

A Look Back at Putin



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The Return of Direct Defense in Europe: The Putin Thread

09/16/2019

By Robbin Laird

I worked a great deal on Soviet-European relations in the 1970s and 1970s.

This included a significant amount of effort on the prospects for German unification, which was the topic of a working group set up in the mid-1980s at the Institute of Defense Analysis.

I am currently working on a book with my co-author dealing with the return of direct defense in Europe and how to deal with the Russian challenge.

Clearly, in terms of the Russian challenge, the key thread in the post-2014 period is the life, politics and agenda of Vladimir Putin.

He comes to Europe in the mid-1980s and his views are forged in East Germany and the Soviet Union and lives through the turbulent years of collapse and recovery in Russia of the 1990s.

He believes strongly in the return of Russia to the world stage, and to a Russia which is an alternative to Western policies and values. He has also risen to power with the resurgence of Russian orthodoxy as well, which provides the national identity for many Russians who have seen the return of Russia.

For Putin, shaping a resurgent Russian agenda has been at the heart of his efforts. The military has provided tools for this effort, but have not driven this effort.

Angela Stent's recent book *Putin's World* provides a very comprehensive look at Putin's approach to power and the largely flawed Western powers attempts to understand the Putin agenda for the return of Russia to the world stage. She provides a comprehensive look at the rise of Putin's agenda and the largely irrelevant Western attempts to deflect or more accurately incorporate that agenda.

Not surprisingly she is very critical of President Trump and does underscore the conflicting agendas within his Administration. But the more compelling challenge does not lie with the United States or Donald Trump, it is about the evolution of Europe itself.

With a Germany clearly demonstrating little or no leadership with regard to direct defense, and wishing to preserve its options in dealing with Russia, the question becomes how will the evolution of Europe interact with and be shaped by and influence the evolution of Russia itself?

We are facing sooner rather than later the post-Putin world, and the Putin world has been one of Russia being governed by a regime rather than a state, as one analyst has noted.¹

Her book largely ignores the core part of Europe which has provided a very strong political-military response to Putin, namely, the states building defense capability in the Polish to Nordic arc. It is a book about the major European powers, the UK, France and above all Germany.

It is not difficult to be critical of President Trump for his diplomatic approach but he has led an effort to rebuild the US military and has reinforced American capabilities to work with those states in Europe wishing to defend themselves.

She argues in her conclusion that we need a more realistic policy to deal with Russia.

In the absence of a broader agreement between Moscow and the West, Russia will continue to nurse its growing list of grievances against the US and Europe.

The West's task for the rest of Putin's tenure is to exercise strategic patience while containing Russia's ability to disrupt transatlantic ties as it strengthens its defenses against Russian incursions. It must consistently and robustly push back against Russian interference in Western elections.

But it must also be prepared for new challenges as Putin focuses on building up Russia's artificial intelligence capabilities and deploying its considerable cyber prowess.

Yet the US and Europe also should be prepared to reengage more actively with Russia should the Kremlin step back from its current confrontational policies and moderate its anti-Western stance.²

But from my point of view, rather than focusing on Trump, we need to ask ourselves how the American and leadership got it so wrong about Russia from George W. Bush, to Clinton, to Obama Administration's?

The question of how to frame the key questions for shaping a realistic and effective way ahead to compete with the 21st century authoritarian powers is crucial.

It is not about the "end of history" and the engine of progress.

It is about how democracies can survive and thrive while the 21st century authoritarian powers expand their influence within their societies and compete globally, while we continue to deny ourselves the significant opportunity of targeting the internal publics within these authoritarian societies.

We will clearly be dealing with both post-Trump and post-Putin powers sooner rather than later, so how would we shape a more realistic agenda to deal with the 21st century authoritarian powers, of which Russia is not even the most powerful?

And not only did leaders in this period mentioned get Russia wrong, that is clearly even in second place to our misunderstanding about how to deal with the new China and its authoritarian global agenda.

And given that these two states are fueling a global rise of authoritarianism, we are not a period of normal diplomacy for sure.

What we are seeing is a major reworking of the Western agenda in terms of the constitutional crises in the United States, Europe and the UK. Clearly, Putin is playing off of these crises, but the continued economic weaknesses of Russia, with growing levels of dissent interacting with an increasingly diversified West, might actually pose a more significant challenge for Russian transition than a unified West.

There are clearly various political alternatives in the West as it diversifies which post-Putin leaders can identify with and work with.

And there is always the prospect that key Western states will directly work within Russia to undercut the authoritarian regime.

Political warfare is not just a one-way street.

What are Putin's Strategic Priorities and Russia's Strategic Dilemmas

07/22/2019

By Carl Bildt

While the European Union gears up for new leadership in the northern autumn and US President Donald Trump gets his 2020 re-election campaign going, Russian President Vladimir Putin is sitting steady in the saddle with a mandate stretching to 2024. But what, exactly, does Putin intend to do with his next five years in the Kremlin?

Like leaders of all major powers, Russia's elite must regularly try to divine the future in order to shape the country's strategic priorities in a way that anticipates likely challenges. The United States conducts such assessments every four years under the direction of the National Intelligence Council; the EU does so every five years, and has just published a semi-independent study of likely global trends between now and 2030.

In Russia's case, geostrategic forecasting is one of the activities of the semi-official Primakov Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), which has published a global outlook for 2035. Generally speaking, its assessment of future trends is similar to that of the US and the EU. Where the report gets interesting is in its appraisal of the implications for Russia. The authors identify several strategic dilemmas the country will face.

For example, according to the report, Russia's top priority is 'preserving and improving its position in the world hierarchy of powers and responsibility'. But achieving that will require a 'structural reconstruction of the Russian economy'. Without far-reaching economic reforms—or what the authors describe as 'radical changes'—Russia's international standing will almost certainly decline. The same point is made with great force in Anders Åslund's acclaimed book Russia's crony capitalism.

Following the discussion of Russia's economic plight, which is no small matter, the report addresses a number of complicated geostrategic issues. The authors expect an 'inevitably long political conflict with the West in connection with Russia's role in the post-Soviet space, first of all in defining the future of Ukraine and neighboring territories'. In the near term, they conclude that such tensions will make it necessary for Russia to turn to China and other parts of Asia.

The implication is that the authors see no possible resolution to the conflicts that Russia has created in its attempts to undermine its immediate neighbours' sovereignty. The study simply takes for granted that the Kremlin will continue to pursue revanchist policies abroad, despite the obvious negative impact its aggressive behaviour has had on Russia's international standing and domestic economy. It is as though Russia's illegal incursions into Georgia and Ukraine are mere historical matters, admitting of no solution in the present.

As for moving closer to China, this has been a hallmark of the Kremlin's foreign policy at least since Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 provoked Western sanctions. Already this year, Putin has paid a visit to Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing, and Xi has met with Putin in Moscow and St Petersburg.

The problem, as the IMEMO study shows, is that pursuing closer cooperation with China is not really a viable option for ensuring Russia's long-term development. 'In the long run', the authors point out, 'cooperation with China and other Asia-Pacific countries cannot become a strategic alternative to cooperation with the West'. Accordingly, the authors believe the Kremlin should be directing its efforts towards 'working out its own agenda for possible active cooperation with' Europe and the US.

The upshot, then, is that Russia has not only failed to modernise as it should, but it has also enmeshed itself in regional conflicts that have precipitated a crisis with the powers upon which its own development depends. This has forced Russia to rely ever more on China, even though it knows that becoming a junior partner to its eastern neighbour is not a desirable way forward. One way or another, Russia must find a way to restore relations with the West. This cannot happen immediately, given that the conflict in Ukraine remains a live issue, but it must be on the long-term agenda.

The obvious solution to the dilemma—admit that the conflict with Ukraine was a huge strategic mistake and seek an honest settlement—was probably beyond the mandate of a study like this.

The question, of course, is whether Putin himself takes IMEMO studies seriously, or even reads them at all. I sincerely doubt it. Most likely, shorter-term security assessments are what command his attention. Nonetheless, it's notable that a

respected semi-official institution with strong support among influential members of the Russian elite has produced such a report. Though its language is often cautious and obscure, it is a clear critique of Putin's entire approach to foreign policy.

Moreover, the IMEMO is absolutely correct: Russia has created a situation in which its global standing might well deteriorate. Continued conflicts with its neighbours at the expense of its relationship with the West will inevitably prevent it from pursuing economic modernisation and development. And without a strong economic foundation, it will have no chance of securing a respectable 'position in the world hierarchy of powers and responsibility' that Putin seems to find so important.

Carl Bildt is a former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden.

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Putin's Revealing Financial Times Interview

07/09/2019

By Richard Weitz

Immediately before departing for the G20 summit in Japan, Vladimir Putin gave a revealing [interview](#) to *The Financial Times*.

Although most attention focused on his dismissal of liberal globalism as a spent ideology, the text offers other insights into the Russian President's national security strategy.

For example, Putin provided one of his clearest assessments of Russian gains from its military intervention in Syria, which he explains as a calculated risk: "It was sufficiently high.

"However, of course, I thought carefully about this well in advance, and I considered all the circumstances and all the pros and cons."

According to Putin, in Syria, "we have accomplished even more than I had expected":

- 1) the intervention killed many terrorists who were planning to return to Russia or neighboring countries;
- 2) the situation in a nearby region has become more stable;
- 3) "we have directly strengthened Russia's domestic security;"
- 4) Russia has strengthened its ties and influence in the Middle East;
- 5) "Our Armed Forces have received such practical experience that they could not have obtained during any peace-time exercises."

Addressing Sino-Russian ties, Putin denies that their cooperation is driven by common hostility to the United States.

"Russia and China are not directing their policy against anyone," he claimed. "

We are just consistently implementing our plans for expanding cooperation," which Putin asserted were based on the goals laid out in their 2001 bilateral friendship treaty.

Nonetheless, the Russian president added that the two governments' "positions coincide on a number of matters on the current global agenda," including economics and trade.

In this regard, Putin noted that Chinese and Russian leaders believe that, since the share of the global GDP accounted for by the Group of Seven (G7) Western industrial countries has declined over the last 25 years from 58 percent to 40 percent, the governance of the world's economic institutions should be adjusted accordingly.

Although he chastised Americans' alleged unwillingness to share leadership with rising powers, and supposedly exaggerated fears of Russian and Chinese military power, Putin argued that the deterrence effect of nuclear weapons decreased his fear of a military conflict between Beijing and Washington since each understood the devastation such a war would cause.

On the sidelines of the April 2019 Moscow Security Conference, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu remarked in his meeting with Chinese counterpart General Wei Fenghe, "Thanks to the efforts of Russian and Chinese leaders, our relations are reaching a new, unprecedented high level," to the general benefit of "ensuring peace and international security."

Shoigu asserted that this high level of joint activity included "joint operational and combat training activities [and] consultations between the general staffs" as well as military exchanges and collaboration between Russian and Chinese professional military educational institutions.

Wei reciprocated, calling their mutual defense ties "the closest interaction which is the best among all relations between large countries."

His list of notable interactions included reciprocal support "in the most important issues and strategic projects" as well as heightened "joint opposition to security threats amid instability and uncertainty prevailing in the world."

