allies are attempting to slow down or even reverse the natural process of evolution in international relations in the context of the formation of a multipolar system. They deem it acceptable to bend the entire world to fit their needs through unqualified, extralegal methods.

The political and economic establishment in Europe and the US reasonably fears that the transition to a multipolar system is associated with serious geopolitical and economic losses and the final breakdown of globalization in its current form that has been tailored to fit the West. First of all, they are frightened by the prospect of losing the opportunity to parasitize the rest of the world, securing faster economic growth for themselves at the expense of others.

Considering all this, contemporary Russia envisions its mission as upholding the global balance of interests and constructing a fairer framework for international relations. Our perspectives are systematically outlined in the new version of the Foreign Policy Concept approved by Russian President Vladimir Putin on March 31, 2023. We firmly believe that creating an environment for the peaceful and progressive advancement of humanity based on a unifying agenda should stand as a universal priority. A pivotal objective in this area is to revive the capacity of the UN to assume a central role in harmonizing the interests of its member states.

It is important to understand that Russia's state nuclear deterrence policy is solely defensive. It is directed at maintaining the potential of nuclear forces at the minimum level required to guarantee the protection of the state's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to prevent aggression against Russia and its allies.

In the context of deterrence, the possession of nuclear weapons is currently the only feasible response to certain significant external threats to our country's security. The development of the situation around Ukraine confirmed the validity of our concerns.

We must remind our adversaries about the presence of great military and political risks and send them sobering signals.

I want to emphasize that our country is fully committed to the principle of the impermissibility of nuclear war and proceeds from the fact that such a war cannot be won.

Western countries have literally exploded after a couple of decades of pretending to be civilized and reasonable partners on the international stage. However, there is a positive side to this situation. The Global Majority has had an opportunity to see the true face of those who have all but claimed a monopoly on defining “universal values.”

Western capitals openly admitted that they did not plan to implement the Minsk agreements that were designed to resolve the conflict in Ukraine. In fact, they were just stalling for time to prepare for a military scenario, pumping Kiev up with weapons.

I think that it is important to understand the main point: The West aims to eliminate our country as a significant geopolitical competitor.

Western leaders repeat like a mantra that they will continue to help Kiev for as long as needed. Of course, to fight to the last Ukrainian is their choice, as well as the decision of Zelensky’s clique. However, historically, the US has not had the best track record in supporting its allies.

The West should also realize something else: Russia will protect its people and its core interests by all means.

It is impossible to demand that we agree to the infringement of our fundamental security interests and continued abuse against Russians and Russian-speaking people on [Russia’s] new territories and on land controlled by the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Our approach is consistent and completely transparent. We have always said that we are ready for meaningful dialogue, and we spent many years and much effort trying to get Kiev to implement the Minsk agreements.

Thus, prospects for negotiations between Russia and the West are, unfortunately, not discernible at the moment. Additionally, the Western sponsors are consistently urging the Kiev regime to escalate tensions.

The second Russia-Africa summit, held in St. Petersburg in July, confirmed that Moscow and African countries are firmly committed to cooperation and to expanding the scope of the partnership. It also revealed the common ideological basis for our interaction in the form of traditional spiritual and moral values. Despite enormous pressure from the West, 48 official delegations and representatives of five leading regional integration associations attended the meeting.

The summit opened new prospects for enhancing Russian-African cooperation in various fields. In particular, they pertain to investments, regional economic integration, agriculture, energy, infrastructure construction, subsoil use, information and communication technologies, health care, and education.

Special mention should be made of our pilot project to establish a Russian industrial zone in Egypt intended to serve as a platform for producing and exporting goods to other countries in the region while utilizing the opportunities of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Our partners in the EAEU and the CSTO are under enormous pressure from unfriendly states. Visits by high-ranking officials from Western capitals to hold “consultations” on “opposing the evasion” of illegitimate anti-Russian sanctions have become a regular occurrence. To put it plainly, we see here efforts to coerce our allies by threats and blackmail into abandoning entirely legal cooperation with Russia.

The EAEU market accounts for up to 40% of the foreign trade of the Central Asian states. More than 10,000 Russian and joint ventures operate in the Central Asian region, creating about 900,000 jobs. In

general, Eurasian integration serves as a guarantee of maintaining the economic stability of the EAEU member states and improving the well-being of their citizens.

The same assertion can also be fully made with respect to the CSTO. The foundation of our interaction within this organization rests on the principles of equality and consideration of the interests of all its member states.

As a result, naturally, we expect that, while forging connections with third countries and associations, our allies in the EAEU and the CSTO will avoid actions that run counter to their obligations within these two organizations. At the same time, it is not our practice to lecture other states on “how they should live” or dictate how and with whom to establish relations. Russia does not prevent any of our neighbors and partners from interacting with whomever they choose, but we consistently request that our legitimate interests be considered. I believe they are heeding our message.

Incivility in Diplomacy as a Reflection of the Crisis in Foreign Policy Culture

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Keywords: Russia-NATO, EU, OSCE, Ukraine, New START

THE 2020s have been characterized by a profound crisis of confidence in international relations and world politics manifested in the use of political, psychological, and rhetorical methods and techniques that are atypical of traditional diplomatic practices and do not correspond to generally recognized norms of diplomatic protocol.

The year 2020, initially marked by an unprecedented level of cooperation and mutual assistance between states in combating the spread of the novel coronavirus infection, was darkened by biased political assessments uttered by most Western leaders following the results of the national vote to approve amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation held in the summer of the same year. By the end of the year, the destructive tone of our foreign “partners” reached its emotional peak due to the investigation into the so-called “Navalny case” regarding his alleged poisoning.

In early 2021, after the voluntary return of the person in question and his expected arrest on numerous criminal charges in Russia, US President Joe Biden, in his bumbling response to a provocative question from a journalist, made it clear that he was accusing Russian President Vladimir Putin of an assassination attempt against Navalny. In March 2022, the American leader called his Russian colleague a war criminal – a statement that he later repeated.

Throughout 2021, Russia’s position, its role in intra-Ukrainian reconciliation, and its approach to the advisability of continuing this work in the Normandy Format were deliberately distorted. To put an end to these speculations, the Russian Foreign Ministry decided to open primary sources to public scrutiny and publish the diplomatic correspondence between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his German and French counterparts, Heiko Maas and Jean-Yves Le Drian. Simultaneously, the Russian foreign minister asserted his belief that his European counterparts would recognize the necessity of such an unconventional move. He stressed that this was about conveying the reality to the global community about who truly abides by international legal obligations, and how these obligations, agreed upon at the highest levels, are fulfilled.

In early 2022, Lavrov publicly announced that he had sent a message on the practical implementation of the principle of equal and indivisible security by Western countries, personally addressed to the foreign ministers of 37 states of Europe and North America. This message particularly emphasized that Moscow was expecting a detailed response from them in their national capacity. However, the received responses contained no substantive reaction to the directly posed question.

The responses to these proposals (a separate one from the US and collective responses from NATO and the EU) testify to significant differences in the understanding of the principle of equal and indivisible security, which is fundamental to the entire Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

Western countries continue to pick and choose from it only the elements they need, as if it was a restaurant menu – namely, the right of states to freely choose alliances to ensure their security exclusively.

Tellingly, in their statements asserting their readiness to develop dialogue on Europe's security contours, representatives of the West carefully avoid references to the Istanbul Charter and the Astana Declaration. They cite only earlier OSCE documents, most often the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe, which does not contain the now- "inconvenient" obligation not to strengthen the security of one's own state at the expense of others.

The essence of the indivisible security guarantees lies in the fact that security exists for either everybody or nobody at all. And, as stipulated in the Istanbul Charter, every OSCE state has an equal right to security – not just NATO and EU members, who interpret this right as a privilege reserved exclusively for them.

Speaking about the current situation in Europe, the US and NATO constantly call for "de-escalation" and urge Russia to "choose the path of diplomacy." However, the most important acts – the documents of the summits in Istanbul and Astana – are the literal result of diplomatic work. The fact that the West is now openly trying to unilaterally revise these diplomatic achievements of all OSCE countries in its favor is deeply alarming.

The loss of territorial integrity by the Ukrainian state is a result of the illegitimate political processes that have taken place within the country.

If Ukraine is admitted to NATO, there will be a real threat that the regime in Kiev will try to "return" Crimea and Novorossiia by force, drawing the US and its allies under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty into a direct armed conflict with Russia, with all ensuing consequences.

Washington touches upon the indivisible security concept only in passing, reducing it to the right of states "to freely choose or change the means of ensuring their security, including treaties of alliance." However, this freedom is not absolute and is only half of the conceptual formula enshrined in the Charter for European Security. Its second part requires not "strengthening one's security at the expense of the security of other states" in the exercise of this right.

THESE examples of foreign relations and strategic dialogue, unexpectedly turned inside out, show how low the culture of Western diplomacy has sunk in recent years. A simple unscheduled call, an impromptu meeting "on the sidelines," "on the fly," or "in the fields," which used to be a common occurrence, now prompts speculation about whether it is a breakthrough or a failure, and whether there is any hope for the restoration of communication between the parties.

Extremely aggressive expressions, statements, and actions are being used against Russia. They are primarily expressed as so-called "cancel culture," unilateral restrictions, and unprecedented sanctions, and demonstrate that the "golden billion" has truly decided that an undeclared, hybrid war is being waged, and it is a life-and-death struggle.

Emerging Contours of a New, Just World

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Keywords: breakup of the Eastern bloc, breakup of the Soviet Union, referendum on the status of Crimea, Munich Security Conference, South Ossetia, conflict in Ukraine, Western political and military support for Kiev, dialogue

THIRTY-TWO years ago, an event took place that American political scientist Francis Fukuyama claimed marked the “end of history.” It was argued that the disappearance of the Soviet Union from the world political scene and the end of the Soviet socialist project meant that there was no socioeconomic alternative to a liberal capitalist world order – a system that puts the individual above society and private business above national interests and gives overconsumption priority over progress.

In the wake of all this and with political support from their governments, British, German, French, and American companies received unlimited sway over a market representing nearly 420 million people, of whom 290 million represented the total population of former Soviet republics and the other 130 million the population of former Eastern bloc countries.

But the Eastern bloc countries and ex-Soviet republics were not the only nations harmed by the termination of the Soviet project. Countries – primarily in Africa and South America – that had looked to the USSR for support were left powerless against the increasing hegemony of the US and its European satellites.

Russia shared this plight. We quickly became a target of some of the best colonial practices. The most glaring of these included so-called production sharing agreements (PSAs) – contracts that de facto vested so-called foreign investors with control of Russian resource extraction sites, mainly oil and gas fields. Shell, ExxonMobil, and Mitsui were developing some of Russia’s richest oil fields under PSAs. PSAs were abolished only in 2004.

The March 2014 referendum on the status of Crimea shocked the Western political establishment. And no wonder: Somebody dared to disagree – justifiably! – with the Western model for global development. At that time, we did not know the phrase “rules-based order”; it came into being later, and we will get back to it.

The reason for developments that culminated in the Crimea referendum was the fact that the West, by brutally trampling on all agreements and throwing away whatever trust it enjoyed, tried to deprive Russia of its right to have national interests and defend its people and allies. Russia has always been loyal to its tradition of unflinchingly honoring its international commitments and working for international peace and harmony, but not to the detriment of our basic national interests.

The US and its satellites have weaponized global economic infrastructure – payment systems, financial instruments, financial guarantees, etc. In the past, they claimed that this infrastructure would be outside political influences in what they predicted would be a new, integrated world. Over the past year and a half, it has become obvious that none of those economic infrastructure elements can be used as a weapon more than once, and it only makes sense to use them if there is a guarantee of success.

The Western system is obviously falling apart, and this is a sign that the West-centric world is heading toward collapse. The US has used all its political resources to hastily form a coalition of countries that shares its ideology and has made them bear the huge burden of supporting anti-Russian military, political, and economic efforts. To meet US demands, Europe continues to invest in the Ukraine project, mercilessly burning away its post-World War II accumulations in the furnace of the conflict.

Today, more and more countries in key regions of the world are asserting their identities and becoming aware of their interests and development potential.

The West's main problem in its relations with Russia is that, in the days when it was still called the Soviet Union, our country brought down the global colonial system. Though weaker than the West, it showed the rest of the world another path – a path of justice, respect for oneself and others, and rejection of hegemony. A path to genuine power. The West could not forgive us for that then, nor can it today.

It will be Russia's main task after the end of the violent phase of the confrontation to be instrumental in building a multipolar world, a world in which no country or political bloc would have the right to seek well-being for itself at the expense of others.

Of course, our confrontation with the West will not result in the collapse of liberal ideology, the downfall of the US, the dissolution of the EU, or the disbandment of NATO. We should not have any illusions. The outcome will be global balance. The US and its satellites will have to curb appetites that they have satisfied by exploiting other countries, Europe will have to deal on its own with the numerous problems caused by the ignorance of its current bureaucrats, while seven-eighths of humankind will become truly independent and will not have to build its future into the system of economic and social relations that the "golden billion" countries are trying to force on the rest of the world.

Strategies Race Between Russia and the West: An Adaptability Test?

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Keywords: Russia, West, Ukraine, strategic race, geopolitical revolution

THERE is no longer any doubt that the Western blitzkrieg in Ukraine has failed phenomenally. The seven-year rearmament of Ukraine, comparable to the appeasement policy toward Nazi Germany (in order to provide it with sufficient military resources for an attack on the USSR), combined with a sharp increase in sanctions-based pressure on Moscow (all its impact came from the initial sanctions packages) could not bring down the Russian economy in the first 18 to 24 months of the SMO [Special Military Operation]. Thus, they were unable to destabilize the domestic political situation in the country or create conditions for "regime change" and the subsequent dismemberment of the country as a form of the "final solution" to the Russian question. Inflicting a "battlefield defeat" on Russia last summer and autumn also proved impossible.

THE time we gained by capturing Mariupol, Severodonetsk, and now Artemovsk was of significant importance. Evidently, this latest development will play a pivotal role in the overall strategic situation in Ukraine. On the Russian side, as seen many times in the history of our relations with the West, exchanging time for space is a crucial resource for achieving strategic success, aligning with a deeper, and now arguably cultural and civilizational tradition, where the West frequently trades space for time. This phenomenon is seemingly also acknowledged in Western capitals, where the strategy is to push for a negotiated settlement with us by the end of the year, beginning with a ceasefire.