Discussing the recent developments regarding North Korea, which included a summit between the Russian and DPRK leaders in the Russian city of Vladivostok, Putin argued that the key to incentivizing the North to renounce nuclear weapons was to determine how "to ensure the unconditional security of North Korea and how to make any country, including North Korea feel safe and protected by international law that is strictly honoured by all members of the international community."

In Putin's view, this required avoiding future military interventions aimed at regime change, such as the NATO campaign in Libya, and instead following something like the détente policy between the USSR and the West that helped end the Cold War.

Furthermore, one of Putin's comments seems a justification, and perhaps confirmation, of the assassination attempt against Russian intelligence officer and double agent Sergei Skripal: "treason is the gravest crime possible and traitors must be punished.

"I am not saying that the Salisbury incident is the way to do it. Not at all. But traitors must be punished."

Regarding arms control, Putin had expressed exacerbation that the Trump administration had not accepted his offer to extend New START by five years, as provided for by the treaty: "we have not seen any relevant initiative from our American partners. . . . Our previous conversation with Donald showed that the Americans seem to be interested in this, but still they are not making any practical steps."

Putin and other Russian leaders had been repeating this criticism of U.S. non-responsiveness regarding New START for months, but the Russian government is partly responsible for the delay.

For years Russian officials have been expressing "concerns" about the procedure the United States was following in reducing the number of warheads on U.S. nuclear delivery vehicles, averring that their removal could be rapidly reversed in a crisis, without formally charging the U.S. with violating the treaty, thereby increasing skepticism among U.S. officials whether Moscow sincerely seeks to maintain New START.

Last month, Timothy Morrison, White House National Security Council director for weapons of mass destruction, told a Hudson Institute audience that, “there’s a significant question with respect to whether or not the Russians are interested in extending New START.

“They have these contrivances that they have hurled against us and the prior administration on how we’ve converted our ballistic missile submarines and our heavy bombers.”

In his *Financial Times* interview, Putin again harped on “the unilateral US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty” in 2002 as undermining “the cornerstone of the entire international security system.”

In Putin’s view, this decision, as well as the failure to develop new joint restraints or projects on Russian-U.S. missile defenses, unleashed a dangerous era of “new weapons and cutting-edge military technology” that threatens to destabilize world politics.

However, while concerns about U.S. missile defenses partly explain why Moscow has been developing and deploying new strategic delivery systems, the flow of causation for the United States was stronger in the opposite direction — the advent of new defense technologies and new types of post-Cold War threats has led the United States to pursue a more diverse range of missile defenses aimed at non-Russian targets.

Celebrating 2014 as a Strategic Turning Point: President Putin Looks Forward to Expanding Russia’s Global Impact

04/08/2019

By defense.info

2014 is a decisive strategic turning point.

President Putin started his rollback of Western advancement into his perceived zone of influence.

And on the day of the 5th anniversary, Putin celebrated the event as follows:

President Vladimir Putin led thousands to chant “Russia!” on a visit Monday to Crimea marking the fifth anniversary of the Black Sea peninsula’s annexation from Ukraine, as NATO and the European Union once again strongly condemned the land grab by Russia.

Speaking at an outdoor concert in Crimea’s regional capital of Simferopol, the Russian leader hailed Crimea’s residents, likening them to the Red Army soldiers of World War II.

“Russia has taken you into its fold with delight and joy,” he told the crowd. “We will fulfill all of our goals ... because we are together now.”

The action effectively stopped Westward expansion.

And from this event, Putin is building out new defense capabilities to pressure Europe a la cart as he sees it, not as “Europe Free and Whole” as has been the aspiration of Western leaders for some time.

Not only has Russia violated the INF treaty and built out offensive longer range strike weapons, but with the Trump Administration indicating that they intend to pull out of the treaty, Putin following in the long experience of the Soviet Russian leaders before him puts the cause for any action he takes on the “aggressive” West.

He grew up politically in the Euromissile era in which the INF treaty was eventually negotiated; and his tactics and his approach hark back to Soviet leadership strategy of the 1980s.

Last month, the Russians have moved long range bombers into Crimea “in response” to the US putting Aegis Ashore in Poland and Romania.

One could easily ask how a missile defense system is in any way equivalent to strike system like a bomber, but it really does not matter if the logic is not there.

The political logic is there — which is to incorporate Crimea into a forward based Russian military system.

According to an article published on Sam LaGrone on March 18, 2019 on USNI News:

Russian defense officials say they are deploying “squadrons” of Tupolev Tu-22M3 Backfire bombers as a counter to U.S. Navy Aegis Ashore missile defense installations in Poland and Romania, according to a report in Russian state-controlled media on Monday.

In comments made to the TASS news agency, Russian lawmaker Viktor Bondarev said Russia was sending the bombers to the Gvardeyskoye airbase in Crimea in a move to directly counter the U.S. Aegis Ashore missile defense installations.

“The deployment of American missile defense systems in Romania came as a major challenge, in response to which the Russian Defense Ministry made the decision to deploy long-range missile-carrying bombers, Tupolev Tu-22M3s, at the Gvardeyskoye airbase,” Bondarev said. “This move has drastically changed the balance of forces in the region.”

The seizure of Crimea was a key launch point in shaping a broader global engagement, which has been seen in the Middle East in Syria and in working relationship with other authoritarian leaders worldwide. From this point of view, the Putin strategy is about enhancing Russia’s global presence and global interests through engagement with and shaping global working relationships with authoritarian leaders worldwide.

Although clearly not the same, the Putin effort reminds one of the days of the Spanish Civil War where Authoritarian leaders operated together to advance their core interests, without being directly confronted by the liberal democracies, who were too focused on their domestic affairs to really do much about it.

In a piece by Simon Shuster published April 4, 2019 by Time Magazine, the author analyzes the Putin approach.

The title is quite accurate in characterizing the approach: “How Putin Built a Ragtag Empire of Tyrants and Failing States.”

The Russian campaign reaches from major conflict zones such as Venezuela, Libya and Syria to the more obscure corners of Africa and, as al-Bashir hoped, to Sudan.

What comes through is a newfound Russian willingness, even an eagerness, to involve itself in wars and cultivate regimes anywhere Moscow sees a chance to assert itself.

But unlike the Cold War, when the communist East competed with the capitalist West as equals, the new contest is being waged in an altered world.

Trump’s America no longer projects interest in foreign affairs, democratic ideals or even alliances. And China, with an economy eight times the size of Russia’s, has replaced it as the major alternative to the West.

Yet Putin has managed to keep Russia in the global picture—punching far above its weight through a combination of opportunism, bluster and common cause with isolated despots to whom Moscow offers weapons, protection and respect.

“We are not out to rule the world or impose some ideology on other countries, be it communism or capitalism,” says Senator Andrei Klimov, a fixture in Moscow’s foreign policy circles.

“We are merely out to defend our interests. And we will do that wherever they arise.”

Putin’s Last Term: Taking the Long View

01/24/2019

By Ian Bond and Igor Yurgens

Relations between Russia and the West are likely to be characterised by distrust, mutual fear and confrontation for the remainder of the Vladimir Putin era and probably for some time after.

But as the Cold War showed, both sides should accept it is in their interests to talk to each other in order to reduce tensions and avoid escalation, even if there’s no agreement.

That’s the key conclusion of a new paper by the Centre for European Reform, ‘Putin’s last term: Taking the long view’, which takes an in-depth look at Russia and its relations with the West, from both a Western and a Russian point of view.

Putin faces many challenges – the economy is not performing as strongly as he said it would at the start of his previous term in 2012, and remains closely tied to the fortunes of the oil and gas sector. The reforms and investment needed to modernise the economy appear unlikely. Russia’s population is declining and aging. And there is also a looming question about leadership when Putin’s term ends in 2024, and whether he will seek to remain in power.

The Russian authorities have tried to boost their domestic support by portraying the country as a fortress besieged by enemies. Putin has pursued a confrontational foreign policy, with military action in Ukraine and Syria, destabilising cyber and intelligence operations, and increasing tension with the West.

But he has shown he can sometimes work with other nations, for example to curb Iran’s nuclear weapons ambitions, and has courted China and talked to Germany and France about the conflict in Ukraine.

At the same time, Putin has proved to be adept at exploiting divisions within and between Western countries. Regardless of whether there was collusion with Donald Trump, Russia found ways to influence the US election narrative. Even though Russia has been hit with sanctions over its role in Ukraine, and the use of a chemical weapon against former spy Sergey Skripal, its international influence has grown.

Nevertheless, Russia should consider whether its interests would be better served by developing more cooperative and less hostile relations with its neighbours. Relations with the West would also benefit from more discussion, even if agreement seems impossible. There are lots of areas of mutual concern to talk about from security, nuclear arms control, and cyberspace, to less contentious areas like climate change and healthcare.

For their part, Western nations need to be open to the possibility of improvements in relations with Moscow – isolating Russia diplomatically is neither desirable nor possible, even if Trump’s approach to Russia and US allies has made a co-ordinated Western approach more difficult.

“Putin faces a range of economic and social problems at home in what should be his last term. No-one knows whether he will succeed in dealing with them, or manage a smooth transfer of power to a successor. But in dealing with Putin, Western

policy-makers need to act as though nothing will ever change in Russia, but also be ready for everything to change overnight,” said Ian Bond, director of foreign policy at the Centre for European Reform, and co-author of the policy brief.

“We have lost almost all the usual channels of communication between Russia and the West. Current diplomacy is not working. It is time to come up with something better than deadlock”, said Igor Yurgens, Chairman of the Management Board at the Institute of Contemporary Development in Moscow and co-author of the report.

This article was first published by the UK-based [Centre for European Reform](#) on January 23, 2019.

21st Century Authoritarian Powers and the Reshaping of Warfare in the Contest for Global Leadership

07/30/2019

By Robbin Laird

In their assessment of the challenges facing UK defense policy and the rebuilding of UK forces, [Michael Ashcroft and Isabel Oakeshoot](#) underscored the nature of the Russian challenge to the UK and to European defense posed by the 21st century political and military capabilities being used by Russia to reshape the European and global environment to their advantage.

“In this very modern approach to warfare, everything is a potential weapon, from the media to energy supplies.

“Culture and language; money as investment; bribes; organized crime; deception and so-called psyops (psychological operations); subversion; dirty tricks; espionage: all are marshaled to the cause of undermining liberal democracy.”¹

They are referring to the use by Putin’s Russia of a highly organized political and hybrid warfare approach, which is backed up the modernization of relevant conventional forces.

As the authors put it clearly:

“Of course, hard power is not the obvious or only answer to hybrid war.

“It is no use pointing a gun at computer viruses, Facebook or Twitter.

“But without hard power, hybrid can swiftly become conventional – as the Ukrainians have found – and a country unable to mount a credible military response to a co-ordinated and comprehensive hybrid attack is a country unable to defend itself.”²

In our work on the strategic shift from the past twenty years of military operations in the Middle East to being able to operate and win in full spectrum crisis management settings, mastering political warfare and shaping ways to prevail in hybrid warfare are key tool sets for the liberal democracies.

What is problematical is whether the strategic elites in the liberal democracies and notably their political masters are ready for the shift in the global game in which peer competitors master political and hybrid warfare backed by relevant conventional military forces.

The non-liberal powers are clearly leveraging new military capabilities to support their global diplomacy to try to get outcomes and advantages that enhance their position and interests.

The systems they are building and deploying are clearly recognized by the Western militaries as requiring a response; less recognized is how the spectrum of conflict is shifting in terms of using higher end capabilities for normal diplomatic gains.

It is about hard power underwriting other warfighting tool sets, notably those associated with political warfare, which underwrites hybrid warfare, which in turn is empowered by escalation capabilities residing in a robust conventional military force structure, which in turn is underwritten by modern nuclear weapons as well.

This is quite different from the classic distinction made between hard and soft power, and is really about thinking through how political warfare tools and hybrid warfare concepts of operations are key parts of full spectrum crisis management.

In a recent speech by the Chief of the Defence Force (Australia), General Angus Campbell highlighted how he saw warfare in 2025.

He noted that the main challenges are already here, so we do not need to wait until 2025 to focus on the nature of the challenge and to think through the question of relevant capabilities.

In that speech, General Campbell highlighted Russian thinking and actions as highlighting the new nature of warfare and deterrence facing the liberal democracies.

Russia's actions are a case in point.

In 2013, General Valery Gerasimov — the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces — outlined a new doctrine with six phases of conflict.

Essentially, he sees conflict as opening with a covert phase — intensive information and political operations — which then continues to and combines with other phases, including economic and escalating non-kinetic measures.

In most situations, Western countries take few, if any, actions during the first two phases.

And it's typically only at the end of phase three — just before crisis point — that diplomatic and economic steps are taken.

By then, to the Russians, the war is half fought — and, perhaps, already won.³⁸

Political warfare is triumphant.

Now, some have argued that this doctrine is simply a well-articulated version of what the Russians have always done and, certainly, the actions of the former Soviet Union back that up.

But how it is practised — the nature and intensity of the actions — are orders of magnitude greater in scale, reach and sophistication.

The Ukraine Crisis in 2014 was an example of this. We saw masked Russian Special forces — the “little green men” — and Russian-backed para-military groups seize buildings and infrastructure in Crimea.

This “masked warfare” was a nod to Soviet-style disruption. But it was also accompanied by computer attacks, manipulation of social and mass media, collapse of the national financial system, and other deceptive operations.

Together, they paralysed the Ukrainian government, and the international community. No effective action could be taken.

On this, it's worth pointing out a recent analysis by Hasan Suzen, from Beyond the Horizon International Strategic Studies Group. Among Russia's overt direct and indirect actions, Suzen lists energy blackmail, economic manipulation and white propaganda, and military build-up in various eastern locations.

Russia's covert direct and indirect actions are no less broad.

There's black propaganda and diplomatic support to oppositions, cyber and troll attacks, mobilising locals and arming civilians, exporting corruption, and employing Trojan horses.

Meanwhile, the only covert action in the NATO column was cyber defence — and back then it was accompanied by a question mark.

Instead, NATO and EU counteractions have, according to Suzen, been “based primarily on public diplomacy, strategic communication, and limited economic sanctions and assurance measures.”

It's this environment that has some suggesting that we need to “reconceptualise [our] understanding of conflict.”

The character of war — they claim — is clearly changing.

In this world view:

- *War is likely to be less about open conflict and the use of kinetic force,*
- *It will be about undermining adversaries, with no domain off limits, and*
- *War is now ... it will always be political warfare ... and it will occasionally become violent.*

This is challenging for many of us.

As I've said, we believe — rightly — that peace should always be the natural state.

We distinguish sharply between peace and war....

It's important that here — at a conference like this — these ideas are discussed and reflected upon.

Because they raise important questions that many of you need to consider and, eventually, we all need to answer.

Questions such as:

Are we, indeed, too rigid in our conception of war?

What parts of our state deter, or defend us from, modern forms of political warfare?

Can modern, open democracies conduct political warfare?

Will the brinkmanship of political warfare inevitably drive us to violent conflict?

Or, perversely, is it actually an element of state-on-state competition that helps keep us out of violent conflict?

Are we, as some scholars suggest, ignorant and naive? Ignorant of our history, naive of our competitors?

I encourage you to think deeply on these questions. Because to return to Trotsky, while, right now and in the war of 2025, you may not be interested in political warfare ... political warfare is most certainly interested in you.³

But what exactly is the relationship among political warfare, hybrid warfare and conventional capabilities in the Russian approach to reasserting its position within Europe and beyond?

Or in the case of China, the use of political and hybrid warfare to ensure that its global power grows as the “gray zone” operations are expanded with the liberal democracies only able to respond by using high end kinetic tools or most likely doing nothing at all.

A recent report authored by Ross Babbage with a number of case studies provided by his contributors of how the Chinese and Russians have shaped a 21st century authoritarian approach to escalation dominance provides solid analysis and conclusions about the nature of the challenge and ways this challenge can be met.

These reports were published by CSBA and a briefing was held on July 23, 2019 to release the two reports and their two appendices (containing the case studies).

Or put in blunt terms, simply building up a hard power military capability to deal with the strategic shift from the Middle East land wars to dealing with peer competitors is a necessary but not sufficient condition for 21st century escalation dominance or deterrence.

Babbage’s argument highlights how political warfare prepares the ground for hybrid warfare, where kinetic means are blended in with the initiatives prepared by political warfare.

And both are underwritten by background relevant conventional warfare capabilities.

In effect, Babbage is suggesting that 21st century authoritarian states are taking on liberal democracies at the level of their core values and are challenging them to protect their interests.

What Babbage argues is that unless the liberal democracies sort through ways to engage at the level of political warfare and to both shape denial and proactive strategies to do so, liberal democracies will respond to the 21st century authoritarians with higher end conventional force when it might be too late or the tools not the ones most effective to head off or deal with the challenge.

Without political warfare tools linked in fundamental ways to engage in hybrid war, the liberal democracies will not only be disadvantaged but will see their global influence reside as well.

In other words, the liberal democracies are in a global contest, not of their own making.

And to engage in this global contest, the war of values is central – Remember Mr. Gorbachev tear down this wall – but expressed in whole of government and a comprehensive coalition effort for the liberal democracies.

Some Westerners might be tempted to define political warfare to encompass only diplomatic persuasion, influence operations, intimidation, and some types of subversion.

This narrow definition would see political warfare standing alongside economic warfare, cyber warfare, and many other forms of coercion short of conventional military combat.

This report takes another path by drawing on Clausewitzian logic to argue that political warfare encompasses the use of a very wide range of national and international instruments in efforts to persuade, intimidate, coerce, undermine, and weaken opponents, and hence achieve desired political goals.

This approach mirrors that of the Russian and Chinese regimes, both of which marshal and maneuver numerous instruments in coordinated political warfare operations in order to win political advances. The only major activity excluded from this conception of political warfare is the use of kinetic force.

In consequence, political warfare is defined in this report as “diverse operations to influence, persuade, and coerce nation states, organizations, and individuals to operate in accord with one’s strategic interests without employing kinetic force.” The techniques range widely from more political measures such as assertive diplomacy, intense media campaigns, economic sanctions, subversion, corruption, and the theft of intellectual property to more strategic measures such as exerting coercive pressure through the deployment of powerful paramilitary and military forces.

Political warfare is used extensively by the regimes in Beijing and Moscow to shape the strategic space, but it can also be used to prepare targeted environments for more substantial unconventional and conventional kinetic military operations.

Political warfare is clearly distinguished from so-called hybrid warfare and other forms of conflict that inhabit the gray area between Western conceptions of “peace” and “conventional war.” Whereas political warfare employs a range of instruments, it does not involve combat by military or para-military forces.

Hybrid warfare operations, by contrast, involve the use of or commitment to use military or paramilitary forces in kinetic combat operations or a strategic commitment to engage in combat if deploying forces are seriously challenged.

In short, political warfare involves coercive operations without kinetic force, whereas hybrid warfare involves coercive operations with the actual or authorized use of kinetic force. In some situations, political warfare may be employed for some time prior to and following a temporary escalatory phase of kinetic hybrid warfare, as was the case with the Crimea crisis in 2013–2015.

Babbage sees political warfare as a very dynamic capability in which the whole of society rather than simply the whole of government addresses ways to achieve the national interest through comprehensive political engagement, not simply diplomatic engagement, to provide a shaping function for the achievement of national goals by whatever means might prove necessary down the road.

In effect, what his reports underscore is a dynamic process along the following lines:

Babbage highlights a number of capabilities, which the liberal democracies need to acquire and shape to be able to conduct political warfare and hybrid warfare.

At the heart of his recommendations are the need to craft political warfare capabilities as core competencies in which organizational redesign within liberal democratic states creates conditions in which personnel are trained to both understand and to prepare for political conflict and in which key coalition partners work together towards reshaping a global political agenda within which what the 21st century authoritarian states are about is the focus of attention.

Rather than assuming the unending rise of democracy in the world, liberal democracies need to represent that the future is not necessarily on their side.

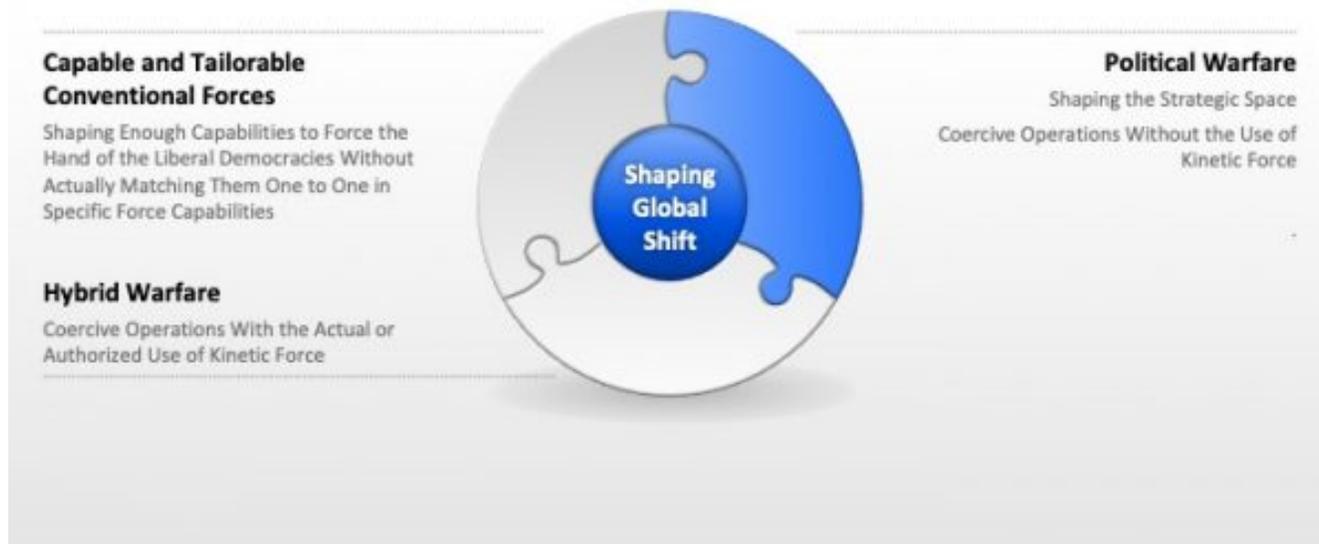
A key element among his recommendations is to shape the human capital needed to engage in such activity.