The zombification of the Ukrainian population, which predominantly believes in the fantasy of a “battlefield victory” over Russia and its own racial superiority – using as proof the primitive rural culture (with all due respect, Ukrainian motifs occupy a notable place in music school textbooks) and the products of a narrow provincial mindset entwined with a wildly absurd mythology that requires no evidence due to its inherent absurdity – could not have gone so far without faith in the omnipotence of America seen as capable of performing miracles.

It is essential to acknowledge that the matter of contemporary Ukrainian mythology is far from straightforward, if we recall Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, where he elaborates on the mechanics of artificially crafting national identity.

The story of the recasting of Orthodox Rusyns as Ukrainians in Galicia – then part of Austria-Hungary – on the eve of World War I and of their subsequent genocide during the war completes the picture of the origins and significance of contemporary Russophobia in Ukraine.

The West, both in Ukraine and through Ukraine, is now resurrecting a Europe reminiscent of the interwar era, marked by aggressive nationalism and conflict. Thus, there are valid reasons to talk about the Weimarization of the West and about Ukraine as a part of this process.

The July NATO summit in Vilnius presented a markedly, obscenely simplified reality that can no longer be concealed from the Ukrainian population: Victory over Russia on the battlefield is Kiev’s only path to membership in the alliance; meanwhile, the West will furnish everything required to attain that victory. No “brotherhood in arms,” on which Ukrainian propaganda was counting.

Presently, American analysts are pondering another question: When will Russia, having ceded the initiative for escalating the conflict to Washington, redress the accumulated escalation imbalance with the West? Allegedly, our delay is inadvertently fostering further escalation with the US. This matter pertains not just to Ukraine, but centers on Russia’s security vis-à-vis the West, a matter that currently cannot be resolved through bilateral agreements due to profound mutual distrust.

If we accept that NATO has contingency plans for a “major war” in Europe, the question becomes even more pressing: How can we, as well as Europe as a whole, avoid being drawn into a protracted war of attrition? Experience has taught us that we must make the first move to retain our upper hand in the extended conflict within Ukraine. We must seize the moment, since the West currently is not ready for a war in Europe and the US is unprepared for war with a militarily and technologically equal adversary. In a few years, circumstances may change, potentially drawing us into an arms race – the usual strategy of Western elites when facing yet another systemic crisis in their own societies.

We also must not forget that the conflict in Ukraine is a battle of narratives, including historical ones.

Defeat in such a conflict would be akin to losing a global war, necessitating a shift from the existing world order to a new one that takes the altered balance of power into account. This balance will be impossible to camouflage after a military defeat regardless of its form.

JUDGING from the publications of American experts, there is growing concern that in Ukraine, Moscow’s restraint, its refusal to engage in total war, and its initiative in escalating dominance are luring Washington into a geopolitical “encirclement” fraught with the prospect that, after reaching the peak of its escalation, the Biden administration will either have to admit defeat (is this what is determining the time line of the SMO?) or take the risk of direct armed confrontation with Russia. They assume that Moscow’s completion of the encirclement could result in an “accumulated response” to the Western escalation, including the use of nuclear weapons against American allies in Europe, which would place America in an “impossible exchange” situation where Berlin or Warsaw might be traded for New York or Chicago, initiating the process of NATO’s dissolution.

This is likely why the theme of “avoiding a war on two fronts” – in this case, a combination of two blitzkriegs (the Schlieffen plan and Operation Barbarossa, judging by their geopolitical consequences) – in American political science debates is being replaced by another: “how to prevent World War III.”

IN ATTEMPTING to maintain its hegemony, which has become the means of its survival, the West is opposing the Global Majority, including Moscow and Beijing, which have found themselves subject to neocolonial exploitation to the same extent as the former colonies and dependent territories. Everyone has to pay rent for the “international public goods” supplied by the West in the form of the Western-controlled systems of currency, finance, trade, and economics. The current crisis has exposed the extensive use of this “interdependence” (to put it mildly) as a weapon by the West.

Besides “soft” methods there are “digital” methods, including a “digital concentration camp,” if a significant portion of the population loses the freedom to control their money (you don’t want dollars? – fine, there won’t be any money at all!), as well as pandemics like COVID with their already well-rehearsed state of emergency. For the latter option, IT business leaders like Bill Gates are predicting the next pandemic – the Marburg virus, which is similar to Ebola and has an 88% fatality rate.

In a recent issue of Harper’s magazine, Benjamin Schwarz and Christopher Layne wrote about the “false lessons” of the Cuban Missile Crisis, in which Moscow acted quite legally, while the US engaged in unjustified (except for the domestic political considerations of the elites) escalation, pushing the world to the brink of a thermonuclear disaster. Washington is acting similarly in the Ukraine crisis – not even in response but rather initiating the confrontation. There is hope that Moscow will once again demonstrate civilizational restraint and adhere to the moderate policy advocated by Kissinger.

The coming months will reveal what conclusions Washington will draw from its desperate situation, which it entered when the SMO transitioned to a protracted conflict last spring.

Analytics in International Relations

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Keywords: analytics, international relations, analytical centers, international affairs analyst

THE concept of “analytics,” which has recently become fashionable, has appeared in the Russian active sociopolitical, scientific, and cultural lexicon relatively recently. Analytics is actually a combination of analysis, synthesis, generalization, and prediction, and acts as a link between data evaluation and decision-making. It is a creative intellectual activity of extracting new relevant knowledge from the totality of collected information and can be considered a special type of such activity aimed at preparing and making decisions.

However, despite the growing number of international analysts, the quality of analytical research, especially forecasting, clearly leaves much to be desired. Their results appear more convincing in *descriptive analytics*, which describes and analyzes what is happening or has already happened, and less so in *predictive analytics*, which focuses on forecasting future events, processes, and phenomena. The inadequacy and insufficiency of prediction, in turn, is reflected in the conclusions of *prescriptive analytics*, whose task is to develop prescriptions and recommendations for practical action.

Recently in Russia, there has been growing attention to *cognitive analytics* in the realm of international relations – to the use of its cognitive function to expose false claims and falsifications of history in a well-reasoned manner based on historical facts, documents, and evidence. A notable example is the

analytical study *On the Threshold of War*, published in 2020 based on materials of an international scientific conference, which reveals, substantiates, and exposes anti-Russian ideological myths constructed in the West.

The most common claim, found in various publications, is that international relations think tanks originated in the US, the first being the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, founded in 1910 to research problems of war and peace. Meanwhile, in Russia, which had faced the aggression of the collective West in 1812, the victorious Emperor Alexander I founded a secret foreign policy task force under the leadership of adjutant general Alexander von Benckendorff to prevent new threats and risks for the Russian Empire.

Judging by its activities, the task force may well be considered an analytical center or its prototype.

Having had diplomatic experience at the Russian Embassy in Paris, Benckendorff personally reported to the emperor the information received and offered foreign policy considerations prepared based on an analytical comprehension of the obtained data.

In the 19th century, both Slavophiles and Westernizers, Eurasians and Narodniks, who were coming up with their own projects for a world order, engaged in analytical reflections on Russia's role in the world and its future. As is known, some Narodniks ended up using terrorist methods to fight for their beliefs. Russian left-wing socialist movements and their leaders, particularly Georgy Plekhanov and Vladimir Lenin, were characterized by a strong analytical approach to international issues. By the start of the new, 20th century, which was destined to become the century of analytics, Russia was in the vanguard of world analytical thought, doing analytical work more often in the format of closed groups working for the state or within political movements. Essentially, these were analytical centers in a broad sense – i.e., entities that do analysis and produce an intellectual product on this basis.

The emergence of formal analytical centers on foreign policy and international relations is often associated with world developments before, during, and after World War I. This period was marked by extraordinary complications of social relations and the international situation, the emergence of a gigantic global confrontation, and the ensuing cardinal transformations of the entire world order.

The emergence of formalized think tanks on international issues in the early 20th century is associated with the establishment of the profession of international analyst – a profession that many people seek to excel in these days but not everyone succeeds in doing.

From ancient times to the present day, expert analytical support of foreign policy and of decisions on international issues has been of great importance, which has only grown with the current sharp escalation of tensions on the world stage caused by the aggression of the collective West against Russia from the Ukrainian springboard.

Many researchers single out Stalin-era Soviet international relations analytics, which relied on a set of sources, the main ones being diplomatic intelligence, foreign intelligence, military intelligence, and party intelligence. The latter supplied information from the Comintern system, foreign party organizations, trade unions, and youth, student, and other mass movements.

Climbing out from under the ruins of perestroika, which destroyed practically everything that competed with or was disapproved of by its American inspirers, including the existing system of analytical support for preparing and making foreign policy and international relations decisions, Russia is returning to the path of forming independent judgments and decisions in its own national interests. This, however, is no easy task. The imposed foreign templates that persist and sometimes dominate in the perceptions of those who process primary information, justify and prepare draft solutions, and make decisions at various levels present an obstacle

Many different organizations in the country claim to be analytical centers in various fields, including international relations, but only a small number of them are able to do qualitative analytical work on international issues and propose strategies and solutions.

The current geopolitical crisis that has engulfed the rapidly changing world, the international tensions that threaten global catastrophe, and the increasing number of natural and anthropogenic cataclysms have heightened the credibility of analytics as a special science meant to properly assess current events, predict their possible development, and offer effective solutions to the multiplying problems and challenges.

Overcoming foreign policy illusions about the possibility of joining in mutual love with the West – for which Russia has always been and remains civilizationally alien, incomprehensible, barbaric, and therefore subject to obliteration – is an important condition for Russian analytics to achieve adequate assessments and recommendations. This is essential for positioning our country on the world stage as a great power with its own interests and priorities.

Hypersonic Weapons: Strategic Breakthrough or Strategic Challenge?

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IN RECENT years, hypersonic weapons have become a central topic of discussion around new military technologies affecting international security. Hypersonics are becoming a priority area of military-technological development that some states are using to restore their strategic stability and provide a real deterrence mechanism and others are using to pursue the goal of global dominance. Vast financial, scientific, and technical resources are being invested in the development of missile programs.

In his Message to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on March 1, 2018, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that our country has such weapons.

In December 2017, the Kinzhal hypersonic air-launched missile system was placed on experimental combat duty. In 2018, development of the Avangard missile system with gliding winged units was completed; according to the president, it “is capable of hitting targets at intercontinental depths with hypersonic speed and high precision, with high maneuverability both in altitude and course.” The Avangard was put on combat duty in December 2019. The Zircon anti-ship hypersonic cruise missile underwent testing in 2020-2021.

Having embarked on the path of modernizing ICBMs and developing hypersonic weapons and other military-technical innovations – nuclearpowered carriers, laser weapons – Russia is gradually restoring the strategic balance that was upset by the US’s withdrawal from the AntiBallistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002 and its deployment of a global ABM system, including near Russia’s borders.

The Pentagon has launched a number of projects that are at various stages of development. Among the most promising are the Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW) and its naval version – Conventional Prompt Strike (CPS). It consists of a land-based ballistic missile with a guided maneuverable hypersonic warhead known as the Common-Hypersonic Glide Body (C-HGB).

China is quietly working on hypersonic weapons technology. Its strategic missile forces are already equipped with DF-17 missiles with DF-ZF hypersonic glide vehicles with a speed of between Mach 5 and Mach 10 and a range of 1,800 to 2,500 kilometers. In 2022, China began deployment of the DF-27 hypersonic missile in "limited quantities." Its range is between 5,000 and 8,000 km. China's arsenal now includes the YJ-21 antiship ballistic missile with a sea- and air-launched hypersonic gliding warhead. Its range is 1,500 kilometers.

India is showing interest in HSW. In February 2023, it carried out a third test of its Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV). Work is under way on the BrahMos-II hypersonic missile.

The DPRK is developing hypersonic weapons at an accelerated pace. The first test launch of such a weapon was carried out in September 2021. In January 2022, North Korea tested a guided hypersonic missile with lateral maneuverability and a liquid-fueled ballistic missile with a conical maneuverable warhead.

Thus, it is becoming increasingly obvious that many countries with significant missile capabilities are actively working on HSWs. All of them are presently at various stages of the development of hypersonic vehicles. Russia has undoubtedly taken the lead. Nevertheless, accelerated hypersonic weapons development programs in both the US and Asian countries, coupled with the rapid development of ICT, quantum computing, and artificial intelligence, could quickly erode our strategic advantages.

Information about hypersonic weapons is extremely limited and shrouded in secrecy. Little is known about the tactical and technical capabilities of hypersonic missiles: their use in real combat conditions, advantages and disadvantages, strike potential, and degree of vulnerability.

The current situation is reminiscent of the eve of World War II, when the whole of Europe was under the control of Hitler's Germany with its revanchist aspirations to the East. Today's "America First" imperative serves as the ideological basis for the official US policy of creating a system of global dominance and implies the forced imposition of neoliberal values on all countries, including Russia. This concept is confrontational in nature and will inevitably provoke many more global crises in the future.

Particular attention should be paid to the eastern direction, which contains the greatest concentration of countries seeking to build up missile capabilities, including hypersonic missiles. In the event of a certain development of the situation, these missile weapons could pose a threat to our security. To counter this threat, a so-called safety net of missile interceptors with an appropriate rapid response mechanism should be established in advance.

If you want peace, earnestly prepare for war. Hypersonics can provide some help in this regard, but HSW will not solve all problems of strategic nonnuclear deterrence. Under the current circumstances, comprehensive measures are in order. We must establish the right domestic priorities aimed at increasing the economic and technological strength of our country and the combat potential of the Russian Armed Forces and at improving their combat readiness. Our approaches to foreign policy should also be formulated in this vein.

If diplomatic solutions to the increasingly stalemated situation are not found, real military force will be the only way we can counter the current external threats, contain the aggressive onslaught of the Euro-Atlanticists, ensure adequate defensive capability, and influence the formation of the future international security architecture, which will sooner or later begin to take shape on the current weakened and cracked pillars that have not stood the test of time.

Artificial Intelligence as a Source of International Security Threats

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Keywords: artificial intelligence (AI), big data, US, cognitive warfare, UNESCO, Recommendation

THE world is gripped by unprecedented interest in artificial intelligence (AI). Articles, books, conferences, and seminars on AI are multiplying exponentially. More importantly, so are AI-based machines, mechanisms, and tools, which are used in practically every industry.

AI FIRST became the subject of a large-scale research program back in the 1950s. This program was based on symbolic logic, and programmers encoded data for processing by AI. As a result, AI was of little practical value.

The late 1990s saw the birth of second-generation AI. Much more powerful computers, big data, new algorithms, and artificial neural networks were landmark developments.