But this will be especially difficult given the conflicts within the “United” States, the “United” Kingdom or the European “Union.”

I raised this question of the challenge of building human capital at the briefing and our exchange can be seen below:

21st Century Authoritarian Approach to Escalation Dominance

Engaging in 21st Century Full Spectrum Crisis Management



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In effect, what is missing are civil capabilities to lead out in the full spectrum of crisis management within which capabilities exist to engage prior to gray zone encounters or prior to being subjected to the salami slicing authoritarian approach to hybrid warfare.

In other words, although Babbage’s study is about political warfare, it really is about the nature of the challenge which the 21st century authoritarians pose to the liberal democracies.

We are witnessing a global engagement in which conflict is framed and driven by the authoritarian powers until the point is reached where liberal democracies admit that their global sphere of influence is shrinking and that the world becomes safe for authoritarianism.

As he notes in his report:

“Deterring, confronting, and defeating authoritarian state political warfare campaigns is critically important for the West.

“Failing to properly address this challenge risks a further shift in the global balance of power, the loss of additional strategic space, a serious weakening of allies and international partners, a demoralization of the democratic world, and an emboldening of authoritarian regimes to launch new and more threatening campaigns. Ignoring the political warfare domain could mean that in a future crisis U.S. and allied forces would have little choice to arrive late to a battlefield that has been politically prepared by the West’s opponents.”

Footnotes

1. Michael Ashcroft and Isabel Oakeshoot, *White Flag?: An Examination of the UK’s Defence Capability*. Biteback Publishing. Kindle Edition.
2. Michael Ashcroft and Isabel Oakeshoot, *White Flag?: An Examination of the UK’s Defence Capability*. Biteback Publishing. Kindle Edition.
3. General Angus Campbell, Chief of the Defence Force, Presentation to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute International Conference, “War in 2025,” June 13, 2019.

Russia Sees Its Future in China and Eurasia

05/08/2019

By Christopher Marsh

Putin’s ambitions reach beyond Russia’s near abroad and to the international system itself, in which it seeks to regain and retain its position as a great power.....

Along with Beijing, Moscow seeks a multipolar world in which U.S. hegemony comes to an end.

As Alexander Lukin recently pointed out, the “common ideal of a multipolar world [has] played a significant role in the rapprochement between Russia and China.”

As Grigory Karasin put it over twenty years ago, during the Yeltsin years the support of the two great powers for a multipolar world was “particularly important” at that time, “when the international community still face[d] the inertia of the way of thinking that characterized the Cold War, claims to exclusive leadership, and attempts to reduce the development of international relations to unipolarity.”

This is even more so the case today, some twenty years later, when Russia has recovered significantly from the post-Soviet glut it found itself in during the 1990s and China has continued to grow steadily and modernize its military.

Russia and China were explicitly mentioned in the 2018 National Defense Strategy as the great powers with which the United States is in competition.

Both Russia and China have come a long way since the 1990s, and the “friendship” that emerged in the immediate post-Tiananmen period and continued to grow over the years now today appears to be one of the strongest bilateral alliances on the planet.

Not only does the alliance provide each country with a secure rear flank, technology transfers and weapons sales support each other’s military-industrial complexes and military modernization.

While Russia is still ahead of China in certain areas, including maritime, aviation, and weapons systems, the Kremlin knows that this edge will likely give way in the next ten to twenty years, as China emerges as the more advanced and powerful of the pair.

Hence the focus of acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan on “China, China, China,” for all indications are that in the long-term China will dwarf Russian military power and present the greatest threat to U.S. interests and national security.

Together, Russia’s influence on its former Soviet neighbors and Moscow’s strategic alliance with Beijing in pursuit of a multipolar world form the two main pillars upon which Putin’s grand strategy rests. All other aspects of its foreign policy behavior can be traced back to this dual-pronged grand strategy.

As the 2018 National Defense Strategy puts it, “Russia seeks veto authority over nations on its periphery in terms of their governmental, economic, and diplomatic decisions, to shatter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and change European and Middle East security and economic structures to its favor.”

These, in a nutshell, are the objectives of Russia’s grand strategy.

All of Moscow’s machinations—both foreign and domestic, from clamping down on civil liberties at home to meddling in Venezuela’s revolution abroad, are all in support of these larger strategic objectives.

For the complete article, see the following:

<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/russia-sees-its-future-china-and-eurasia-53702?page=0%2C1>

Prime Minister Modi Visits President Putin in Vladivostok: Re-Energizing the Indian-Russian Partnership

09/17/2019

By Ambassador Ashok Sajjanhar

The 36-hour visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Vladivostok, Russia on September 4-5 to participate in the 20th Annual Summit and as Guest of Honour in the 5th Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) at the invitation of President Vladimir Putin provided, in PM Modi’s own words, “a new direction, new energy and new speed” to relations between the two countries.

The strength and resilience of India-Russia relations can be appreciated from the fact that bilateral Annual Summits have been held every year without fail since the time they were first launched in 2001 by President Putin and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The two countries entered into a Strategic Partnership at that time. With no other country does India have such a long-standing tradition of holding Annual Summits. PM Modi made a poignant reference to his first meeting with President Putin during his visit to Russia as Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2001 with PM Vajpayee.

This was the fifth visit by PM Modi to Russia since he assumed power in 2014. Relations between the two countries were seen to have become listless at the beginning of PM Modi’s first term because of India’s perceived growing closeness to USA, and Russia’s increasing dependence on China as well as its expanding flirtations with Pakistan including in arms supplies.

Russia’s decision to engage in military exercises with Pakistan, (first reportedly in POK but later clarified that they were conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), immediately after the Uri attack by Pakistan in September, 2016 represented a low point in bilateral understanding.

Relations witnessed an upsurge after the informal Summit between the two leaders in Sochi in May, 2018. Since then PM Modi and President Putin have met several times including at the G-20 Summits in Buenos Aires in November, 2018 and in Osaka in June, 2019 in a trilateral format with Chinese President Xi Jinping; in SCO Summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in

June, 2019, and at the bilateral Summit in New Delhi in October, 2018. The current visit injected a huge energy to the partnership.

PM Modi is the first Indian PM to visit Russia's Far-East although India's relations with the region go back a long-time as India was the first country to establish its Consulate in Vladivostok in 1992.

Significance of PM Modi's visit needs to be assessed in the context of the reassuring statement by Russia just before the visit that it considers the revocation of Article 370 as an internal matter of India and that all issues between India and Pakistan be settled bilaterally through dialogue.

This articulation was particularly encouraging as it came in the wake of some confusing remarks by the Russian Deputy Permanent Representative in New York just prior to the informal consultations in the UN Security Council on 16th August that issues between India and Pakistan should be resolved on the basis of Simla Agreement, UN Charter and relevant UN Resolutions.

The Joint Declaration at the end of the bilateral visit titled "REACHING NEW HEIGHTS OF COOPERATION THROUGH TRUST AND PARTNERSHIP" clearly refers to the "inadmissibility of interference in the internal affairs of Member States."

Several momentous decisions were taken by the two countries to significantly bolster their bilateral relations. Reinforcing trust was identified by PM Modi as the most significant achievement of the visit.

Speaking at the EEF, PM Modi announced extension of \$1 billion line of credit to the Russian Far-Eastern Region to promote India's economic engagement with that region. It is for the first time that India has provided such a facility to a specific region of a country rather than to the whole country.

Cooperation in Russia's Far-East is a win-win proposition for both India and Russia. President Putin started developing this region seriously about 5 years ago, both because the centre of gravity of the world economy is shifting from Europe and America to Asia, as also, because of the crippling sanctions imposed by the West on Russia in 2014 in the wake of the Ukraine crisis and referendum in Crimea to unite with Russia. Russia would like the Far-East region to be developed as it is extremely rich in mineral resources like oil, gas, diamonds, rare-earths, timber etc, with a huge area of more than 6 million sq km and a low population of about 8 million.

Russia is also apprehensive of the increasing political, economic and military assertiveness of China as well as its growing investment in that region and presence of the very large Chinese population just South of its border. India is keen to enhance its economic and commercial exchanges with Russia because, notwithstanding the special and privileged strategic partnership, bilateral trade between the two countries is languishing at \$11 billion.

Moreover, India is deficient and in critical need of all the mineral and hydrocarbon resources that are available in plentiful in the region.

Both countries reiterated their resolve to expand bilateral trade to \$30 billion by 2025. A 5-year long road map on cooperation in hydrocarbons was signed to bring bilateral relations in this crucial sector to a significantly higher level.

Connectivity was another important issue of deliberations. A Chennai-Vladivostok maritime route will soon be established. This will help to carry Indian cargo via the Northern Sea Route (Arctic Route) to Northern European countries as against the much longer and more expensive route through the Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Suez Canal, Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean.

The proposed route via Vladivostok would be more economical in duration and distance of travel as compared to the existing route. Launching the "Act Far East" Policy, PM Modi said that henceforth Vladivostok would serve as the springboard for India to invigorate its connect with countries in this region.

In his Address at the 5th EEF, PM Modi spoke at length on the possibilities of man-power exports from India. He said that Indian white- and blue-collar workers around the world have distinguished themselves by their discipline, integrity, sincerity, commitment and honesty. Their presence in this sparsely populated region would fulfil a much-felt need.

Several Agreements between the governments and business entities of the two countries spanning the fields of nuclear and non-nuclear fuel and energy, manufacture of spare parts for Soviet and Russian defence equipment in India, railways, cooperation between different regions of India and Russia, development of the International North-South Transport Corridor, collaboration in Space and training of Indian astronauts for its first manned Space mission “Gaganyaan” in Russia, agriculture, tourism, education, healthcare, joint development and production of military equipment, components and spare parts, culture, films, visa simplification etc. were signed.

Production of Russian systems like helicopters, aircraft, assault rifles and their spares in India was on the agenda. Notably, a project to make nearly a million AK 203 rifles, an advanced variant of the famous AK 47 Kalashnikov assault rifle, has already been cleared and a factory is being set up in India’s northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

In the comprehensive Joint Statement issued at the end of the Summit, the two leaders strongly condemned terrorism and vowed to fight against it. They asserted their resolve to expand cooperation in all regional and global fora like SCO, BRICS, RIC etc.

PM Modi took the opportunity of presence of President of Mongolia and PMs of Japan and Malaysia to hold discussions with them on advancing bilateral ties. Issue of extradition of Zakir Naik from Malaysia was raised with the Malaysian PM.

PM Modi’s visit to Vladivostok was short in duration but long on achievements and results.

Decisions arrived at between the two countries, both at government and private sector level, will provide a quantum jump in bilateral ties.

This article was published by our partner [India Strategic](#) in September 2019.

The Spy and the Traitor: The Gordievsky Affair

03/21/2019

By Robbin Laird

Recently I read the 2018 book written by Ben Macintyre about the Gordievsky Affair or as the title calls it, “the greatest espionage story of the Cold War”.

I then re-read the book dealing with the other greatest espionage story of the Cold War, namely the Farewell Affair.

This gave me an opportunity to think about the concurrent impact of the two operations on how cooperation in the West had its impact on the Soviet Union and its leadership.

One operation was run by the British; the second was run by the French.

Clearly, the United States was a major beneficiary of both operations, and without the ability of the heads of state to work together and to establish a working relationship among competent aides this would not have happened.

In this piece, I will review the Macintyre book; in the second, the book on the Farewell Affair.

And then in a third piece I will discuss both operations and their collaborative impact as well as the importance of how Western governments worked with one another to create a significant impact on the Soviet leadership.

There are clear lessons to be learned here for the current set of Western leaders more set on conflict than cooperation, which frankly only benefits President Putin. And that is no accident, for Vladimir Putin was a key student of geopolitics during the 1980s when the two spy stories played out.

Clearly, President Reagan came to power with a focus on challenging the Soviet leadership and end the kind of détente which had preceded him.

But without British and French cooperation and contributions through standing tall in the Euromissiles crisis, which was very visible, and through the inflow of information from inside the Soviet Union from the two separate espionage operations this would not have happened, certainly the way they did.

The book starts by reminding us that although this about the history of the 1980s, in some ways it is not simply that.

“There is no such thing as a former KGB man,” the former KGB officer Vladimir Putin once said.¹

Gordievsky came from a KGB family with his father having served faithfully through the hard days of the 1930s, and his older brother as well. He started by being a paper pusher in the agency but was finally able to serve in the West in terms of running agents in the West.

While in Denmark, Gordievsky observed the rise and fall of the Czech reform movement, viewing the movement favorably but very disappointed in the Russian crushing of the rebellion.

What he did not know from his post in Copenhagen was that his brother was playing a role in crushing the Czech “Spring.”

“The older Gordievsky brother was at the forefront of KGB efforts to defame and destroy the Prague Spring; like his father, he never questioned the rectitude of what he was doing.”²

The crushing of the Czech reform movement and the end of the Czech spring was a turning point for the younger brother.

“Oleg Gordievsky was appalled and disgusted. As angry Danish protestors gathered outside the Soviet embassy in Copenhagen to denounce the invasion, he felt a deep shame. Witnessing the building of the Berlin Wall had been shocking enough, but the invasion of Czechoslovakia offered even more blatant proof of the true nature of the regime he served. Alienation from the Communist system turned, very swiftly, to loathing: “This brutal attack on innocent people made me hate it with a burning, passionate hatred.”³

Gordievsky then returned to the Soviet Union only to return to Copenhagen in 1972. In the meantime, British intelligence had learned from the Danes that in their view Gordievsky could be turned.

“In his new role as a political-intelligence officer, Gordievsky would no longer be running illegals, but actively gathering secret intelligence and trying to subvert Western institutions. In practice this meant seeking out, cultivating, recruiting, and then controlling spies, contacts, and informants. These might be Danish government officials, elected politicians, trades unionists, diplomats, businessmen, journalists, or anyone else with privileged access to information of interest to the Soviet Union. They might even, ideally, work in Danish intelligence.”⁴

This meant as well that his new job would allow him an opportunity to switch sides if he was so inclined and that what was to happen.

A key role for the KGB in the West was as well was the generation of their own version of the news and seeking out friendlies in the West who would spread their version of the news. The means today are a bit different but the strategic goal is the same.

“The KGB had long excelled in the dark art of manufacturing “fake news.” Under KGB taxonomy, foreign contacts were classified in order of importance: at the top was an “agent,”⁵

After a several months courtship, MI6 had recruited Gordievsky and agent “sunbeam” was now operational.

By 1973, the moment had come for MI6 to pull a Kim Philby in reverse strategy on the KGB with Gordievsky. He would provide information which would expose spies in both Norway and Sweden working for the Soviet Union.

During this time in Denmark his marriage was coming apart and new love relationship developing. Divorce in the KGB was usually a career killer so his personal life was threatening his promotion paths within the KGB.

As he was producing significant high-grade information delivered by a camera system, MI6 was starting to focus on how they would get their spy out when discovered. If operating in the West this would not be difficult; but if he were to return to the Soviet Union this would be virtually impossible. This indeed what they would do a decade later which also is a remarkable aspect of his case.

An exfiltration plan was worked out in case Gordievsky returned to Moscow.

“The plan envisaged that at 7:30 p.m. every Tuesday when Gordievsky was in Moscow, a member of the MI6 station would “police” the signal site. The spot was actually visible from parts of the housing complex; an MI6 officer would head out with the excuse of buying bread or time his return from work to be passing the site at exactly the right moment.

“The exfiltration plan could be activated in only one way: Gordievsky must be standing by the bread shop at 7:30, holding a plastic bag from a Safeway supermarket. Safeway bags bore a large red S, an immediately recognizable logo that would stand out in the drab Moscow surroundings. Gordievsky had lived and worked in the West, and there would be nothing particularly remarkable about his holding such an object. Plastic bags were prized, especially foreign ones.

“As an additional recognition signal, Gordievsky should wear a gray leather cap he had recently purchased, and a pair of gray trousers. When the MI6 officer spotted Gordievsky waiting by the bread shop with the all-important Safeway bag, he or she would acknowledge the escape signal by walking past him carrying a green bag from Harrods and eating a chocolate bar, either a KitKat or a Mars bar—“a literally hand-to-mouth expedient,” as one officer remarked.

“The chocolate eater would also be wearing something gray—trousers, skirt, or a scarf—and would make brief eye contact but not stop walking. “Gray was an unobtrusive color, and therefore helpful in averting pattern accumulation by watchers. The downside being that it was all but invisible in the murk of a long Moscow winter.”⁶

Sounds a bit mission impossible like and when it came to execute it there were several bumps in the road to be sure.

Then in the early 1980s, a crucial period in Soviet history, for combating Western politics and the arms buildup, the KGB needed to rebuild their capability in London. They turned to Gordievsky to become a key part of their rebuild in the UK. This would become a crucial moment in terms of the impact of the MI6 spy in the KGB on UK insights into the Russian leadership and would be eventually provided for the PM, Mrs. Thatcher, with a direct view inside Kremlin thinking.

This would provide especially crucial as a NATO planned nuclear exercise was to be misinterpreted as providing for an operation to execute a first strike on the Soviet Union. It is no small statement that Gordievsky changed history by providing Thatcher and her Western allies with direct intelligence on how Andropov former head of the KGB and now the head of the Soviet Union was preparing a response to what was perceived as a coming US led first nuclear strike on the Soviet Union.

Prior to his taking up his position in the UK, Gordievsky went through the files in Moscow about the UK and discovered a great deal about the “friendlies” who were supportive of the Soviet Union. One file particularly stood out.

“But there was one dossier that stood out from all the others. The cardboard box contained two folders, one three hundred pages thick, the other perhaps half that size, bound with old string and sealed with plasticine. The file was labeled BOOT. On the cover the word “agent” had been crossed out, and “confidential contact” inserted.

“In December 1981, Gordievsky broke the seal and opened the file for the first time. On the first page appeared a formal introductory note: “I, senior operational officer Major Petrov, Ivan Alexeyevich, herewith open a file on the agent Michael Foot, citizen of the UK, giving him the pseudonym Boot.” Agent BOOT was the Right Honorable Michael Foot, distinguished writer and orator, veteran left-wing MP, leader of the Labour Party, and the politician who, if Labour won the next election, would become prime minister of Britain. The Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition had been a paid KGB agent.”⁷

The Foot relationship was described by Gordievsky as follows:

“Gordievsky recalled: “Foot freely disclosed information about the Labour movement to them. He told them which politicians and trade union leaders were pro-Soviet, even suggesting which union bosses should be given the present of Soviet-funded holidays on the Black Sea. A leading supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Foot also passed on what he knew about debates over nuclear weapons.

“In return, the KGB gave him drafts of articles encouraging British disarmament, which he could then edit and publish, unattributed to their real source, in Tribune. There was no protest by Foot to the KGB over the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, and he quite often visited the Soviet Union to a top-level welcome.”⁸

The author provided a rather full analysis of the Foot case and highlighted it with this comment:

“Lenin is often credited with coining the term “useful idiot,” *poleznyy durak* in Russian, meaning one who can be used to spread propaganda without being aware of it or subscribing to the goals intended by the manipulator. Michael Foot had been useful to the KGB, and completely idiotic.”⁹

On June 28, 1982, Gordievsky landed in London from Moscow beginning a new phase of his career. He arrived with his new wife and his daughters to a new phase of his life, one in which his daughters would become Anglicized and where they still live to this day.

While the UK was working a key MI6 agent within the KGB, the US was undercutting the effort inadvertently by the actions of Aldrich Ames who eventually would provide the KGB with the names of many Western agents working inside the Soviet system. He received money in effect for executing the West’s top agents in the Soviet Union. He would eventually finger Gordievsky so what the book describes is the ticking time bomb of Ames up against what Gordievsky was doing for the UK and the West.

It should be noted that MI6 decided not to disclose the Foot relationship with the KGB to Mrs. Thatcher as she would end up running against him in the general election. They did however set up a working relationship between what they were learning and presenting that in packages presented directly to her.

The most important package of information involved the launching of Operation Ryan by the Soviets.

By the end of the 1970s the West had begun to pull ahead in the nuclear arms race, and tense détente was giving way to a different sort of psychological confrontation, in which the Kremlin feared it could be destroyed and defeated by a preemptive nuclear attack. Early in 1981, the KGB carried out an analysis of the geopolitical situation, using a newly developed computer program, and concluded that “the correlation of world forces” was moving in favor of the West.

“Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was proving costly, Cuba was draining Soviet funds, the CIA was launching aggressive covert action against the USSR, and the US was undergoing a major military buildup: the Soviet Union seemed to be losing the Cold War, and, like a boxer exhausted by long years of sparring, the Kremlin feared that a single, brutal sucker punch could end the contest.”¹⁰

Andropov believed the US was preparing to do just that and launched an operation to prove his “conviction.”

“Like every genuine paranoiac, Andropov set out to find the evidence to confirm his fears. Operation RYAN (an acronym for *raketno-yadernoye napadeniye*, Russian for “nuclear missile attack”) was the biggest peacetime Soviet intelligence operation ever launched. To his stunned KGB audience, with the Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, alongside him, Andropov announced that the US and NATO were “actively preparing for nuclear war.” The task of the KGB was to find signs that this attack might be imminent and provide early warning, so that the Soviet Union was not taken by surprise.

“By implication, if proof of an impending attack could be found, then the Soviet Union could itself launch a preemptive strike. Andropov’s experience in suppressing liberty in Soviet satellite states had convinced him that the best method of defense was attack. Fear of a first strike threatened to provoke a first strike. Operation RYAN was born in Andropov’s fevered imagination. It grew steadily, metastasizing into an intelligence obsession within the KGB and GRU (military intelligence), consuming thousands of man-hours and helping to ratchet up tension between the superpowers to terrifying levels.”¹¹

This particular affair underscores the key significance of senior leadership looking for information simply confirming what they already believe to be true rather than allowing for an honest intelligence effort to sort out what is really happening with regard to one's adversary.

I wish this was an historical comment but it is much more an ongoing challenge in the intelligence and policy worlds. Self-licking ice cream cones for the intelligence to policy worlds can be fatal to both worlds.

“In launching Operation RYAN, Andropov broke the first rule of intelligence: never ask for confirmation of something you already believe. Hitler had been certain that the D-day invasion force would land at Calais, so that is what his spies (with help from Allied double agents) told him, ensuring the success of the Normandy landings”¹²

The author added this priceless comment with regard to the self-licking ice cream cone dynamic.