With some reservations, the phenomenally successful ChatGPT chatbot, developed by the OpenAI company and launched in November 2022, may be seen as representing third-generation AI.

ChatGPT-4, which was launched in March 2023, is a stunningly versatile model. It can chat, translate into many languages, code, provide medical and other advice, look for pictures, and give verified answers to some of the most unpredictable questions. It knows the content of books and films and possesses numerous other skills.

OpenAI is working on ChatGPT-5, which is expected to launch in December 2023. If public information is correct, ChatGPT-5 may be a milestone in ChatGPT development, as the fifth model's AI would be almost indistinguishable from human intelligence and achieve the level of artificial general intelligence (AGI).

AI adds a new and ominous meaning to the maxim "the history of war is a history of great discoveries and inventions." Indeed, despite its unquestionable economic and social benefits, experts put AI among the technologies that can irreversibly change the nature of war and peace just as gunpowder, internal combustion engines, aircraft, nuclear weapons, drones, and information weapons have done. AI can give new meaning to the military and economic power of a nation because of being at the center of practically all disruptive technologies.

NATO has considered cyberspace one of its potential theaters of war for more than 10 years. Ever since AI came into existence, Western theorists and practitioners have been exploring its military applications. This has manifested itself in numerous studies, in cutting-edge weapons, and in doctrines developed by NATO and major nations, including the US and Britain.

On October 21, 2021, NATO defense ministers approved the first AI strategy for the alliance.

In April 2022, NATO foreign ministers approved the Charter of the Defense Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA), an initiative to vest national AI test centers with the duty of supporting NATO AI projects.

DIANA's first regional office – the European office – was opened on March 30, 2023, hosted in Britain in partnership with Estonia and located at the Imperial College London Innovation Hub. DIANA employs numerous experts at dozens of facilities in more than 20 NATO countries. It comprises a network of

more than 10 affiliated accelerators and more than 90 test facilities at innovation centers throughout the alliance. In June, NATO said that it was setting up a regional office in Halifax, Canada, and that a regional hub would soon open in Tallinn.

The US Chamber of Commerce's Commission on Artificial Intelligence Competitiveness, Inclusion, and Innovation said in a report in March 2023: "The United States faces stiff competition from China in AI development. This competition is so fierce that it is unclear which nation will emerge as the global leader, raising significant security concerns for the United States and its allies."

In June 2022, China announced it had developed a supercomputer that could train an AI model with "174 trillion parameters, rivaling the synapses in the human brain."¹⁷ The model was named BaGuaLu, "alchemist's pot."

Reports in January 2023 said that the PLA was going to use AI to simulate an invasion of Taiwan and the deterrence of US forces on Taiwanese territory in a planned exercise.

BILLIONAIRE Elon Musk has predicted that AI will inevitably end up being a self-controlling force with the potential to annihilate humankind, although via a different scenario than the plot of the movie *The Terminator*. In March 2023, Musk became one of the first to sign an open letter published on the website of the Massachusetts-based Future of Life Institute that today has more than 33,700 signatures. The signatories include well-known AI researchers and AI-focused business figures. "We call on all AI labs to immediately pause for at least 6 months the training of AI systems more powerful than GPT-4," the letter says. "AI labs and independent experts should use this pause to jointly develop and implement a set of shared safety protocols for advanced AI design and development."

There is a danger that disruptive technologies will be concentrated in the hands of a small number of companies and the governments of some of the world's richest countries, thereby becoming tools for global informational and ideological domination.

AI also inevitably entails threats to national security. For example, GPT technologies may be used to create highly dangerous computer viruses. AI can, besides, design military strategies, and its ability to generate authentic-looking videos puts it just a step away from producing an unlimited amount of highly convincing material for disinformation and manipulation purposes.

ANALYSIS suggests that three key forms of restrictions have been proposed on the military use of AI. The mildest form is applying existing rules to AI systems. The EU wants stricter control. An EU regulatory law establishes a classification of AI based on the degree of risk it poses and requires strict monitoring. The EU bans some types of AI, including remote biometrics and advertising that can affect the subconscious.

SEEKING to counter the strengthening of the multipolar world order, the West is testing new methods of hybrid warfare against its adversaries, primarily Russia and China. One of these methods is cognitive warfare. In other words, the human brain is going to become "the battlefield of the 21st century."

The West makes extensive use of AI in cognitive warfare in seeking, according to a NATO-sponsored 2020 study, "to alter enemy cognitive processes, exploit mental biases or reflexive thinking, and provoke thought distortions, influence decision-making and hinder action ... both at the individual and collective levels."

SINCE 2017, more than 40 countries have adopted AI strategies. Russia adopted its strategy in 2019. The document is titled National Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence for the Period to 2030. It was approved by Presidential Decree No. 490 of October 10, 2019. The strategy sets the goal of making Russia an international AI leader in order to guarantee high living standards and quality of life for its population, consolidate national security, ensure domestic law and order, and achieve sustainable competitiveness for its economy.

Today, the AI used by the armed forces is not an independent decision-maker – it may detect a potential target and suggest response options to its operator. But putting new military AI technologies into service hastily may entail algorithmic glitches and accidents involving human fatalities, and using AI to control nuclear facilities may sharply increase the risk of nuclear accidents.

On July 26, 2022, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu approved a document on AI to fulfill Russian commitments under international law, including international humanitarian law, and step up cooperation with foreign partners.

Russian proposals on LAWS put before the Group of Governmental Experts, Guterres's watchdog advocacy, and Azoulay's appeal for supporting UNESCO's ethical recommendation are extremely important moves from the standpoint of international security. But equal participation by all UN member states is crucial to their implementation.

The NATO Summit in Vilnius: Words and Deeds

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Keywords: NATO, summit, Vilnius, Russia, China, Ukraine, Stoltenberg

THE NATO summit that took place in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis aroused heightened interest. After all, it seemed as if the Western countries were ready to discuss key issues of war and peace. And now we have results from this two-day meeting of the self-described "strongest alliance in history." Let's take a closer look at the cast of characters and their decisions.

The author's overall assessment of this gathering turns out to be a little paradoxical. On one hand, there is an ongoing military conflict in Europe into which practically all nations of the North Atlantic alliance have been dragged, so far playing the role of meeting the military needs of the Kiev regime – and this is what NATO was created for: to fight, fight, fight, as it has been doing for more than 70 years now since its creation in 1949. On the other hand, at the podium of the summit, so many words were uttered about defense that it gave the definite impression that no matter how much NATO continues to strut, these days it does not want to go to war alone and is stepping back toward strategic defense, realizing what is happening on the Ukrainian battlefield. To the indignation of [Ukrainian President Vladimir] Zelensky, who was present at the event, the NATO summit did not even come close to discussing whether to accept Ukraine among its ranks. But NATO had its own rationale in this regard.

The summit was held amid this nerve-racking setting. Thus, in our opinion, the basic results – both announced and unannounced – were the following.

First. The collective West's shift to strategic defense.

Second. Blame placed on Russia for all mortal sins. As if NATO is looking at itself in the mirror and seeing its own trespasses against all the peoples of the world but dutifully ascribing them to Russia.

Third. Surprisingly, the number of calls for peace in this communiqué is staggering in scope. They even signed on to a "general nuclear disarmament," as if we are reading from Soviet material put together at the time in Moscow.

Fourth. The situation in Ukraine and the new military aid being given to the Kiev government were discussed at the summit amid harsh statements from the US and Germany. As the German [newspaper]

Bild reported, [the two countries] “do not want to take part in a war against Russia and thus do not wish to accept Ukraine into NATO” [translated from Russian – Trans.].

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg summed up the results of the discussion, reporting that NATO has confirmed a multi-year package of support for Ukraine containing three elements. First is a multiyear plan of support [for Ukraine] in meeting NATO compatibility requirements. Second is the creation of the aforementioned NATO-Ukraine Council. Third is the removal of some requirements from the Membership Action Plan, which will shorten Ukraine’s accession process from two steps to one. Still, Stoltenberg added, explaining this sophistry: Ukraine will become a NATO member only once the [other] allies decide that the preconditions have been met. In other words, if you remember the classic [paradox], the horizon keeps getting further away as you approach it.

Keeping up the pace of progressively deepening “high-level relations” with the Kiev regime Wallace had said, as reported by Politico: “Ukraine must show ‘gratitude’ to its allies, despite its disappointment over the way NATO framed Kyiv’s future membership prospects.”

IN CONCLUSION, as was reported outside the bounds of the summit, the Group of Seven nations adopted a Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine, which was announced by Japanese Prime Minister [Fumio Kishida]. It’s hard to remember when the G7 ever officially distanced itself from NATO this way. So, is it turning out that their interests do not coincide when it comes to Ukraine? If so, we are witnessing a definitive split within NATO.

Now let’s conclude these notes with a sentence from NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg that shows the state of mind of this organization and the way its leadership combines words and deeds: “The Vilnius summit has gone down in history thanks to Sweden.” What was he trying to say here, if Sweden has not yet been admitted to NATO?

But it seems that NATO leaders are quite smug that they have avoided a military twist of fate and escaped a direct confrontation with Russia – at least so far.

A Summit of Self-Determination

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Keywords: NATO summit in Vilnius, G7, anti-Russian bias, military assistance to Ukraine, support for the Kiev regime

THE NATO Vilnius summit, which took place on July 11-12, 2023, became a summit of the alliance’s self-determination in the sense that the alliance effectively embarked on a clear anti-Russian course. In their final communiqué, NATO members described Russia as “the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and to peace and stability in the EuroAtlantic area.” Alliance members also issued several statements of support for the Kiev regime.

THE air in Vilnius was electrified with disputes about whether to escalate the situation in the world, and if so, to what extent. It was decided that it could be escalated, but very carefully.

“I remember how during the 1996 presidential election in Russia, when we were urged to vote with our hearts, people often asked their friends before visiting them, ‘Are you for or against Yeltsin?’ And their decision about whether to visit depended on the answer to this question. Right now, the important question for NATO is, ‘Are you for or against Ukraine?’ ”

The anti-Russian bias defines NATO's entire policy. A case in point is the final communiqué, which has become the first document in the alliance where almost a dozen articles are openly anti-Russian. After Russia, the second most significant threat to NATO is terrorism, which comes even before China. This is another none-too-subtle hint that Russia, as the West would have the world to believe, is the motherland or sponsor of terrorism.

According to Leonkov, the Vilnius summit managed to resolve one of the key issues related to financing the future alliance – its reorganization, reform, modernization, and expansion of defense programs. It was decided that NATO members must spend at least 2% of GDP [on military expenses], eventually increasing the share to 5%. In addition, the summit addressed matters related to NATO's rapid reaction force [NATO Response Force] – a contingent of 300,000 troops that will be funded from NATO's budget, with each member country contributing its share.

UKRAINIAN President Vladimir Zelensky arrived at the summit with the hope of clarifying the terms and conditions for Ukraine's accession to NATO and the European Union. Those hopes were so high that when he got neither, Zelensky caused an uproar, which shocked the Americans. He practically lost it, yelling that everyone had deserted him and let him down, and slamming the US and its allies. Events took a dramatic turn.

AT THE summit, the G7 countries agreed to a joint framework for providing long-term security pledges to Ukraine to increase supplies of military equipment to the Kiev regime, including airborne and naval equipment and modern long-range weapons systems; military personnel training programs; intelligence sharing programs; and cybersecurity assistance. It was noted that priority will be given to air defense, armor, artillery, and long-range weapons. They also promised to provide an international compensation mechanism for Ukraine, and to that end, to keep Russia's foreign assets frozen.

The final communiqué also devotes special attention to China: Beijing was predictably accused of building up its nuclear arsenal and not doing enough in arms control. The alliance members also routinely expressed their concern, mentioning in passing that the deepening of strategic partnership between China and Russia is at odds with NATO values and interests.

AT THE same time, the NATO representatives stressed that the alliance does not seek confrontation with Russia, even though it does not consider the country to be a partner. Surprisingly, at the summit, it was stated that NATO poses no threat to Russia.

Right now, relations between Russia and NATO have escalated over the Russian SMO in Ukraine, but everyone understands that this operation will not last forever. Even Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu said that any military actions eventually end with negotiations, including negotiations with NATO.

Japan's Cybersecurity Policy: Past and Present Developments

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Keywords: Japan, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), National Information Security Center (NISC), cybersecurity strategy, preemptive cyberattack

CYBERSECURITY as a component of information security and, more broadly, an element of the safe use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is an area where Japan has not made as much progress as one would have expected from such a technologically advanced country.

As regards documents on information security with its legal and technical aspects that came out in Japan in 2000, it is worth pointing out the Guidelines for Information Security Policy, the Special Action Plan on Countermeasures to Cyber-terrorism of Critical Infrastructure, and the Action Plan for Building Foundations of Information Systems Protection from Hackers and Other Cyberthreats [9]. All these documents focused on details and failed to lay the basis for comprehensive guarantees for the safe use of ICTs in general or cybersecurity specifically. In 2005, two strategic bodies were set up to coordinate and systematize information security activities: the National Information Security Center (NISC) and the Information Security Policy Council (ISPC).

Between 2005 and 2013, government authorities and commercial companies jointly revised the aforementioned documents and introduced new strategic documents, thereby systematizing Japan's information security policy.

It is unclear what made the Japanese government pay less attention to information security as a whole and to focus on cybersecurity.

THE 2013 Cybersecurity Strategy noted that cyberspace – which it defined as “global virtual spaces such as the Internet, composed of information systems, information communications networks, and similar systems, and which circulate large quantities of a large variety of information” – has rapidly expanded and begun permeating the real space [18, p. 5]. The strategy argued that the escalating risks that this entailed needed to be seriously addressed because, while some of them were personal risks, others might represent national or international and global dangers.

The 2013 strategy laid down “basic principles for realizing a cybersecurity nation”: “free flow of information”; “responding to increasingly serious risks”; “enhancing a risk-based approach”; and “acting in partnership based on shared responsibilities.” The document also described proposed “roles of government,” “roles of critical infrastructure providers,” “roles of private companies, educational institutions,” and “roles of individual users, and small and medium-sized enterprises.” A separate passage addressed the “roles of cyberspace-related operators” – “the majority of the device manufacturers, Internet access providers, network operators, software developers and other organizations responsible for the equipment, networks, applications, etc., that make up cyberspace.”

Unlike the 2013 strategy, which was an ISPC paper, the second Cybersecurity Strategy, adopted in 2015, was a government document. Its main distinguishing feature was the thesis that no one must be denied access to cyberspace “without any legitimate reason.”

THE main distinctive features of the 2018 strategy were plans to advance cybersecurity as a “value creation driver” [21, p. 15] and enhance Japan's capability to repel “massive cyberattacks” [21, p. 34]. The anticiberattack plan (the 2018 strategy was Japan's first document to set the goal of improving capacity for heavy cyberattacks) was almost directly linked to the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo, which were held in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

THE 2021 strategy mentions the swift digitalization of Japanese society, as earlier documentation has done, and vests the Digital Agency with the duty of providing individuals with safe digital environments integrated into general cyberspace. The document refers to the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics as a source of “invaluable experience” in dealing with cyberattack risks. It is likely that potential future cybersecurity strategies will also make significant references to preceding major international events. The chief novelty of the 2021 document is that it is Japan's first cybersecurity strategic plan to name specific states as alleged sources of cyberattacks. Russia, China, and North Korea are claimed to be state actors that have been behind cyberattacks with political, military, or commercial aims.

Based on Japan's previous strategies, we can presume that the planned 2023 cybersecurity strategy, besides calling for closer cooperation with the US and other Western nations, primarily the G7

countries, will likely include plans for investing in an offensive cyber arsenal in order to enable Japan to make preemptive cyberattacks. It is just as likely that the 2023 document will contain a section entirely devoted to the Russia-Ukraine military conflict as an event of cybersecurity relevance similar to that of the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics. But this conflict is more likely to be cited as a reason for further militarization in Japan – in this case, in the area of ICTs – than as a source of experience.

Prospects for Expanding Russia's Cooperation With ASEAN Countries in the New Geopolitical Reality: A Case Study of Myanmar

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Keywords: Russia, Myanmar, ASEAN, Russia-Myanmar relations, trade and economic cooperation

MYANMAR (called Burma until 1989) is the largest country in the Indochinese Peninsula and the second largest ASEAN member state (after Indonesia).

MYANMAR has a unique geopolitical position, as it is located between two economic giants, India and China, and in effect at the intersection of key trade routes, acting as a bridge between East, South, and Southeast Asia.

For many years now, Myanmar has been an arena of rivalry between the major powers, primarily India and China. It plays an extremely important role for both Asian giants. First, from the perspective of its geographical location, Myanmar lies at the crossroads between East, Southeast, and South Asia. Second, it is important as a source of fuel and energy, other mineral resources, and agricultural produce. And third, it is important for promoting their geostrategic interests.

For India, close cooperation with Myanmar is also a matter of national security. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Corridor, which connects India's northeastern states with the rest of mainland India, runs through Myanmar, bypassing the narrow Siliguri Corridor (about 30 km), also known as the Chicken's Neck. Moreover, as things stand today, India cannot compete effectively with China's growing economic presence in its immediate neighborhood, which is why New Delhi seeks to prevent an increase in the Chinese political and military presence in adjacent countries.

Myanmar's stance toward these countries is very mixed because of past and current political events. During the colonial period, Myanmar was part of British India, and most administrative posts in that period were held by ethnic Hindus, which led to dissatisfaction among the local population. As for China, it was repeatedly suspected by Myanmar's leaders of having links with separatist groups operating in some regions of the country and even of providing military assistance to armed rebels. The US imposed sanctions on Myanmar back in 1988, after the previous military coup. In fact, the country has been in international isolation for a long time. Because of the geopolitical rivalry between China, India, and the US for influence in the region, Russia is a good counterweight for Myanmar and the safest ally.

Myanmar was the only ASEAN country to support Russian actions in Ukraine. It was mutual interest in the search for new key partners that prompted unprecedented rapprochement between the Russian Federation and Myanmar.

In 2023, Russia and Myanmar are marking the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. And 2022 was a truly breakthrough year in relations between the two countries. Numerous agreements on cooperation in the key and most promising sectors of the economy have been signed, and many projects are already being implemented.

Russian diplomacy has rather quickly achieved immense results in relations with Myanmar. Trade between the two countries remains modest and falls short of its potential.

It must be stated that today the Russian business community has little experience with doing business in Myanmar. Russian entrepreneurs have long seen it as a high-risk market. Among the potential problems in starting a business in Myanmar are political risks, poor infrastructure, shortcomings in legislation, an underdeveloped financial sector, and corruption. Moreover, Russian entrepreneurs are usually unaware of the specifics of doing business in that country, which has repeatedly led to significant losses and breaches of contract. But lately there has been evidence of positive trends.

IT IS important to understand that cooperation develops intensively only when both sides are interested in it. If one side sees no tangible benefit in expanding trade, economic, and political relations, this kind of lopsided relationship can only produce modest results.

There is reason to believe that in the coming years other ASEAN countries will also increase their cooperation with Russia for several reasons. First, they are seeking to prevent over-dependence on China or the US. Second, interaction with Russia is not seen in the Southeast Asian countries as a threat to national sovereignty. Third, Russia has an excellent scientific and technical potential and vast natural resources and can meet the ASEAN countries' needs for food and energy to a significant extent. Fourth, seaborne trade between Russia and the ASEAN countries is possible without intermediaries and is very convenient logistically, provided that infrastructure is developed and modernized. And fifth, members of the political elites in many Southeast Asian countries still remember the assistance provided by the Soviet Union to their countries immediately after they gained independence in the mid-20th century. This is why public attitudes toward Russia remain friendly even though after the Soviet Union's breakup Russia for a long time did not pay enough attention to maintaining ties with countries in the region.

In the author's view, our relations with the ASEAN countries should focus precisely on high-tech products. Of course, Russia should increase the supply of food and energy resources needed in Southeast Asian countries. But Russian products for objective reasons may be at a disadvantage compared to, say, Australian exports to the region due to high transportation costs and longer routes. In addition, Russia should develop a comprehensive strategy for expanding its presence in Southeast Asia, with an emphasis on key competitive advantages that help to fill profitable niches and gain a strong foothold in the region.

The Impact of China-India Economic Cooperation on Bilateral Political Tension

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Keywords: Chinese-Indian trade, economic cooperation, New Development Bank (NDB), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Indo-Pacific, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

RELATIONS between China and India are affected by a combination of economic and political factors. On one hand, trade between the two countries is marked by positive dynamics, and they interact successfully on issues of global development and multilateral international cooperation. On the other hand, they are military and political rivals and compete for regional economic leadership. Former Indian national security adviser Shivshankar Menon considers Indian-Chinese relations a combination of cooperation and rivalry.

The purpose of this study is to highlight features of Chinese-Indian economic relations that can be viewed as partly defusing tensions between the two nations. We examine key elements of trade between China and India, political cooperation between them in multinational political formats, and joint efforts by them to advance the interests of developing countries. We also analyze the imbalance in their trade, investment problems they face, mutual mistrust, and their rivalry for economic and political leadership in the Indo-Pacific.

RAJESWARI Pillai Rajagopalan, an analyst at the influential New Delhi-based think tank Observer Research Foundation (ORF), argues that an increase in trade between China and India is one of the main positive factors in their relations, although there remain some negative aspects to them. India is a country with extensive economic and investment opportunities for China. Being less attracted to Western markets after they were severely battered by the world financial crisis of 2007-2008, China began to take more interest in Asian economies, including the Indian economy.

India is China's eighth-biggest trading partner,⁴ while China was India's main trading partner between 2008 and 2022. In 2022, the US replaced China as India's number one partner, as the US was swift to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, while China was rather slow to lift pandemic restrictions.

Recently a trend has emerged for some international manufacturing facilities to be moved from China to India due to prolonged COVID lockdowns in China and the escalating US-Chinese trade war, and although today this trend is limited in scale, eventually it may give a boost to Indian production and help reduce India's deficit in its trade with China.

INTERACTION between China and India in multinational organizations such as the AIIB and NDB is a good illustration of the two countries' need for closer economic cooperation. India is a major borrower; it needs considerable amounts of money to modernize infrastructure and for other projects. But AIIB loans, for example, are impossible to obtain without approval from China, which is a key holder of voting shares in the bank.

INDIAN-CHINESE economic relations involve rather low investment activity as a result of ongoing political tensions between the two countries and the border dispute, as well as a consequence of restrictions imposed by Modi in April 2020 on investments from countries sharing land borders with India.

Since investment largely depends on political situations, the only way to boost investment as an element of Indian-Chinese economic cooperation is to improve political relations between the two countries.

INDIA is so afraid of economic dependence on China that New Delhi includes it among the main risks to the Indian economy. Beijing and New Delhi have repeatedly addressed the increasing deficit in India's trade with China and have taken steps to liberalize their trade.

IMPRESSIVE trade volumes and economic pragmatism should presumably persuade China and India to stabilize their relations, despite occasional escalations of their border dispute. The June 2020 incident in Ladakh, located in the northern Himalayas, has been one of the most intensive armed clashes between the two countries since the 1962 war.

Another source of mutual mistrust is each country's annoyance with the other's regional policy. India fears that China will increase its military and economic power in the Indian Ocean and South Asia exponentially by building up its relations with Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

India is seeking to build security guarantees for its economic relations with China and to diversify its foreign economic relations. India is in intensive talks with Britain, Canada, and the EU on mutual

reductions of trade barriers,⁴⁸ and in 2021, it signed free trade agreements with the United Arab Emirates and Australia.

We may witness increasing strategic rivalry between China and India in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, excessive economic dependence on China makes India look for alternatives in its international economic activities. It boosts relations with other regional actors such as ASEAN, Australia, and the US and players outside the region such as the EU, Britain, Eurasian Economic Union member countries, Canada, Israel, and Gulf countries.

Information and Analytical Support for the Islamic Vector of Russia's Foreign Policy

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Keywords: Islamic world, OIC, Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the OIC, information and analytical work

The 2023 Policy Concept says: "The states of friendly Islamic civilization are becoming increasingly desirable and reliable partners of Russia in ensuring security and stability, as well as in solving economic problems at the global and regional levels."

The Russian Federation is an observer in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Cooperation with the Islamic world is also carried out by the Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group and the annual KazanForum International Economic Forum, now held at the federal level.

Russia's active interaction with OIC member states has significantly strengthened the historical potential of Russia-Islam cooperation, particularly within the OIC framework. It is worth noting that this international intergovernmental organization unites 57 states with a total population of about 1.5 billion people.

The main functions of the Russian Permanent Mission to the OIC are focused primarily on establishing its information, analytical, and forecasting activities. Hence the importance of this interaction in strengthening the Islamic vector of Russia's foreign policy activities.

Emphasis was placed not only on the relevance of information and analytical work, but also on the need to establish constant monitoring of the state of the Islamic world and its comprehensive cooperation with Russia. Thus, it is possible to coordinate joint activities amid the international challenges, threats, and conflict situations that affect the Muslim world and the situation around it, taking into account Russia's national interests and the participation of Russian Muslims in these processes.

The information and analytical work of the Russian Permanent Mission to the OIC is performed with consideration of the general Islamic specifics of the state of society and power in specific Muslim countries and their needs and prospects for interaction with Russia. It should be noted that Russia has no negative colonial legacy. Moreover, the liberation and development of many Muslim countries is connected with Soviet Russia.

The Russian Mission systematically interacts with the OIC Secretariat General, the Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group, and Russia's religious organizations, analyzing the state of the Islamic factor and its impact on Russia's domestic and foreign policy.

It is important to note that the amount of information is increasing, especially on the Internet, but in the absence of effective technologies for systematizing information flows to increase its role.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that Russia gained observer status in the OIC on the initiative of Russian President Vladimir Putin, which allowed Russian Muslims and the Russian state to intensify traditional and comprehensive interaction with Muslim countries of the world. Russia's participation in the affairs of the Islamic world, in which we take common interests into account, is undeniably important to Russia and Russian Muslims. Russian Muslim leaders support Russia's policy toward Russian Muslims and the Islamic world, exerting a positive impact on cooperation between Russia and the OIC in the development of comprehensive relations, fighting alongside Russia against the dictates of a unipolar world, and working together to establish a multipolar model of world politics.

The Spiritual-Moral Values of Orthodox Christianity and Islam Confront the Degradation of Modern Society

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Keywords: Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group, OIC, KazanForum

THE Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group (RIW SVG) worked up gradually toward its May 19, 2023 meeting in Kazan by holding a number of other events, conferences and forums, including meetings abroad.

A crucial component of the collective Russian national identity is to forge an interreligious and intercivilizational dialogue and understanding that stand up against the ultra-liberal values of the modern West. This postulate allowed the majority of the meeting's participants to reach the conclusion that there is a historical proximity between the Russian state-civilization and the Islamic world. What unites Russia with the Islamic world is a devotion to its traditional spiritual and moral values. Of special significance to our country is the fundamental similarity of social opinions, humanitarian positions, and worldviews between Islam and [Christian] Orthodoxy.

The conceptual bases of the SVG's meeting titled "Russia-Islamic World: Traditional Spiritual and Moral Values as a Basis for Interreligious Cooperation" were [two] documents adopted by decree of Russian President Vladimir Putin: The Bases of State Policy on Preserving and Strengthening Traditional Russian Spiritual-Moral Values (No. 809 dated November 9, 2022) and the updated Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (No. 229 dated March 31, 2023).

The Russian President stressed that the meeting in Kazan served to confirm the traditionally close and trusting relations of Russia and the Muslim states, both bilaterally and within the OIC as a group, on many relevant issues of our time.

The world is entering the epoch of a new world order. In this regard, political and religious circles, as well as society in general, will have to comprehend and make sense of the provisions articulated for the first time in the updated Foreign Policy Concept signed by the President of Russia. It emphasizes that the states that represent amicable Islamic civilization are becoming more and more needed as reliable partners for Russia in matters concerning security, stability, and the resolution of economic issues on

the global and regional levels. It stressed that Russia, being a polyethnic and multiconfessional state-civilization, possesses unique experience in fostering mutually respectful dialogue among representatives of traditional world religions, including both Orthodoxy and Islam.

Important contributions to the discussion of practical steps for interaction between Muslims and Orthodox Christians came from the speeches of Marat Khusnullin, Deputy Prime Minister of Russia; Igor Komarov, the Russian President's envoy to the Volga Federal District; Grand Mufti Sheikh-ul-Islam Talgat Hazrat Tadzhuiddin; Sheikh Ravil Khazrat Gaynutdin, Chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia; and others. The speakers stressed that unity of Muslims and Orthodox Christians of Russia is the linchpin of Russian society's defense of common spiritual values from outside encroachment.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill stressed that cooperation between Russia and the Islamic world today is acquiring a very important and novel dimension. We are becoming especially close today because our peoples profess similar spiritual-moral values.