“In a craven and hierarchical organization, the only thing more dangerous than revealing your own ignorance is to draw attention to the stupidity of the boss.”¹³

This crisis would lead the UK to decide to include the US intelligence community in its findings which would prove nearly fatal to Gordievsky because of Ames but crucial in informing the Reagan Administration of what was going on inside the mind of Andropov.

“The decision to widen the circle of distribution to include the US intelligence community marked a critical juncture in the case. MI6 did not say which part of the world the material came from, or who had supplied it. The source was carefully camouflaged and underplayed, the intelligence packaged in such a way that its origin was obscured. “The decision was taken to pass filleted, edited material as normal CX [an intelligence report]. We had to disguise the provenance. We said it came from a middle-ranking official, not in London. We had to make it look as bland as possible.”

“But the Americans were in no doubt about the authenticity and reliability of what they were hearing: this was information of the highest grade, trustworthy and valuable. MI6 did not tell the CIA that the intelligence came from within the KGB. But it probably did not need to. So began one of the most important intelligence-sharing operations of the twentieth century.”¹⁴

As the process gained steam, the flow of information to the President began to take shape.

“Eventually, as Gordievsky's espionage haul grew in volume and detail, the intelligence would find its way to the highest levels of the American government, influencing policy within the Oval Office itself. But only a tiny handful of American intelligence officers ever knew that the Brits had a highly placed Soviet mole: one of these was Aldrich Ames.”¹⁵

Mrs. Thatcher was now reading material from the MI6 spy on a regular basis and she referred to him as Mr. Collins. Meanwhile, the Soviets were on full time attack against Western governments, notably around the Euro-missile conflict.

“The KGB was working hard to try to ensure that Thatcher lost the 1983 general election. In the eyes of the Kremlin, Thatcher was “the Iron Lady”—a nickname intended as an insult by the Soviet army newspaper that coined it, but one in which she reveled—and the KGB had been organizing “active measures” to undermine her ever since she came to power in 1979, including the placing of negative articles with sympathetic left-wing journalists.

“The KGB still had contacts on the left, and Moscow clung to the illusion that it might be able to influence the election in favor of the Labour Party, whose leader, after all, was still listed in KGB files as a “confidential contact.”

In an intriguing harbinger of modern times, Moscow was prepared to use dirty tricks and hidden interference to swing a democratic election in favor of its chosen candidate.¹⁶

And into this environment, entered Able Archer which was to follow the downing of the Korean airliner by the Russians.

“Into this stew of ferocious mistrust, misunderstanding, and aggression came an event that took the Cold War to the brink of actual war. “ABLE ARCHER 83” was the code name for a NATO war game, held from November 2 to 11, 1983, intended to simulate an escalating conflict, culminating in a nuclear attack.”¹⁷

Gordievsky provided important insights into Soviet thinking about the exercise and that information was used to modify the exercise to reduce the danger of escalation.

“Margaret Thatcher was deeply worried. The combination of Soviet fears and Reaganite rhetoric might have ended in nuclear war, but America was not fully aware of a situation it had partly created. Something must be done, she ordered, “to remove the danger that, by miscalculating Western intentions, the Soviet Union would over-react.” The Foreign Office must “urgently consider how to approach the Americans on the question of possible Soviet misapprehensions about a surprise NATO attack.” MI6 agreed to “share Gordievsky’s revelations with the Americans.”

“The distribution of NOCTON material moved up another gear: MI6 specifically told the CIA that the KGB thought a war game had been a deliberate prelude to the outbreak of war. “I don’t see how they could believe that,” said Ronald Reagan, when told that the Kremlin had genuinely feared a nuclear attack during ABLE ARCHER, “but it’s something to think about.”¹⁸

This would provide an input in Reagan’s thinking about Star Wars as well and as what we learned from the Farewell Affair. There was another reason for launching Star Wars, namely, the Russian capability to steal Western technology was being decisively reduced and the ability to compete reduced concurrently as well.

“ABLE ARCHER marked a turning point, a moment of terrifying Cold War confrontation, undetected by the Western media and public, that triggered a slow but perceptible thaw. The Reagan administration began to moderate its anti-Soviet rhetoric. Thatcher resolved to reach out to Moscow.

“She felt the time had come to move beyond the rhetoric of the ‘evil empire’ and think how the West could bring the Cold War to an end,” according to a senior adviser. Kremlin paranoia started to abate, particularly after the death of Andropov in February 1984, and though KGB officers were told to remain alert for signs of nuclear preparation, the momentum of Operation RYAN began to wane.”¹⁹

In short, the book provides key insights into a crucial historical period. It provides as well insights into how important good working relationships between Western governments are in dealing with the Russian challenge.

It also highlights how important it is to have competent and well-structured working relationships at the policy level.

It was not just about the special relationship between Thatcher and Reagan; it was about the ability as well to have effective working relationship.

And the impact of a mole like Ames on blowing apart the networks is a useful reminder as well of the difficulties of managing a large intelligence structure such as the United States has built.

The deep state has its own problems for sure.

But I can not close before including an interesting comment made with regard to the exfiltration of Gordievsky from Moscow through Finland to Norway to the UK.

When it came to recriminations inside the Soviet system with regard to how the MI6 spy could escape the Soviet Union, a name to become famous in our period pops up.

“Everyone blamed the surveillance team, which, since it occupied the lowest rung of the pecking order, had no one else to blame. The Leningrad KGB, responsible for surveillance of the British diplomats, was held directly accountable, and many senior officers were either sacked or demoted. Among those affected was Vladimir Putin, a product of the Leningrad KGB who saw most of his friends, colleagues, and patrons purged as a direct consequence of Gordievsky’s escape.”²⁰

This is yet another reminder of Putin's roots in the 1980s conflicts between the West and the Soviet Union and the learning curve which he has gone through, something which leaders like Mey, Trump, and Macron have not.

Currently, there are only two key leaders with this experience and which each speak the other's language: Chancellor Merkel and President Putin.

It really never is only history.

Putin Sets the Stage at the Valdai Conference: Driving Demand for Enhanced Missile Defense

2017-11-01

By Richard Weitz

President Vladimir Putin made one of his most anti-American [presentations](#) at the Valdai Conference in Sochi since his February 2007 [speech](#) to the Munich Security Conference.

His comments suggest the prospects for future Russian-U.S. arms control are bleak due to fundamental differences between Moscow and Washington.

In a discourse that seemed out of place in a conference [whose sessions](#) aimed to help humanity grapple with 21st-century challenges, Putin devoted much of his speech to attacking the United States for violating 1990s-era arms control agreements or exploiting Russian trust and weakness to disadvantage his country.

In his view, Russia has made great exertions to comply with its agreements, while the United States has been violating or shirking its commitments.

For example, the President complained about how, under the now ended [Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program](#), U.S. inspectors gained access to “the holiest of holies of the Russian nuclear weapons complex, namely, the enterprises engaged in developing nuclear warheads and ammunition, and weapons-grade plutonium and uranium.”

In return for this “absolutely unprecedented openness and trust” during the 1990s, Putin continued, Russia received “total neglect of our national interests, support for separatism in the Caucasus, military action that circumvented the UN Security Council, such as the bombing of Yugoslavia and Belgrade, the introduction of troops into Iraq and so on.”

Putin argued that, once he became president, “our cooperation with the United States entered a new stage of truly equitable partnership,” with balanced treaties and agreements such as the [2000 Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement \(PMDA\)](#).

But in Putin's view the United States has since violated or unilaterally abandoned these accords as well as several others, such as the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, or the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Putin now saw the United States as angling to leave or adjust New START.

He insisted that, “We are not going to withdraw from it, although something may not work with us either.

This is always a part of some kind of compromise.

However, it is better to have some agreements rather than none at all.”

When it enters into full force in February 2018, New START will limit Russia and the United States to 1,550 deployed strategic warheads deployed on at most 700 deployed intercontinental-range ballistic missiles, strategic submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and long-range nuclear-capable bombers.

Both countries will also possess several thousand non-deployed (reserve) strategic warheads and non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapons that are excluded from the Treaty limits.

Putin dismissed the “many accusations about Russia violating [the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, or INF Treaty] as “cooking up something.”

The Treaty bans Russia or the United States from having ground-launched cruise or ballistic missiles with ranges between 500km-5,500km.

Putin acknowledged that “maybe we would be tempted to do just [violate the treaty] that if we had no airborne and sea-based missiles” but, unlike when the treaty was signed in 1987, “now we have them” like the United States.

Indeed, Russia has been making an effort to [profile such Kalibr missiles in its war in Syria](#).

Putin took pains to warn Washington, where the Congress and the Pentagon have been [developing contingency plans](#) if Russia does not return into compliance with the INF Treaty, that Russia’s response to a U.S. withdrawal from the treaty would be “immediate and reciprocal.”

Russia could employ such missiles, even armed with conventional warheads, to attack the military and civilian infrastructure that the US Army would use to flow reinforcements into East Central Europe during a NATO-Russia conflict.

Unless Moscow changes its stance soon, the United States could proceed with the development and deployment of additional offensive and defensive systems in Europe, which President Putin has stated Russia would meet with an immediate reciprocal response.

Although the Russian-U.S. strategic stability talks that resumed earlier this year have provided a means for discussing the New START and INF issues, as well as means to decrease military accidents and miscalculations due to diverging doctrines and the rising encounters between Russian and U.S. armed forces, the talks find it [hard to grapple](#) with these contrasting arms control perspectives as well as the impact of non-nuclear domains such as cyber- and space-based threats.

Putin saw this as Americans trying to take advantage of Russia and demonstrating the Washington was incapable of treating Moscow as an equal partner.

He warned that Moscow would no longer trust the West or make concessions out of weaknesses or to garner fleeting international goodwill.

The one benefit of his frank attack was that, since nothing the United States does will please the Russian government, the Trump administration now has greater freedom in building U.S. national defenses.

For example, the administration can direct more funding to improve the Ground Based Interceptors (GBI) stationed in Alaska and California, which currently provide the United States with the only direct defense against ICBMs.

These ground-based mid-course systems consist of a multistage solid-fuel booster that rams an unarmed “kill vehicle” into a missile or warhead in outer space, obliterating the target before it can re-enter the atmosphere.

The Pentagon’s Missile Defense Agency could profitably use some of the additional funding to make the GBI exercises more frequent, demanding, and operationally relevant against near-term threats.

Buying more GBIs would be prudent since the United States needs more interceptors to test the Redesigned Kill Vehicle, the Multi-Object Kill Vehicle, and other missile defense capabilities that will make Americans safer in coming years.

Editor’s Note: Putin’s speech was provided by the Kremlin as follows:

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55882>

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Thank you very much.

I am not sure how optimistic it will sound, but I am aware that you had very lively discussions over the last three days. I will try, as has now become customary, to share with you what I think about some of the issues. Please do not take it badly if I say something that has already been said as I did not follow all the discussions.

To begin with, I would like to welcome Mr Karzai, Mr Ma, Mr Toje, our colleagues and all our friends. I can see many familiar faces in the audience. Welcome everyone to the Valdai Club meeting.

All disputes must be resolved in a civilised manner. We are firmly convinced that even the most complex knots – be it the crisis in Syria or Libya, the Korean Peninsula or, say, Ukraine – must be disentangled rather than cut.