The Patriarch likewise stressed that the Bulgarian Islamic Academy is today the leading center of Islamic education in Russia. Of no small importance is the fact that the academy hosts the Center for Interreligious Dialogue, and that Orthodox clergy and Orthodox scholars take part in the learning process. His Holiness expressed certainty that further development and expanding mutual endeavors between Orthodoxy and Islam, including within the academic sphere, will help us effectively take a stand against the enticements, challenges, and temptations of our times.

The speeches of the high-ranking Russian and foreign participants in the meeting provided a deep analysis of the sociopolitical and religious situation in the modern world. It was rightfully mentioned that a sea change was under way in the international arena, manifested in the ongoing complex formation of a new, more just, multipolar world order that responds to the interests of the majority of humanity.

As this rich discussion has shown, the spiritual, moral and cultural priorities and pillars common to Russia and friendly Islamic civilization, which have been shaped for centuries under the influence of traditional religions, including Christian Orthodoxy and Islam, are of particular importance in the modern world.

The leadership of the RIW SVG expresses its sincere gratitude to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus and to all highranking foreign and Russian group members and guests for their active participation in this meeting, and for their invaluable contribution toward strengthening mutual understanding and paths for preserving and enhancing the traditional spiritual and moral values of Orthodoxy and of Islam as the pillars of deep cooperation between Russia and the countries of the Islamic world.

The Political Landscape of Iraq: The Rise and Fall of Muqtada al-Sadr

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Keywords: political landscape in Iraq, parliamentary elections

IRAQ has entered a very complicated period of its history: a change of ideologies, the collapse of previous state structures, and the emergence of new forms of government. The 20-year American occupation turned the country's political landscape upside down. Today in Iraq there are multiple views on the country's future development, about where to go next: Should the country move toward the Arab world and Iran or try to rebuild the collapsed bridges with the West? Should it remain a secular state or rely on orthodox Islam? China is gaining weight in the region, yet the main element of suspense

in Iraq's political life is the emergence of serious disagreements, if not a split, between the Shia parties and groups in the country, where Shia Muslims constitute a clear but not overwhelming majority of the population.

On the whole, 3,200 candidates represented 109 parties and 21 coalitions; 789 were independent candidates; a quarter of the 329 parliamentary seats was reserved for women and five for Christian representatives, who gained only four. The results can be described as a crushing defeat of the pro-Iranian Shia parties and coalitions that for several years had dominated Iraqi politics and were closely connected with the militarized network al-Hashd ash-Sha'bi (The Popular Mobilization Forces – PMF). The Fatah Alliance, the second biggest bloc in the parliament, lost 34 of its 48 mandates; the same can be said about the Hezbollah Brigade, one of the biggest PMF groups. Abu Ali al-Askari, its press secretary, dismissed the results as “the biggest scam and robbery.”

Neither the majority inside the country nor observers were surprised by the victory of Muqtada al-Sadr. His ties with Tehran were firm, and he was one of the first politicians to raise up Iraqis to fight the American occupiers, earning him popularity and the support of millions of his compatriots – Shia, Sunnis, and Kurds. He had an experienced campaign apparatus that helped him keep abreast of trends and enough money to wage an election campaign.

Everything looked as it should: Go vote, take this rare opportunity to support your candidates – but something went wrong. Instead of marching enthusiastically to the polls, the majority preferred to ignore the elections; they did not trust their fairness. Strange as it may seem, having achieved the main aim – snap elections – the protesters were frankly burned out from the intensity of their own passions, having lost faith that they would be able to break the bureaucratic machine.

EVEN though it had gained more seats than the other forces, the Shia Sairoon Alliance, however, was not eligible to form a cabinet of ministers: By law, it needed 220 mandates, while at best it could muster 200 mandates with the help of more or less loyal allies.

It turned out that the planned “government of the majority” was one of the main reasons for the political crisis that split the Iraqi Shia into two rival camps. The first of them, headed by al-Sadr, was nationalist and, to a great extent, patriotic.

In early 2022, the split among Iraqi Shiites grew even deeper due to differences between the two main factions in parliament.

Observers were convinced that the decision to set up a majority government proceeded from al-Sadr's conviction that his prestige among Iraqi Shiites was high enough to set up a totally subordinate government. This would have allowed him to disregard the interests of pro-Iranian Shia movements and limit cooperation with them to compromises.

BY EARLY September 2022, Iraq suddenly found itself at the brink of another Shia-Shia civil war; two days later, the threat disappeared, leaving behind the memory of short yet fierce exchanges of gunfire, over 30 dead, about 800 wounded, and even more people (including police and soldiers) badly affected by tear gas.

The violence broke out when al-Sadr announced that he was determined to bow out of politics and stay clear of all political quarrels and corrupt Iraqi officials. He said that he wanted to close all Sadrist institutions except for the mausoleum of his father, an ayatollah murdered along with two of his sons by Saddam Hussein's agents in 1999. His words brought thousands of his supporters to the streets of Baghdad armed – nobody knew how – with heavy weapons, including tanks, artillery, and multiple rocket launchers.

Al-Sadr called on all political parties of Iraq and his own Sairoon Alliance to renounce all state posts to help resolve the months-long political crisis. In fact, this was not the first time that al-Sadr announced his withdrawal from big politics: He did so in 2014, 2016, and 2018, after which he returned with even more zeal. Nobody believed he had left for good, since his statements were growing increasingly contradictory: Angry calls to the barricades would be followed by requests for forgiveness.

IN SEPTEMBER 2022, al-Sadr made a final, unsuccessful attempt to change the situation and consolidate his influence. Contrary to expectations, he failed to raise a wave of protests more or less similar to the August one. The calls to disband the parliament, to send the deputies on leave, and to announce new, snap elections were ignored. The Supreme Court of Iraq issued an official statement in which it said that the Constitution did not allow the disbandment of the country's highest legislative body; it can be disbanded only by its own decision. While al-Sadr's followers were resigning, most of the deputy corps showed no intention to follow suit.

Today, there are three big groups or trends among Iraqi Shiites. The first group consists of those who made their political or military carriers with American help. Some people regard them as a "fifth column"; the second group consists of pro-Iranian forces with corresponding ideologies; the third group consists of formerly purely pro-Iranian forces that today speak of themselves as Iraqi patriots. They are convinced that Iraq should follow its own path, not a Western or an Iranian one. Muqtada al-Sadr is among them, although his number of supporters has noticeably decreased.

It seems that in Iraq, the US has fallen into its own trap. Driven by its unbridled desire to remove Saddam Hussein and during its chaotic and hard struggle against the Islamic State (ISIS), Washington bet on Shiites and stirred up disagreements between the Shia and Sunni communities of Iraq. Until recently, American statistics showed more Shiites than Sunnis in Iraq, contrary to Arab sources. No matter what, spiritually the Shia gravitate toward Iran, Washington's main enemy in the Middle East. They will continue their quiet and consistent move in that direction until quantity transforms into quality. To what extent? We will see.

The US in Central Asia: "Non-Soft Power" Policies

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Keywords: "non-soft power," the US, Central Asia, ISIS, Al Qaeda

THE rich and beautiful valleys of Wyoming are destined for the occupancy and sustenance of the Anglo-Saxon race. The wealth that for untold ages has lain hidden beneath the snow-capped summits of our mountains has been placed there by Providence to reward the brave spirits whose lot it is to compose the advance-guard of civilization. The Indians must stand aside or be overwhelmed by the ever advancing and ever-increasing tide of emigration. The destiny of the aborigines is written in characters not to be mistaken. The same inscrutable Arbiter that decreed the downfall of Rome has pronounced the doom of extinction upon the red men of America [2:180].

The above quote is from a newspaper published in the American wild West; it was nothing out of the ordinary – something that goes without saying. Do our American contemporaries think the same about other peoples? Regrettably, the answer is "Yes." This superpower does not cherish the lives of others as it cherishes American lives. Driven by the cult of technological modernization to a much greater extent than other nations, the American nation never stops moving forward, while certain of its existential

ideas and attitudes remain the same for decades or even centuries. Americans are a missionary people; the American establishment and most of its citizens are convinced that theirs is a special mission of teaching others the principles of freedom and democracy. All other peoples must either follow the US leadership or else historical progress will (with the help of the Americans) remove them as it removed the “red men” from the “rich and beautiful valleys of Wyoming” – and from the rest of North America, for that matter. Today, Russians, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tajiks, South Africans, Mongolians, or Chinese might fill the role of “red-skinned inhabitants” of lands rich in minerals to whom “historical progress” is especially cruel.

According to the American ruling class, “leadership” should spread far and wide, to all regions without exception. Today, this leadership consists of two main components: universally promoting democracy (as it exists in the minds of the American foreign policy establishment) and ensuring US national interests and security.

At no time was an American presence in Central Asia obvious to any extent. Today, however, Washington is building up its efforts and relying on the entire range of means and methods (from “soft power” to coups) to consolidate its hegemony in that region, too. The US has organized more than one military action against states that have protected their national interests and refused to follow the American foreign policy course. Saddam Hussein was provoked to occupy Kuwait only to be routed by the US, its NATO allies, and several Arab states. The American military presence in the Persian Gulf zone was increased many times over.

Amid the sharp international rivalry, the struggle for Central Asia is gaining momentum. Americans, both politicians and the military, are fairly open about their tactical and strategic goals in this part of Asia that is far removed from their own borders. The methods employed can be identified through current and retrospective analysis.

Kind words, including tweets in local languages, were accompanied by stern warnings. The US Department of the Treasury, Department of Justice, and Department of Commerce gave companies that might be involved in the export of sanctioned goods guidelines for preventing the circumvention of sanctions against Russia. Uzbekistan was added to the document alongside China, Turkey, and Armenia as territories of illegal transit to Russia.

The US’s youth policy is very effective. America is pursuing two aims: First, to create an elite US-oriented core among the younger generation that is educated in the US on American grants and looks to America as a pattern to be copied. America is striving to establish a group of young people in Central Asia who at some point in the future will be able to lead these countries in the direction approved by the US. The second goal is to select the most talented young people and make them US citizens. These lucky people will first acquire green cards with all (except political) rights of US citizens.

The US works hard to lure well-off and healthy young people (from the Central Asian countries in particular) with the prospect of permanent residence status. Families with underage children are especially welcome.

Young people are also attracted by educational and recreational centers known by the common name American Space. They offer audio and video-materials about the US and fast and reliable Internet; they host meetings, seminars, and training sessions; and they serve as a social space for spending time with friends. Such centers have been already opened in eight cities of Tajikistan (Dushanbe, Khujand, Isfara, Kulob, Khorugh, Bokhtar, Gharm, and Panjakent) and in eight cities of Kyrgyzstan. In Kulob, the center is based in the building of the Institute of Technologies and Innovative Management; in Isfara, it shares the building with school No. 2. The centers are open from morning to evening.

According to secret reports of American diplomats that appeared on the Internet thanks to WikiLeaks, the US frequently and successfully relied on corruption in Central Asia. It was through corruption that the Manas military base continued functioning for some time, albeit under a different name. The key role in this operation belonged to Maxim, son of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev.

The US is indeed bothered by the continued presence of the Islamic State and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, but that is not the only reason why it needs military bases in Central Asia. America demonstrates a dual approach to Islamic terrorists: On one hand, it is determined to prevent any actions against itself; on the other, it might channel their activities against its adversaries. The US might use them to destabilize the situation in Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries, and according to certain facts, it has certain tools at its disposal to influence the activities of ISIS militants.

The downfall of the pro-Western government of Afghanistan forced some Afghan intelligence officers trained in the US and soldiers of elite special forces units to join ISIS-K. Some of them had probably been recruited by American intelligence, which means that from that time on, there were professionals who would not only regularly inform the Americans but would influence the political course of ISIS.

In December 2022, ISIS-K fighters attacked Hotel Langan in Kabul, a popular hotel among Chinese. Five Chinese businesspeople were wounded and several Afghan guards were killed. It was an act obviously intended to intimidate China, which was implementing certain projects in Afghanistan, creating jobs for Afghans, and restoring the country's devastated economy.

Today, the US treats Central Asia as a crucial field of confrontation in which it will not hesitate to use the entire arsenal of available means and methods of a superpower that is losing rationality in its bid to retain world domination and will never hesitate to use the most sophisticated "hard power" methods. The "not-soft power" policy has its logic, but the peoples and states of Central Asia, Russia, and China, however, consider it extremely important to prevent its victory. This is paramount to the security, well-being, and sustainable independent development of all who live in Central Asia.

Kazakhstan: Foreign Policy Dilemmas

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Keywords: Kazakhstan, Russia, China, Turkey, EU, US, multivector policy, foreign policy dilemmas

THE multivector principle, which forms the basis of Kazakhstan's foreign policy, remains the republic's calling card of sorts. This envisions "fostering friendly, equal, and mutually beneficial relations with all states, interstate associations, and international organizations that are of practical interest to Kazakhstan."

Meanwhile, Kazakhstan's multivector trends are often determined by the interests of political, energy, trade, and financial elites that to a large extent depend on international investors. After all, it is no secret that foreign capital has an extensive presence in Kazakhstan's economic system, which largely relies on export revenues from energy and other resources. Another significant influence on Kazakhstan's foreign policy comes from numerous technically nonstate entities, which are mostly of Western origin and promote the political goals of the countries they represent; they have been active in the country since the 1990s.

Until January 2022, Kazakhstan was considered one of the most stable post-Soviet republics. The transfer of power there also took place more or painlessly.

A POLITICAL crisis started on January 2, 2022, with unrest in the oil and gas producing towns of Zhanaozen and Aktau over sharply increased prices for liquefied gas. The “gas maidan” [reference to the 2014 uprising in Ukraine on Independence Square – Trans.] quickly spread to other cities, where initially peaceful demonstrations turned into mass riots. In Almaty, protesters not only looted shops but also began to arm themselves, seizing administrative buildings, infrastructure facilities, and even an airport. President Tokayev declared the rioters “international terrorist gangs” and on January 4, 2022, imposed a national state of emergency for two weeks. At the same time, the president appealed to the heads of state of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), of which Kazakhstan is a full-fledged member, “for assistance in overcoming the terrorist threat,” focusing on reports about “the terrorists’ intention to undermine Kazakhstan’s state system.”