By tradition, this forum focuses on discussing the most pressing global political as well as economic matters. This time, the organisers, as was just mentioned again, have come up with a fairly difficult challenge asking the participants to try to look beyond the horizon, to ponder over what the coming decades may be like for Russia and the international community.

Of course, it is impossible to foresee everything and to take into account all the opportunities and risks that we will be faced with. However, we need to understand and sense the key trends, to look for outside-the-box answers to the questions that the future is posing for us at the moment, and will surely pose more. The pace of developments is such that we must react to them constantly as well as quickly.

The world has entered an era of rapid change. Things that were only recently referred to as fantastic or unattainable have become a reality and have become part of our daily lives.

Qualitatively new processes are simultaneously unfolding across all spheres. The fast-paced public life in various countries and the technological revolution are intertwined with changes on the international arena. The competition for a place in the global hierarchy is exacerbating. However, many past recipes for global governance, overcoming conflicts as well as natural contradictions are no longer applicable, they often fail, and new ones have not been worked out yet.

Naturally, the interests of states do not always coincide, far from it. This is normal and natural. It has always been the case. The leading powers have different geopolitical strategies and perceptions of the world. This is the immutable essence of international relations, which are built on the balance between cooperation and competition.

True, when this balance is upset, when the observance and even existence of universal rules of conduct is questioned, when interests are pushed through at any cost, then disputes become unpredictable and dangerous and lead to violent conflicts.

Not a single real international problem can be resolved in such circumstances and such a framing of the issues, and so relations between countries simply degrade. The world becomes less secure. Instead of progress and democracy, free rein is given to radical elements and extremist groups that reject civilization itself and seek to plunge it into the ancient past, into chaos and barbarism.

The history of the past few years graphically illustrates all of this. It is enough to see what has happened in the Middle East, which some players have tried to reshape and reformat to their liking and to impose on it a foreign development model through externally orchestrated coups or simply by force of arms.

Instead of working together to redress the situation and deal a real blow to terrorism rather than simulating a struggle against it, some of our colleagues are doing everything they can to make the chaos in this region permanent. Some still think that it is possible to manage this chaos.

Meanwhile, there are some positive examples in recent experience. As you have probably guessed, I am referring to the experience of Syria. It shows that there is an alternative to this kind of arrogant and destructive policy. Russia is opposing terrorists together with the legitimate Syrian Government and other states of the region, and is acting on the basis of international law. I must say that these actions and this forward progress has not come easy. There is a great deal of dissension in the region. But we have fortified ourselves with patience and, weighing our every move and word, we are working with all the participants of this process with due respect for their interests.

Our efforts, the results of which were questioned by our colleagues only recently, are now – let me put it carefully – instilling us with hope. They have proved to be very important, correct, professional and timely.

There is a great deal of dissension in the region [Syria]. But we have fortified ourselves with patience and, weighing our every move and word, we are working with all the participants of this process with due respect for their interests.

Or, take another example – the clinch around the Korean Peninsula. I am sure you covered this issue extensively today as well. Yes, we unequivocally condemn the nuclear tests conducted by the DPRK and fully comply with the UN Security Council resolutions concerning North Korea. Colleagues, I want to emphasise this so that there is no discretionary interpretation. We comply with all UN Security Council resolutions.

However, this problem can, of course, only be resolved through dialogue. We should not drive North Korea into a corner, threaten force, stoop to unabashed rudeness or invective. Whether someone likes or dislikes the North Korean regime, we must not forget that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a sovereign state.

All disputes must be resolved in a civilised manner. Russia has always favoured such an approach. We are firmly convinced that even the most complex knots – be it the crisis in Syria or Libya, the Korean Peninsula or, say, Ukraine – must be disentangled rather than cut.

The situation in Spain clearly shows how fragile stability can be even in a prosperous and established state. Who could have expected, even just recently, that the discussion of the status of Catalonia, which has a long history, would result in an acute political crisis?

Russia's position here is known. Everything that is happening is an internal matter for Spain and must be settled based on Spanish law in accordance with democratic traditions. We are aware that the country's leadership is taking steps towards this end.

In the case of Catalonia, we saw the European Union and a number of other states unanimously condemn the supporters of independence.

You know, in this regard, I cannot help but note that more thought should have gone into this earlier. What, no one was aware of these centuries-old disagreements in Europe? They were, were they not? Of course, they were. However, at one point they actually welcomed the disintegration of a number of states in Europe without hiding their joy.

Why were they so unthinking, driven by fleeting political considerations and their desire to please – I will put it bluntly – their big brother in Washington, in providing their unconditional support to the secession of Kosovo, thus provoking similar processes in other regions of Europe and the world?

You may remember that when Crimea also declared its independence, and then – following the referendum – its decision to become part of Russia, this was not welcomed for some reason. Now we have Catalonia. There is a similar issue in another region, Kurdistan. Perhaps this list is far from exhaustive. But we have to ask ourselves, what are we going to do? What should we think about it?

It turns out that some of our colleagues think there are "good" fighters for independence and freedom and there are "separatists" who are not entitled to defend their rights, even with the use of democratic mechanisms.

As we always say in similar cases, such double standards – and this is a vivid example of double standards – pose serious danger to the stable development of Europe and other continents, and to the advancement of integration processes across the world.

At one time the apologists for globalisation were trying to convince us that universal economic interdependence was a guarantee against conflicts and geopolitical rivalry. Alas, this did not happen. Moreover, the nature of the contradictions grew more complicated, becoming multilayer and nonlinear.

Indeed, while interconnectedness is a restraining and stabilising factor, we are also witnessing an increasing number of examples of politics crudely interfering with economic, market relations. Quite recently there were warnings that this was unacceptable, counterproductive and must be prevented. Now those who made such warnings are doing all this themselves. Some do not even conceal that they are using political pretexts to promote their strictly commercial interests. For instance, the recent package of sanctions adopted by the US Congress is openly aimed at ousting Russia from European energy markets and compelling Europe to buy more expensive US-produced LNG although the scale of its production is still too small.

We unequivocally condemn the nuclear tests conducted by the DPRK and fully comply with the UN Security Council resolutions concerning North Korea. However, this problem can, of course, only be resolved through dialogue. We should not drive North Korea into a corner.

Attempts are being made to create obstacles in the way of our efforts to forge new energy routes – South Stream and Nord Stream – even though diversifying logistics is economically efficient, beneficial for Europe and promotes its security.

Let me repeat: it is only natural that each state has its own political, economic and other interests. The question is the means by which they are protected and promoted.

In the modern world, it is impossible to make a strategic gain at the expense of others. Such a policy based on self-assurance, egotism and claims to exceptionalism will not bring any respect or true greatness. It will evoke natural and justified rejection and resistance. As a result, we will see the continued growth of tensions and discord instead of trying to establish together a steady and stable international order and address the technological, environmental, climate and humanitarian challenges confronting the entire human race today.

Colleagues,

Scientific and technological progress, robotic automation and digitalisation are already leading to profound economic, social, cultural changes, and changes in values as well. We are now presented with previously inconceivable prospects and opportunities. But at the same time we will have to find answers to plenty of questions as well. What place will people occupy in the “humans–machines–nature” triangle? What actions will be taken by states that fail to provide conditions for normal life due to changes in climate and environment? How will employment be maintained in the era of automation? How will the Hippocratic oath be interpreted once doctors possess capabilities akin to all-powerful wizards? And will human intelligence finally lose the ability to control artificial intelligence? Will artificial intelligence become a separate entity, independent from us?

Previously, when assessing the role and influence of countries, we spoke about the importance of the geopolitical factor, the size of a country's territory, its military power and natural resources. Of course, these factors still are of major importance today. But now there is also another factor – the scientific and technological factor, which, without a doubt, is of great importance as well, and its importance will only increase over time.

In fact, this factor has always been important, but now it will have game-changing potential, and very soon it will have a major impact in the areas of politics and security. Thus, the scientific and technological factor will become a factor of universal and political importance.

It is also obvious that even the very latest technology will not be able to ensure sustainable development on its own. A harmonious future is impossible without social responsibility, without freedom and justice, without respect for traditional ethical values and human dignity. Otherwise, instead of becoming a world of prosperity and new opportunities, this “brave new world” will turn into a world of totalitarianism, castes, conflicts and greater divisions.

Today growing inequality is already building up into feelings of injustice and deprivation in millions of people and whole nations. And the result is radicalisation, a desire to change things in any way possible, up to and including violence.

By the way, this has already happened in many countries, and in Russia, our country, as well. Successful technological, industrial breakthroughs were followed by dramatic upheavals and revolutionary disruptions. It all happened because the country failed to address social discord and overcome the clear anachronisms in society in time.

Everything that is happening [in Catalonia] is an internal matter for Spain and must be settled based on Spanish law in accordance with democratic traditions.

Revolution is always the result of an accountability deficit in both those who would like to conserve, to freeze in place the outdated order of things that clearly needs to be changed, and those who aspire to speed the changes up, resorting to civil conflict and destructive resistance.

Today, as we turn to the lessons of a century ago, namely, the Russian Revolution of 1917, we see how ambiguous its results were, how closely the negative and, we must acknowledge, the positive consequences of those events are intertwined. Let us ask ourselves: was it not possible to follow an evolutionary path rather than go through a revolution? Could we not have evolved by way of gradual and consistent forward movement rather than at a cost of destroying our statehood and the ruthless fracturing of millions of human lives.

However, the largely utopian social model and ideology, which the newly formed state tried to implement initially following the 1917 revolution, was a powerful driver of transformations across the globe (this is quite clear and must also be acknowledged), caused a major reevaluation of development models, and gave rise to rivalry and competition, the benefits of which, I would say, were mostly reaped by the West.

I am referring not only to the geopolitical victories following the Cold War. Many Western achievements of the 20th century were in answer to the challenge posed by the Soviet Union. I am talking about raising living standards, forming a strong middle class, reforming the labour market and the social sphere, promoting education, guaranteeing human rights, including the rights of minorities and women,

overcoming racial segregation, which, as you may recall, was a shameful practice in many countries, including the United States, a few short decades ago.

Following the radical changes that took place in our country and globally at the turn of the 1990s, a really unique chance arose to open a truly new chapter in history. I mean the period after the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

Unfortunately, after dividing up the geopolitical heritage of the Soviet Union, our Western partners became convinced of the justness of their cause and declared themselves the victors of the Cold War, as I just mentioned, and started openly interfering in the affairs of sovereign states, and exporting democracy just like the Soviet leadership had tried to export the socialist revolution to the rest of the world in its time.

We were confronted with the redistribution of spheres of influence and NATO expansion. Overconfidence invariably leads to mistakes. The outcome was unfortunate. Two and a half decades gone to waste, a lot of missed opportunities, and a heavy burden of mutual distrust. The global imbalance has only intensified as a result.

We do hear declarations about being committed to resolving global issues, but, in fact, what we see is more and more examples of selfishness. All the international institutions designed to harmonise interests and formulate a joint agenda are being eroded, and basic multilateral international treaties and critically important bilateral agreements are being devalued.

I was told, just a few hours ago, that the US President said something on social media about Russia-US cooperation in the important area of nuclear cooperation. True, this is the most important sphere of interaction between Russia and the United States, bearing in mind that Russia and the United States bear a special responsibility to the world as the two largest nuclear powers.