The CSTO Collective Security Council assented to the Kazakh leader’s request, and on the night of January 5-6, 2022, 2,300 military service personnel from Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia arrived in Kazakhstan on a peacekeeping mission.

It was initially agreed that the CSTO peacekeeping contingent would be sent to Kazakhstan “for a limited period in order to stabilize and normalize the situation in the country.”⁴ According to Tokayev, this task was fulfilled by January 10, so he announced the completion of the CSTO mission and the withdrawal of its forces from Kazakhstan on January 13, 2022.

In the period following the quelling of the revolt, the Kazakh leadership sought to continue the course set by the power transfer toward systemic changes that envisioned comprehensive economic and sociopolitical transformations. They were carried out as part of building a new model of public governance and creating mechanisms of dialogue between the authorities and society in keeping with the concept of a “responsive state.”

RUSSIA and Kazakhstan traditionally perceive each other as priority partners and important strategic allies. Both states play a significant role in international organizations active in the post-Soviet Eurasian space such as the CIS, the CSTO, the Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Russia and Kazakhstan are inseparably linked in the security area.

Kazakhstan, with which the Russian Federation has the longest land border in the world (7,598.8 km), is a gateway of sorts that opens for Russia unhindered access to the Asian part of the former USSR and “far” Asia.

Meanwhile, since Crimea’s reunification with Russia in 2014, Russian-Kazakh interaction has been put to the test, mostly related to fears (often fueled from the outside) that Russia would start acting according to the Crimean scenario with respect to northern Kazakhstan. Such assertions ascribed to Moscow could have been chalked up to propaganda, had certain Russian politicians not spoken out on the issue, playing into the hands of Russophobic nationalist circles in Kazakhstan. They complicated the already difficult relations between Russia and Kazakhstan.

The moment of truth came with the January crisis in Kazakhstan, when Russia proved its loyalty to its allied obligations. It is another matter that soon afterward, Kazakhstan faced a dilemma: to go along with Russia in the foreign policy arena or to distance itself from it. This geopolitical fork in the road occurred on February 24, 2022.

Unlike other Central Asian republics that preferred not to advertise their stance on the SMO, Kazakhstan publicly declared its refusal to recognize the independence of the [self-proclaimed] Donetsk Basin republics and the incorporation of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR), the Lugansk People’s Republic (LPR), and Zaporozhye and Kherson Provinces into Russia following the September 23-27, 2022

referendums. Kazakhstan also ruled out sending its military service personnel to the SMO zone to help Russia, although at one time it was the only Central Asian country to send its military contingent to participate in the war in Afghanistan under NATO banners. Kazakhstan has also scaled back several economic and trade agreements with Russia out of fear of being punished by the West for evading the economic and political restrictions imposed on Russia.

But overall, Kazakhstan is not averse to replacing Russia as an alternative supplier of energy resources and goods to Europe.

Russia is tolerant toward Kazakhstan's current agenda, in keeping with its traditional tactics of noninterference in its neighbors' domestic affairs.

In this particular case, such an approach arises from concerns that the US and its European allies may begin to manipulate nationalist elements in Kazakhstan along the lines of the scenario tested out in the Baltic states or Ukraine.

KAZAKHSTAN'S advantageous geographical position as a natural bridge of sorts between Russia and Central Asia is equally attractive to both China and Turkey.

China is particularly interested in transport and logistics access to Europe through Kazakhstan's territory: This is why it has been assigned a key role in China's Belt and Road geopolitical project. Energy is a significant factor in Kazakh-Chinese relations given that China imports roughly one-fifth of [its natural] gas from Kazakhstan, where China is the main oil and gas investor.

As for the January events in Kazakhstan, it seems that the beneficiary there was not so much Russia, which in effect prevented a coup attempt, as China, which looked on as outrages were committed on the streets of Kazakh cities, limiting itself to verbal support for the Kazakh government.

The stumbling block remains the "Xinjiang issue": persistent suspicions in Kazakhstan regarding Beijing's repression against Muslim Uyghurs and ethnic Kazakhs living in the XUAR. Kazakh nationalists continue to criticize the authorities for expanding economic ties with China (as well as with Russia), while anti-Chinese/anti-Russian invective may also reflect the aspirations of some politicians in the upper echelons of power to search for alternative partners that would balance the Chinese and Russian presence in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan's course toward integration with the Turkic world is being cast as one of the republic's foreign policy priorities, especially given that since the first days of its independence, the idea of Turkic unity has been perceived in Kazakhstan as a tool of the nation's historical and cultural revival. It was no accident that a decision was made to switch from the Cyrillic-based Kazakh alphabet to the Latin alphabet by 2025, or to rename South Kazakhstan Province as Turkestan Province in 2018, since, according to the official explanation, its "holy city" of Turkestan is the "spiritual capital of the Turkic world."

Furthermore, some political parties in Kazakhstan are calling for rapprochement with the Turkic community and withdrawal from the EaeU and the CSTO.

TO THE West, Kazakhstan, which borders both Russia and China, is important as a possible replacement of Russia in terms of energy supplies and as a link in the chain of countries that can be used for settling scores with rivals. After all, hypothetically, further destabilization in Kazakhstan or the coming to power in the republic of an openly pro-Western regime would make it easier for the so-called collective West to control destructive processes in Russia, as well as in China – via the XUAR, which borders Kazakhstan and remains a problem for China.

The EU, one of the republic's leading trade and economic partners, employs similar tactics with respect to Kazakhstan. As part of the 11th package of anti-Russian sanctions, adopted on June 23, 2023, the EU

announced the creation of a step-by-step mechanism of restrictions against third countries that are helping Russia bypass sanctions on certain technologies and goods, including dual-use ones. Kazakhstan may end up among such violators: The EU suspects it of failing to comply with Western sanctions and is threatening to punish it.

Taking a realistic view of its potential, Kazakhstan is currently trying to find a political niche that would protect it against threats and challenges arising from the aggravated situation in the post-Soviet space and escalating global confrontation.

Kazakhstan's foreign policy will continue to be influenced by challenges arising from the specific features of the republic's political process and the lineup of forces. In formulating its strategy, Kazakhstan will have to consider both the capabilities of its potential partners and the regional balance, which is prone to ups and downs. Important dilemmas for Kazakhstan's multivector pragmatic policy will continue to be the choice of strategic partners for long-term cooperation and the imperative of upholding its own well-defined interests.

A New Right-Wing Italy and Prospects for Italian Populism

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Keywords: Italian Republic, populism, political parties, protest voting, transformation of the party-political space, elections, Brothers of Italy

IN THE last few years, the party and political landscape of Europe has changed significantly. In some countries, new parties and movements have moved to the fore. They represent a so-called "political alternative" frequently defined as "new populism" – a sign that the broad masses of the European electorate are dissatisfied with developments within national borders and at the supranational level. Europeans are dissatisfied with migration problems, economic instability, and a host of social issues.

Forza Italia as we know it today is a direct descendant of the political party Silvio Berlusconi founded in the 1990s, when the old Italian system was disintegrating during the country's transition to the Second Republic. At that time, Forza Italia was the most striking representative of the new-type parties that were gradually replacing the political forces of the period of the "imperfect two-party system" and the Christian Democrats' total domination in Italian politics.

Brothers of Italy, an extreme right-wing party that its political opponents call "neo-fascist," deserves special mention. Set up in December 2012 by Guido Crosetto, Giorgia Meloni, and Ignazio La Russa, three former members of the right-centrist The People of Freedom, it defines itself as a movement that strives to implement its political program based on the principles of people's sovereignty, freedom, democracy, justice, social solidarity, merits, and financial fairness inspired by a spiritual vision of life and values and the national, liberal, and people's traditions of the peoples involved in building Europe.

The image of Marine Le Pen, meanwhile, is clearly affiliated, despite the radical transformation of the image of the party from the National Front to the National Rally, with pariah radicals of the Jean Louis Le Pen era in France.

THE document 100 Acts in 100 Days by Giorgia Meloni was published in early February 2023, in which a detailed description was given of the successes and achievements of the right-wing government. The

preamble highlights economic stability and restored international prestige (for some reason, confirmed by the fact that Giorgia Meloni was the only female leader at the G20 in Bali).

It is likewise significant that half of the seats in the newly elected secretariat of the Democratic Party are held by women (as befits a progressive European country). Giorgia Meloni's cabinet has a gender imbalance: Just seven of its 27 members are women. This is probably not a big deal in Italy, but it is totally unacceptable to Brussels and its trans-Atlantic partners. This means that such a trifling principle as "noninterference in the internal affairs of sovereign states" can be pushed aside.

Considering that Italian political parties are highly personified, it is likely that the new DP secretary was elected in part as a counterweight to Giorgia Meloni personally.

The "new bipolarity" in Italy might become a faithful reflection of the general trend toward fragmentation of the political landscape in Europe, where the system of political actors is falling apart while electoral instability is increasing. This explains the unions between political actors whose political ideas are not necessarily close.

THE political crisis in Italy that started with Matteo Renzi's failed 2016 constitutional reform has been going on for six years and has led to another round of transformations of the Italian party system. The turn to the right was caused by a protracted government crisis, itself a component of a much greater political crisis that has been affecting domestic policies in Italy for many years. It is an indisputable fact that the populist "alternative" right-wing coalition was brought to power by a nation seeking changes: The systemic crisis in the EU, especially obvious in certain countries, undermined the stability of certain national states, including Italy

The deep-cutting transformations of Italy's party and political landscape seemingly go beyond the country's domestic political paradigm of the last few decades, making it possible to talk about a new stage of its development – a so-called Third Republic in which the leading role in the political process belongs to actors who manage to win the sympathies of a bigger share of the electorate.

Russia and Africa: Old Friends and New Opportunities

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Keywords: Russia, Africa, African continent, Western countries, diplomacy, stability, Ukrainian crisis, cooperation

THE holding of the second Russia-Africa Summit in July 2023 in St. Petersburg amid the tough confrontation between the West and Russia was a true feat of Russian diplomacy. The preparation of such a largescale and significant event required a lot of effort from Russian foreign policy officials. Consistently and convincingly explaining, without typical Anglo-Saxon hysteria and fabrications, Russia's position on international issues, including the Ukraine crisis, and winning African countries over to Russia, which is extending a helping hand to the continent that is home to almost 1.5 billion people, is painstaking and at times exhausting work that remains behind the scenes against the backdrop of positive changes.

The result of careful preparations is evident: The forum was attended by representatives of 49 of the continent's 54 countries, of which 17 were represented by heads of state. This is a high number, considering that many African countries have grappled with the COVID pandemic, faced food crises, and

are dealing with complex problems related to the unstable military and political situation in their countries.

In addition, the summit was held in the context of strong pressure on African leaders from Western countries seeking to disrupt the event and subsequently reduce its impact.

The disappointment of African politicians and entrepreneurs in the so-called partnership ties with Western countries is obvious. Although rich in natural resources, what Africa gets from these partnerships is mere crumbs from the table, as traditional “partners” consider the African continent a source of raw materials for profit.

The leaders who attended the summit expressed their approval of Russia’s policy at the international level.

A key topic at the summit was the diversification of trade and economic ties. This topic is vast and multifaceted. During Putin’s meeting with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, a 16.4% increase in trade turnover was noted.

Russia and Africa are preparing to switch to settlements in national currencies and increase imports of Russian industrial goods to the continent. In addition, Russian companies are willing to transfer to their African counterparts information technologies that may be useful to them in government administration and the banking sector.

On the whole, however, Russia’s foreign trade organizations are still timid in their approach to developing direct ties with African countries.

Many African nations are experiencing the tragedy of armed conflict. Lawlessness, violence, and humanitarian disasters are not uncommon on African soil. It is not surprising that the African leaders who attended the summit were interested in Russia’s high-quality military equipment and weapons.

Education cooperation remains stable as ever. During the difficult years of the 1960s until now, our country has always trained national personnel. According to data of the Russian Ministry of Science and Higher Education, we have more than 34,000 postsecondary students from Morocco, Nigeria, Algeria, Zimbabwe, Tunisia, Cameroon, Congo, Angola, and Cote d’Ivoire.

With regard to education, the Russian Ministry of Education and Science has signed memorandums of understanding on higher education with several African countries. The importance of educating Africans in Russia was emphasized by Guinea-Bissau President Umaro Mokhtar Sissoco Embaló, who named education a priority of cooperation with Russia.

Russian Minister of Science and Higher Education Valery Falkov spoke about network cooperation between universities that allows students to take educational programs from several universities at once.

Russia, as the successor of the Soviet Union, traditionally continues to provide African countries with humanitarian assistance in the health care sector. During the two-day summit, Russia took steps to strengthen relations with the African continent in this area. In particular, Vladimir Putin announced the launch of a 1.2-billion-ruble program of health care assistance for African countries.

The most important outcome of the summit was the final Declaration and Joint Action Plan until 2026 (the year of the next Russia-Africa Summit). The Final Declaration touched on nearly all areas of mutual cooperation: policy, law, security, trade, economics, science, technology, humanitarian aid, culture, sports, and the environment.

According to Oleg Karpovich, vice-rector of the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Diplomatic Academy, “The St. Petersburg summit was a demonstration of our readiness, together with our longtime associates and

partners, to transform individual achievements into systemic multidimensional efforts aimed at liberating the African continent from the legacy of colonialism. The key factor is that this strategy will be pursued not in competition but in cooperation with other centers of power of the emerging era of multipolarity, such as China, India, and Saudi Arabia. The global majority has a logical and formalized understanding of the need to force a historical turning point that will, among other things, give back control to the countries and peoples of Africa over their lives and destinies.”

Dignity as a Key Word at the Second Russia-Africa Summit

Irina Abramova, *Director, Institute for African Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), Corresponding Member, RAS, Member, RAS Presidium*

Keywords: Second Russia-Africa Summit, Agenda 2063, South African Republic, African Union

Irina Olegovna [Abramova], the second Russia-Africa Summit, which has clearly become historic, has come to an end. The Western press was rife with speculation about the level of attendance of African guests. Who in fact came to visit us?

We are well aware that all these speculations are related to the enormous political pressure that Western countries have exerted on African states. There are also purely technical difficulties, when some heads of state were simply not allowed to pass through the territory of some countries or were forced to switch to trains. In other words, everything was done to prevent anyone from reaching us.

Who did we end up with? Seventeen heads of state attended. Yes, this is fewer than [the number who attended the first Russia-Africa Summit (2019)] in Sochi, but the situation has changed.

A total of 49 delegations came. Relevant ministers were in attendance. Namibia alone, a small country, sent a delegation of 84 people – the head of the party and relevant ministers.

The purpose of the visit of these delegations was not just to meet and talk but to identify specific ways to facilitate our interaction and tools that could take our cooperation to a new level. And if we consider the situation in the world today, the anti-Russian propaganda that is being spread, the lies that are being told about our country by the Western media that dominate the African continent, then the summit was a complete success for us.

It is clear that China, India, and the countries of Southeast Asia will remain Russia’s leading partners. But we need to diversify our foreign economic relations. The consumer market of the African continent doubles every five years, and its demands perfectly coincide with what Russia produces.

Africa, for its part, has been waiting for Russia for a long time, and it very much hopes that this time, when we return there, we will not leave the continent again.

[...]

The word “dignity” could be supplemented with the word “sovereignty.” Sovereignty in everything. Not just political, not just economic, but also ideological and intellectual sovereignty, which is no less important. Humanitarian sovereignty – Africa does not accept these so-called Western values that are being artificially imposed on it.

The population of Africa was under colonial oppression for a long time. According to Western sources, 12 million to 17 million people were removed from there. But these figures do not reflect reality, because only those who reached the place where their slave labor was subsequently utilized are

counted. People were transported in horrible, utterly inhumane conditions and simply died on the way. The total number of Africans taken into slavery could be as high as 120 million.

Colonialism has not disappeared. Moreover, new forms of it are now emerging and spreading not only to the global south, but also to Europe.

And, by the way, the tools that were used in the 1990s in relation to our state are also purely colonial tools.

We, at the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of African Studies have always said that Africa should be given a fishing pole, not a fish. Yes, it is important to increase trade. It is important to increase supplies of grain and fertilizers. Naturally, the grain deal was the focus of attention of African states. They did not follow the path imposed on them by the West; they did not accuse Russia of breaking the grain deal, but tried to understand this situation and how it looks from our viewpoint.

But at every session, African representatives said that they had their own opportunities for development. And they do not need to be supplied endlessly with food as humanitarian aid. Yes, in the short term it is important for them to have these supplies, including supplies of free grain, which our president promised. We will compensate for all the grain that was delivered to Africa as part of the grain deal with Russian grain.

It was suggested that we could carry out transactions and payments with Africa using currencies other than the dollar. And, apparently, in the short term, it will be the yuan, which is not the best, because it is essentially switching from one dependence to another. In the medium term, there will be a transition to settlements in national currencies. But there is a problem of matching export and import volumes.

As for scientific development, there was some skepticism with regard to Africa's science. I would like to cite Mikhail Kovalchuk, head of the Kurchatov Institute, who told me that the first textbook he used to study X-ray processes was written by an author from South Africa. The book was published in South Africa in 1939. Can one really say that there is no science in Africa?

Africa is indeed increasingly becoming an agent rather than an object of international relations.

The Soviet Union in Africa often resorted to bartering. Why not? Infrastructure in exchange for a field – that is how China operates. In other words, there are a lot of tools. But our companies must build their strategy clearly, assess African markets, and figure out when, how, and where to go.

Today, no matter how much a certain agenda is being imposed on us from the outside – and it is indeed being imposed on us in our relations with Africa – we need to focus, first, on providing Africa with food. That is, the development of agriculture in a broad sense – not only supplies, but also technologies and modern farming methods.

“Miraculously, Over the Past 30 Years, 40,000 Churches Have Been Restored”

Metropolitan Ferapont

Keywords: Kostroma Kremlin, restoration of churches, Feodorovskaya Icon of the Mother of God, priests in the Special Military Operation zone

We are reviving spiritual life in all its manifestations. We are continuing to restore and build churches, which is highly relevant for our region, since many shrines have been destroyed.

Speaking in modern terms, “the cherry on top” is, of course, the beginning of the revival of the Kostroma Kremlin, a truly special shrine. Two churches stand on the Kremlin territory, both once considered cathedrals. They were blown up in 1934 – physically destroyed.

After yet another fire in the early 18th century, Kostroma residents did not restore it as a defensive fortress but left it as a cathedral complex. Two cathedrals housed the famous miraculous Feodorovskaya Icon of the Mother of God, which wondrously appeared in Kostroma.

There were more than 1,400 churches in Kostroma Province. Many of them were closed or destroyed altogether. Presently, we take pride in having restored approximately 300 churches, and Kostroma Province is home to around 700 historical church buildings.

Our priests spiritually guide the soldiers in the SMO zone. There are two airborne regiments in Kostroma, and our priests provide spiritual nourishment there as well.

Today, as our fathers who have been in the war zone tell us, it is impossible to build mobile temples. The enemy identifies them very quickly and opens fire on them and individual priests, even hunting them down. As a target, a priest is just as valuable to them as a senior officer.

People start to embrace a more profound spiritual life. Not everyone, of course. But there is a saying that there are no atheists in foxholes. During the first three weeks, fathers administered communion to 1,500 people at the frontline. Many people were baptized at assembly points. War compels people to contemplate the true meaning of life, the possibility of death, and, consequently, spiritual life.

The most painful thing for the Church is not physical persecution, which only strengthens it. Martyrdom strengthens Christianity. However, a schism is an extremely challenging situation for the Church because it disrupts the most crucial aspect, the unity of the Church. We know countless stories of schisms, some severe, some less severe. We can talk about the Catholic Church and the terrible split into the Eastern and Western Churches. We can also recall the relatively recent history of the 1917 revolution, which produced the Renovatianist schism that was gradually overcome.

There is always a spiritual aspect. It exists in this case, too – the enemy attacks us, and the Lord allows it to happen. Why? We must understand that the Lord always calls us to repentance. The reason for epidemics, wars, schisms, and everything else lies solely in our spiritual weaknesses. The situation in Ukraine is deeply saddening, but we must trust that the Lord is all-powerful and can mend everything; therefore, we pray for it. As the wise preacher put it in Ecclesiastes: “This too shall pass.” It undoubtedly will, just as the revolutionary and Soviet years did, even though at that time it seemed that the Church would never rise again.

I was baptized as an adult, and I can testify that when the sacrament of baptism was performed on me, I felt like a new person. Some kind of internal change indeed took place – this is a fact.

“Art Creates the State and Makes It Civilized”

N. Safronov

Keywords: installation art, performances, portraits, Western propaganda, charity, museum as a source of the best

Since the 1990s, under American influence, we have had a huge number of installation and performance artists whose work is very questionable. But, of course, good performances and installation art also exist today.

I give a scholarship to the most deserving students at two universities – the M.B. Grekov Russian Art University and the A.N. Kosygin Russian State University – precisely so that, as Dalí said, they “begin by learning to draw and paint like Velasquez. After that, you can do as you like.” First, you must master the basics, then you can do whatever you want. Kandinsky was a professional artist; he could paint. All those who created new painting styles had professional skills and could be Vrubels or Degas.

Today it is very tempting not to bother, because someone who doesn’t even know how to draw has made nearly \$70 million from NFT tokens. And people want to believe in a fairy tale that one can sell performances and installation art for crazy money.

I’m eclectic in many ways, including in painting. Of course, I studied the classics as a realist. And then I was into surrealism. Dalí said: “You’ll never reach the top, but at least you’ll get close.” You have to keep moving toward some important and great goals. In the end, you may not achieve them, but you will achieve many results.

Symbolism and, of course, portraiture are the main areas of my work. But I paint landscapes, too. I designed a Rive Gauche store in Chechnya. I worked on theater productions with Armen Dzhigarkhanyan, on “Pygmalion,” on “Dalí and Gala” for Sergey Prokhanov at Moon Theater.

But mostly I do portraits. I paint rich and famous people, world “stars,” presidents, kings, sheikhs, etc. It is interesting for me, it brings money and, of course, gives me the opportunity to do charity work, to help and support my loved ones.

I have had the fortune to rub shoulders with great personalities, including Sergey Petrovich Kapitsa and Zhores Ivanovich Alferov. Together with my friend Valentin Gaft, we published three books. My paintings inspired him. He once signed his book for me and wrote: “Thanks to you, I have succeeded as a poet.”

Now, neither Shishkin nor Aivazovsky can be sold at major auctions. Everything is changing. But I am still trying to move forward, I am currently preparing an exhibition in Switzerland, which, as I have already said, will be supported by Sophia Loren and Ornella Muti.

Other challenges arise as well. Foreign customers used to pay huge amounts for the portraits I painted, but now the prices have fallen dramatically. Their reasoning: You have problems there, and we won’t pay as we used to. But I still get orders, one just came from Vienna. So foreign orders still come.

I would say that this is a consequence of well-thought-out Western propaganda. In the 1990s, American specialists, Soros representatives, were in almost every institute, and they introduced their negative attitude toward our country through textbooks and curricula, among other things. And it was all accepted back then. New rich people, brought up on that ideology, appeared. They took a lot of money out of our country but did not build, say, schools here, or support, for example, their hometowns. They didn’t need it, and others should ensure their own survival. They made a lot of money in Russia, but they lost pretty much everything. Do you understand? After all, with the money they took out, they could have built churches, improved the cemeteries where their parents were buried, rebuilt cities and neighborhoods.

In the 1990s, our proper Soviet education was corrupted. Our ambition was BAM, Komsomolsk-on-Amur, and not everyone was even accepted. There was good Soviet propaganda. And then it was lost. True values disappeared. That is why there is now a sort of separation of the wheat from the chaff, and it is becoming clear who is who. It is very important to decide which side you are on.

Charity? I have helped a lot of people. Through foundations, too, of course. Sometimes one errs; there are dishonest foundations. But one trusts the people who create these funds and believes in their sincerity.

My mother used to say: “When you grow up, from every three kopeks you earn, give one to charity.” I give one-and-a-half or two.

In general, if there is no art, there is no state. Art creates the state and makes it civilized. That is why art should be properly presented to the masses. Today, as before, there should be Mamontovs, Tretyakovs, and Morozovs, who founded private galleries and showed art to the world and people. And of course, one should visit museums and libraries.

A good museum is a healthy charge of positive energy. And what if a museum has only performances and installation artwork? Those indeed exist, too. But there is a need for other museums with paintings from the collection that cover the entire history of world art. Let’s remember the work Vetka [Russian for “branch”], acquired by the Tretyakov Gallery and exhibited in Alexander Ivanov’s hall right across from his painting *The Appearance of Christ Before the People*. A branch, simply found on the street, attached with a piece of tape to plywood. This kind of art should only be displayed in modern art museums. And classical museums, as I said, should collect only the best.

Following the Routes of Russian 19th-Century Explorers in the Southern Ocean

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Keywords: Antarctic, expedition, Bellingshausen, Lazarev, whaling, Aleut, Slava, Sovetskaya Ukraina, Sovetskaya Rossiya, Yury Dolgoruky, research, negotiations, moratorium on whaling

THE Russian Empire significantly strengthened its positions in the early 19th century by defeating Napoleonic France and playing a key role in the Congress of Vienna – a series of meetings in 1814-1815 that repaired monarchical regimes undermined by the Great French Revolution of 1789- 1799 and established a new political and legal order for Europe.

These political achievements were consolidated by circumnavigations of the globe by Russian ocean expeditions. The first such expedition was a voyage of 1803 to 1806 by the sloops *Nadezhda* and *Neva* under the command of Adam Johann von Krusenstern [Ivan Kruzenshtern] and Yury Lisiansky. Those expeditions, besides flying the Russian flag in various parts of the planet, involved large-scale oceanographic research. The Russian Empire had a chance to boost its global prestige by discovering lands within the Antarctic Circle and by finding a navigation route between the Atlantic and Pacific in the Arctic. The renowned British explorer James Cook was unable to achieve this during any of his three expeditions to the Pacific, (1768-1771, 1772-1775, and 1776-1779).

THE 1819-1821 expedition, preparations for it, and its achievements are the subject of numerous books and articles, both Russian and foreign. On July 24, 1821, *Vostok* and *Mirny* returned to Kronstadt after a voyage of 752 days. Several days later, Russian Minister of the Navy Jean-Baptiste, Marquis de Traversay [Ivan de Traverse] reported to Alexander I that the expedition had been successful and asked for promotions and decorations for the expedition members.

Vostok and *Mirny* approached the shores of the mysterious Terra Australis on nine occasions and mapped them. They discovered islands in the Southern Ocean; obtained data on climate, water

composition, and currents in totally unexplored ocean areas; and made the first classification of drift ice. Many of their conclusions were confirmed by subsequent research. In those years, the word “Antarctic” was not yet part of geographical vocabulary. It was put in use in 1886 at the suggestion of British explorer James Murray. Remarkably, neither the Russian pioneers of 1819-1821 nor British, French, and American explorers who visited the Antarctic soon afterward ever said that a new continent had been discovered. The realization that Antarctica is a continent rather than an archipelago with a common ice cap did not come until the 1960s. Nevertheless, the discoveries by Russian sailors in the Southern Ocean are impossible to overestimate.

Prominent figures in the Russian Navy proposed that Russia organize new Antarctic expeditions to follow up the achievements of 1819-1821. In 1829, Krusenstern drew up a plan for such an expedition, but the Navy general staff turned it down. In 1833, his son Paul Theodor von Krusenstern [Pavel Kruzenshtern], who by then had some major sea voyages to his name, came up with his own plan and put it before the Admiralty Board, but his initiative shared the fate of his father's. After that, no more proposals for Antarctic expeditions were made.

The Russian government made no official statement on the discoveries of the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition before World War I, according to documents in the Russian Foreign Ministry archives. In a letter of February 27, 1915, under reference number 1560, Naval Minister Admiral Ivan Grigorovich asked Foreign Minister Sergey Sazonov to inform the war allies of Russia and neutral states of territorial discoveries in the Arctic Ocean by a Russian hydrographic expedition of 1910-1915 and on the Antarctic discoveries of the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition.

THOUGH Soviet scientists argued that exploring the Antarctic was essential for understanding global natural processes, proposals for an expedition to the region were finding no support in the Soviet government.

Other countries also unilaterally claimed territory in Antarctica – Britain (1908), New Zealand (1923), Australia (1933), France (1924, 1938, and 1955), Argentina (1932), and Chile (1940) – but the USSR offered no official response to any of those claims. The Soviet Union did not revise the Russian Empire's position on the British claim. The main reason why the Soviet Union did not dispute the claims of Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, or Chile was that it did not have diplomatic relations with those countries at the time they made the claims.

The Soviet Union did not need any less whale blubber after the Great Patriotic War – in fact, it needed more. Soviet officials showed tenacity in negotiating with representatives of former World War II allies to obtain a former German whaling flotilla as part of reparations. The flotilla's factory ship, *Wiking*, was built in Britain in 1929 for a Norwegian private company. In 1938, after numerous Antarctic voyages under the flags of Norway, Britain, and other countries, it was acquired by Germany and renamed *Gloria*.

After the outbreak of World War II, the *Gloria* stopped whaling. Later on, some of its ships were sunk in Allied air raids against German ports. After the war, those ports were included in the British occupation zone, and the British raised the sunken vessels and took the entire flotilla to Liverpool, planning to use it for whaling in the Antarctic under the British flag. The Soviet Union was eager to acquire the *Gloria* to use it for whaling in the Antarctic, the most promising area for whaling in the World Ocean.

The Soviet Union considered joining the agreement and protocol but took another option – it accepted an invitation of October 4, 1946, from the US State Department to participate in a planned conference in Washington on whaling regulation scheduled for November 20, 1946. In a letter of October 14 to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, the minister for the fishing industry of the western USSR, Alexander Ishkov, proposed sending a delegation to the conference.

The Washington conference, which took place in December, resulted in a new accord, the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling. The Soviet Union became one of its signatories, and this made Slava's first voyage possible.

The Soviet Union sought to build up its whaling operations in the Antarctic and in the mid-1950s adopted a program to establish three new flotillas. Soviet design bureaus designed catchers and factory ships. Two identical factory ships were built at a shipyard in Nikolayev. One of them, Sovetskaya Ukraina, was built in 1959, and the other, Sovetskaya Rossiya, in 1961. Each was 217 meters long and 24.8 meters wide, had a displacement of 44.9 tons, was fitted with two 7,500-horsepower engines, could attain a maximum speed of 16 knots, and was to be manned by a crew of 536. On March 30, 1959, the government ordered the establishment of one more flotilla, to be based in Kaliningrad. The factory ship for it was made by converting the German passenger and cargo ship Hamburg, built in 1926. On June 20, 1960, it was renamed Yury Dolgoruky, and the Soviet flag was hoisted over it.

Soviet whaling in the Antarctic from 1946 to 1987 helped address numerous international political and legal problems for the USSR, including issues of Soviet participation in IWC meetings, and was one of the reasons for the Soviet memorandum on the Antarctic of June 7, 1950, and for the First Soviet Comprehensive Antarctic Expedition, which began in 1955. Antarctic-related activities are still within the purview of the legal department of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

The history of Soviet and Russian whaling is expounded in detail in Kitoboy'naya slava Rossii [The Whaling Glory of Russia], a book published in 2016.

A.G. Yakovlev: Consul General of Russia in the Holy Land

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Keywords: Russian Empire, Holy Land, Jerusalem, St. Sergius compound, Israel, Siam, consulate, consul general, digital diplomacy, online exhibition

THE Embassy of Russia in Israel has prepared an online exhibition, "A.G. Yakovlev: 10 Years of Service as Russian Imperial Consul General in the Holy Land," to honor the memory of outstanding diplomat and Orientalist Alexander Yakovlev (<https://yakovlev-jerusalem.ru>). The website has desktop and mobile versions. His biography, digitized archival materials, documents, and photos (some of them never before published) serve as an excellent illustration of the history of Russia's presence in the Holy Land in the latter half of the 19th century.

The Department of History and Records (DHR) of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has filled the exhibition with digitized documents from the Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Empire related to Alexander Yakovlev and his diplomatic work.

WRITTEN history of the presence of the Russian state in the Holy Land dates to 1820, when a vice-consulate opened in Jaffa. The spiritual and cultural ties of our Fatherland with the Biblical region are much older. For centuries, the Middle Eastern holy sites of Christianity and Islam have attracted pilgrims from our multinational and multiconfessional country.

Russia decided to expand its diplomatic presence in the historic region not only to consolidate its influence in the Middle East but also to protect pilgrims and support the local Christian population and the Jerusalem Orthodox Church.

At no time did Russia regard the Holy Land or any of its neighbors as a platform for colonial aggression or an object of military-political ambitions. The comprehensive support that the Russian Federation extends to the Christians of the Middle East and the local Orthodox churches goes back to the active role of patron of the Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire that our state played from the 18th to the early 20th century.

The 19th century was the “golden age” of Russia’s presence in the Holy Land, when the flow of pilgrims from Russia increased many times over. The Russian Spiritual Mission in Jerusalem (RSM), founded in 1847, and the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society (IOPS), founded in 1882, played a great role in consolidating the cultural and spiritual ties between Russia and the Holy Land and organizing pilgrimages to Christian shrines.

Russia’s efforts to set up a network of educational establishments for the local population (over 100 schools, colleges, and seminaries) in Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon³ deserve special mention. The most popular of them functioned in Nazareth and other cities of Galilee, the cradle of Christianity. Several generations of the Arab intelligentsia were educated in Russian schools.⁴ The memory of these activities is still alive among descendants of former graduates and serves to stimulate the interest of the younger generation in the Russian language, culture, and study in Russia.

The memory of these people – diplomats, Orientalists, scientists, and researchers – should be preserved and their heritage carefully studied and used. While the figures of outstanding ideologists and creators of “Russian Palestine” – Archimandrite Antonin (Kapustin) and Vasily Khitrovo, an outstanding state and public figure – are known in Russia due to IOPS educational activities, practically nothing is known about Russian diplomats of that time who served selflessly amid a tough situation in the Holy Land.

Their names are known to a small group of specialists, while an analysis of their biographies reveals that their precious intellectual heritage is needed today as much as ever. Their highly professional, creative, and fruitful service to their country is a beacon to all later generations; their analytical documents and diplomatic correspondence have become a training tool and model of diplomatic service.

ALEXANDER Yakovlev was an Orientalist, dragoman (interpreter), consul general of the Russian Empire in Jerusalem, and an honorary member of the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society. When preparing materials for the exhibition, we learned that he was a sensitive intellectual of sharp analytical mind, a bookworm, and a loyal patriot of his Fatherland.

IN 1882, he started his service in the capital of the Ottoman Empire. In spring 1884, Ambassador Alexander Nelidov dispatched the second dragoman of the embassy to Jerusalem on a special mission. He was to study and organize documents related to the real estate holdings of the late Archimandrite Antonin (Kapustin), an outstanding church and state figure and ideologist who had done much to create “Russian Palestine.” It was very important to preserve all of Antonin’s acquisitions and to transfer as much of the property rights of the Palestinian Commission as possible to the Russian government.

Yakovlev’s involvement in the life and activities of the Monastery on the Mount (Gornensky monastery) in Ein Kerem (district of Jerusalem since 1948) is of special interest. In 1894, he compiled the first list of all nuns of the Russian Mountain Community in Ein Kerem founded by Archimandrite Antonin (Kapustin), the future Monastery on the Mount. The digitized list can be found in our online exhibition.

ON November 27, 1897, Aleksandr Yakovlev was appointed Consul General in Jerusalem. His range of duties in this post went beyond property issues; he also monitored attempts of other states to infringe on the interests of Russia and Orthodoxy. On the instruction of Ambassador Nelidov, he studied the rights of each of the Christian churches to Christian shrines in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

In 1904, Alexander Yakovlev played an important role in settling the Ein Pharan issue related to the desire of the Russian Athos monks to buy and restore what remained of the ancient Pharan Lavra of Venerable Chariton the Confessor.

OUR online exhibition became even more interesting when we discovered in the historical archive of IOPS at the compound of St. Sergius in Jerusalem correspondence of the consul general with N. Mikhailov, manager of IOPS missions in Jerusalem from 1902 to 1907, which revealed interesting details of the everyday work of the Russian diplomatic mission abroad in the early 20th century. We studied the archival documents with the permission of and active cooperation with the IOPS Council and the state of Israel.

THE last years of the life of Alexander Yakovlev, which he spent as minister-resident of Russia in Siam and where, according to various sources, he died, deserve closer attention.

The new head of the Russian diplomatic mission in Bangkok never let European countries and their rapacious plans in Siam out of sight. He followed the progress of the French-Siamese Delimitation Commission³⁷ and studied the prospect of signing an Anglo-Siamese treaty.

THE online exhibition was opened on February 9, 2023, at the St. Sergius Compound in Jerusalem, with the support of Rossotrudnichestvo [Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation].

Russian Ambassador to Israel Anatoly Viktorov opened the official part. He spoke about the history of Russian diplomacy in the Middle East and the activities of the Consulate General of the Russian Empire in Jerusalem. The ambassador highlighted the importance of Russian patronage of the local Orthodox population, which intensified in the second half of the 19th century, as well as work to promote the Russian language and culture.

The event was attended by Ambassador of Belarus to Israel Yevgeny Vorobyev; Honorary Consul General of Russia in the Northern District of Israel Amin Safia; Russian, Belarusian, and Serbian diplomats; priests and deacons of the Russian Spiritual Mission in Jerusalem and nuns of the Convent on the Mount; members of the Jerusalem Department of IOPS and the Coordination Council of organizations of Russian-speaking compatriots in Israel; veterans; blockade survivors; and heads of associations of Russian-speaking compatriots in Israel.

Digital International Relations as a New Field in Academic Research and Education

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Keywords: digital international relations, information and communication technologies

Digital International Relations, a textbook for higher education institutions edited by Yelena Zinovyeva and Sergey Shitkov, is a comprehensive study of the role of global digital transformation in key world political trends. In accessible form, it explains key impacts of the digital transition on international relations.

The book is written by a team of leading specialists in international relations, security, and the world economy who examine digitalization from various scholarly and practical diplomatic viewpoints.

The book's first section deals with key aspects of disruptive digital technologies, including big data, artificial intelligence, blockchain, and 5G (fifth-generation cellular networks). Special attention is paid to the digital technology strategies of nations that are major players in world politics.

The second section looks at diplomatic practice through the lens of the digital revolution. It describes the evolution of the use of digital data in diplomacy since the 2010s and explains the importance of data analysis technologies for diplomatic work. This symbiosis of the humanities and engineering science is expected to stimulate research and make it easier to understand international political processes.

The third section is a comprehensive and insightful review of international information security issues. It describes challenges and threats caused by new technologies worldwide, key forms of international cooperation to guarantee information security, and major points of Russia's international information security policy. The section includes a subsection on the criminal use of information and communication technologies and attendant international challenges.

The fourth and final section deals with the digitalization of the world economy and, in combination with the previous sections, makes the book a comprehensive study. The section includes a chapter on the global robotics market and on technical standardization in global markets. Using Russia and some other countries as examples, the section makes detailed studies of the digital transformation of energy sectors.

Among the book's strong points are its clear presentation, deep insight into key issues of digital international relations, and a layout that makes it easy to find necessary information. The authors have definitely achieved their purpose of providing crucial information for students and any interested readers in an accessible form.

A Foreign Policy Narrative for Our Time

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Keywords: Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, world majority, Special Military Operation, Russia, the West, NATO

IT SEEMS difficult to overestimate the importance of the work under review, which has rightly been recommended as a textbook for students and trainees of the Diplomatic Academy. Its main merit is that it has overcome the key cognitive constraints of our political science – not only recent ones, but also those of the Soviet and earlier periods. In fact, the same can be said of the current Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, a truly innovative concept that meets the demands of the times and addresses the task of Russia's effective international positioning in a situation that bears all the hallmarks of a geopolitical revolution.

This is a very timely and yet well-founded study with a solid scholarly apparatus. The author's arguments, which have been sidelined and left out of academic discourse for a long time, are difficult to dispute.

It presents a sober, unbiased, intellectually honest, and scholarly view of things not blurred by any short-term considerations – a view that has been germinating for a long time. This is evident from the sources cited. It is just that the process was hindered by a kind of enchantment with the West, by what we now call West-centrism.

The scale of the problem also depends on the fact that it is a complex one and implies rethinking the very foundations of our existence as a distinct civilization-state throughout our entire history. It was the Ukrainian crisis and the Special Military Operation, no more and no less, that triggered the transformation of Russian society, which had obviously been going in the wrong direction, unaware of its true mission in history. And a great role here was played by the Foreign Policy Concept and President Vladimir Putin's statements about the meaning of the watershed moment in which we are living. Otherwise, we might have suffered an inglorious fate as material for a "smooth" transition under Western control, given the neocolonial dependence on the West in which we found ourselves together with the whole non-Western world (the fate of US allies is not much better), or even another civil war.

We have always felt ourselves to be different from our European neighbors and capable of doing what they were incapable of doing in our common history, such as stopping Napoleon or Hitler, who were products, as is evident today, of Western civilization and its specific worldview. At the same time, we have always believed ourselves to be part of a broader European civilization, albeit a special part of it (all countries are special) – especially since Peter the Great's modernization drew us into European politics and its alignments and we began to speak in its categories, including about ourselves.

But now it is time for our civilizational self-determination. We came a long way to reach this point, and have to thank our Western partners for their powerful and persuasive contribution to our awakening.

Many things speak for themselves. For example, purely objectively, the US and the West as a whole could have made different decisions after 1989 and 1991, so as to make the system they controlled inclusive by coopting not only Russia and China, but also India, Brazil, and South Africa. In that case, the system would have become multilateral and multipolar. They could have dissolved NATO or invited Russia to join it, turning the alliance into a truly regional collective security system. Then there would have been no need to invent something along the lines of the OSCE, or it could have been established as a comprehensive regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. They could have simply pursued a more moderate policy toward Russia and other major powers, considering that their rise was a purely objective process, and could have sought to negotiate instead of dictate.

There were many negative forecasts from sensible people, but a prophet is not without honor save in his own country, and some of them, accused of anti-Americanism, never even had a chance to be heard. Nowadays, just about everyone is writing about a "post-American" and "post-Ukrainian" world, especially after the Vilnius summit, where Kiev was told: Fend for yourself; it's your country, and you will get an invitation to join NATO when you defeat Russia. Plainly put, forget about Ukraine being Europe – you are just as expendable as the Afghans, Iraqis, and others, except that you are geographically located in Europe, and America has never owed anyone anything.

The main thing in the book under review, in my opinion, concerns Russia's civilizational self-determination. Our European "ordeal" has lasted too long, and we, like no one else, have paid a heavy toll for this. Perhaps this has actually been our mission until now. The urge to partner with the world majority in fighting diktat and injustice, which continue to rule the world, shows that historical Russia will always find a cause that is greater than our narrow national interest. This means we have a future to look toward and try to understand, just as we should try to understand why this future is being shaped by the SMO in Ukraine, and Yakovenko's book helps to do just that.