However, I would like to use this opportunity to speak in more detail about what happened in recent decades in this crucial area, to provide a more complete picture. It will take two minutes at most.

Several landmark bilateral agreements were signed in the 1990s. The first one, the Nunn-Lugar programme, was signed on June 17, 1992. The second one, the HEU-LEU programme, was signed on February 18, 1993. Highly enriched uranium was converted into low-enriched uranium, hence HEU-LEU.

The largely utopian social model and ideology, which the newly formed state [the USSR] tried to implement initially following the 1917 revolution, was a powerful driver of transformations across the globe, caused a major reevaluation of development models, and gave rise to rivalry and competition, the benefits of which were mostly reaped by the West.

The projects under the first agreement focused on upgrading control systems, accounting and physical protection of nuclear materials, dismantling and scrapping submarines and radioisotope thermoelectric generators. The Americans have made – and please pay attention here, this is not secret information, simply few are aware of it – 620 verification visits to Russia to check our compliance with the agreements. They visited the holiest of holies of the Russian nuclear weapons complex, namely, the enterprises engaged in developing nuclear warheads and ammunition, and weapons-grade plutonium and uranium. The United States gained access to all top-secret facilities in Russia. Also, the agreement was almost unilateral in nature.

Under the second agreement, the Americans made 170 more visits to our enrichment plants, touring their most restricted areas, such as mixing units and storage facilities. The world's most powerful nuclear enrichment plant – the Urals Electrochemical Combine – even had a permanent American observation post. Permanent jobs were created directly at the workshops of this combine where the American specialists went to work every day. The rooms they were sitting in at these top-secret Russian facilities had American flags, as is always the case.

In addition, a list was drawn up of 100 American specialists from 10 different US organisations who were entitled to conduct additional inspections at any time and without any warning. All this lasted for 10 years. Under this agreement, 500 tonnes of weapons-grade uranium were removed from military circulation in Russia, which is equivalent to about 20,000 nuclear warheads.

The HEU-LEU programme has become one of the most effective measures of true disarmament in the history of humankind – I say this with full confidence. Each step on the Russian side was closely monitored by American specialists, at a time when the United States limited itself to much more modest reductions of its nuclear arsenal, and did so on a purely goodwill basis.

Our specialists also visited enterprises of the US nuclear arms complex but only at their invitation and under conditions set by the US side.

As you see, the Russian side demonstrated absolutely unprecedented openness and trust. Incidentally – and we will probably talk about this later – it is also common knowledge what we received from this: total neglect of our national interests, support for separatism in the Caucasus, military action that circumvented the UN Security Council, such as the bombing of Yugoslavia and Belgrade, the introduction of troops into Iraq and so on. Well, this is easy to understand: once the condition of the nuclear complex, the armed forces and the economy had been seen, international law appeared to be unnecessary.

In the 2000s our cooperation with the United States entered a new stage of truly equitable partnership. It was marked by the signing of a number of strategic treaties and agreements on peaceful uses of nuclear energy, which is known in the US as the 123 Agreement. But to all intents and purposes, the US side unilaterally halted work within its framework in 2014.

The situation around the 2000 Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement (PMDA) of August 20 (signed in Moscow) and September 1 (in Washington) is perplexing and alarming. In accordance with the protocol to this agreement, the sides were supposed to take reciprocal steps to irreversibly convert weapons-grade plutonium into mixed oxide (MOX) fuel and burn it in nuclear plants, so that it could not be used for military purposes. Any changes in this method were only allowed by consent of the sides. This is written in the agreement and protocols to it.

What did Russia do? We developed this fuel, built a plant for mass production and, as we pledged in the agreement, built a BN-800 plant that allowed us to safely burn this fuel. I would like to emphasise that Russia fulfilled all of its commitments.

In our opinion, the UN, with its universal legitimacy, must remain the centre of the international system. Our common goal is to raise its authority and effectiveness. There is no alternative to the UN today.

What did our American partners do? They started building a plant on the Savannah River Site. Its initial price tag was \$4.86 billion but they spent almost \$8 billion, brought construction to 70 percent and then

froze the project. But, to our knowledge, the budget request for 2018 includes \$270 million for the closure and mothballing of this facility. As usual, a question arises: where is the money? Probably stolen. Or they miscalculated something when planning its construction. Such things happen. They happen here all too often. But we are not interested in this, this is not our business. We are interested in what happens with uranium and plutonium. What about the disposal of plutonium? Dilution and geological storage of the plutonium is suggested. But this completely contradicts the spirit and letter of the agreement, and, most important, does not guarantee that the dilution is not reconverted into weapons-grade plutonium. All this is very unfortunate and bewildering.

Next. Russia ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty more than 17 years ago. The USA has not done so yet.

A critical mass of problems is building up in global security. As is known, in 2002 the United States pulled out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. And despite being initiators of the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and international security, they initiated that agreement themselves, they are failing to meet their commitments. They remain as of today the only and largest holder of this form of weapon of mass destruction. Moreover, the USA has pushed back the deadline for eliminating their chemical weapons from 2007 to as far as 2023. It does not look proper for a nation that claims to be a champion of non-proliferation and control.

In Russia, on the contrary, the process was completed on September 27 of this year. By doing so our country has made a significant contribution to enhancing international security. By the way, the western media preferred to keep quiet, not to notice it, though there was one fleeting mention somewhere in Canada, but that was it, then silence. Meanwhile, the chemical weapons arsenal stockpiled by the Soviet Union is enough to destroy life on the planet multiple times over.

I believe that it is time to abandon an obsolete agenda. I am referring to what was. Without a doubt, we should be looking forward, we have to stop looking back. I am talking about this so as to understand the origins of the current situation that is taking shape.

It is high time for a frank discussion among the global community rather than just a group of the chosen, allegedly the most worthy and advanced. Representatives of different continents, cultural and historical traditions, political and economic systems. In a changing world, we cannot afford to be inflexible, closed off, or unable to respond clearly and quickly. Responsibility for the future – this is what should unite us, especially in times like the current ones when everything is changing rapidly.

Never before has humankind possessed such power as it does now. The power over nature, space, communications, and its own existence. However, this power is diffuse: its elements are in the hands of states, corporations, public and religious associations, and even individual citizens. Clearly, harnessing all these elements in a single, effective and manageable architecture is not an easy task. It will take hard, painstaking work to achieve this. And Russia, I will note, is willing to take part in it together with any partners who are interested.

Colleagues, how do we see the future of the international order and the global governance system? For example, in 2045, when the UN will mark its centennial anniversary? Its creation has become a symbol of the fact that humanity, in spite of everything, is capable of developing common rules of conduct and following them. Whenever these rules were not followed, it inevitably resulted in crises and other negative consequences.

However, in recent decades, there have been several attempts to belittle the role of this organisation, to discredit it, or simply to assume control over it. All these attempts predictably failed, or reached a dead end. In our opinion, the UN, with its universal legitimacy, must remain the centre of the international system. Our common goal is to raise its authority and effectiveness. There is no alternative to the UN today.

With regard to the right of veto in the Security Council, which is also sometimes challenged, you may recall that this mechanism was designed and created in order to avoid direct confrontation of the most powerful states, as a guarantee against arbitrariness and recklessness, so that no single country, even the most influential country, could give the appearance of legitimacy to its aggressive actions.

No matter what amazing heights technology can reach, history is made by humans. We can have only a shared future. There can be no separate futures for us, at least, not in the modern world.

Of course, let us face it, the experts are here, and they know that the UN has legitimised the actions of individual participants in international affairs after the fact. Well, at least that is something, but it will not lead to any good, either.

Reforms are needed, the UN system needs improvement, but reforms can only be gradual, evolutionary and, of course, they must be supported by the overwhelming majority of the participants in the international process within the organisation itself, by broad consensus.

The guarantee of the UN effectiveness lies in its representative nature. The absolute majority of the world's sovereign states are represented in it. The fundamental principles of the UN should be preserved for years and decades to come, since there is no other entity that is capable of reflecting the entire gamut of international politics.

Today, new centres of influence and growth models are emerging, civilisational alliances, and political and economic associations are taking shape. This diversity does not lend itself to unification. So, we must strive to harmonise cooperation. Regional organisations in Eurasia, America, Africa, the Asia-Pacific region should act under the auspices of the United Nations and coordinate their work.

However, each association has the right to function according to its own ideas and principles that correspond to its cultural, historical and geographical specifics. It is important to combine global interdependence and openness with preserving the unique identity of each nation and each region. We must respect sovereignty as the basis underlying the entire system of international relations.

Colleagues, no matter what amazing heights technology can reach, history is, of course, made by humans. History is made by people, with all their strengths and weaknesses, great achievements and mistakes. We can have only a shared future. There can be no separate futures for us, at least, not in the modern world. So, the responsibility for ensuring that this world is conflict-free and prosperous lies with the entire international community.

As you may be aware, the 19th World Festival of Youth and Students is taking place in Sochi. Young people from dozens of countries are interacting with their peers and discussing matters that concern them. They are not hampered by cultural, national or political differences, and they are all dreaming about the future. They believe that their lives, the lives of younger generations will be better, fairer and safer. Our responsibility today is to do our best to make sure that these hopes come true.

Thank you very much for your attention.

The Russian Sanctions Debate at the Valdai Conference

2016-11-22

By Richard Weitz

The Russian speakers at Valdai differed on the impact of the Western sanctions applied against Russia's energy, defense and banking sectors in response to Moscow's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and its support for the separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine.

Since 2014, the United States and the European Union (EU) have renewed and expanded these economic sanctions several times.

Western governments believe such sanctions punish Russia by imposing costs for its past behavior, deterring further Russian aggression, underscoring Western solidarity in the face of common threats, and compelling Russia to make concessions regarding Ukraine and other issues.

The Western sanctions have been directed against individual Russian leaders and companies as well as limited sectors of the Russian economy.

The most stringent of the EU and U.S. sanctions limit Western economic engagement with Crimea, apply travel and asset freezes to prominent Russians and Ukrainians responsible for Moscow's actions in Ukraine, and constrain the transfer of military items and sophisticated energy technologies to Russia.

Experts debate the extent the sanctions have harmed the Russian economy by amplifying the adverse impact of the Russian ruble's fall in international value, the flight of assets from the Russian economy, and the decrease in global prices for Russian oil and gas.

In 2015 the Russian economy did [decrease](#) by about 3.8 percent. Nearly half of Russia's federal budget is derived from its oil and gas export revenue, so the fall in prices for these commodities since 2014 has forced major cutbacks in non-military spending.

This loss of revenue combined with limits on high-tech energy sales to Russia have degraded the modernization of Russia's energy sector.

The sanctions and downgrading of Russian government bonds has restricted Russian access to Western financing and required the central bank and government to draw from the country's previously large national reserve funds.

Despite their economic costs, the sanctions have not changed Moscow's policies towards Crimea or any other critical national security issue. The sanctions have not stopped Crimea's integration into the Russian Federation nor have they reduced Russia's political-military support for the war in the Donbass region of Ukraine.

The Obama administration expressed hope that Moscow might alter its course if Russian President Vladimir Putin's popular support began to seriously erode due to the economic costs of the sanctions.

However, polls show a surge in President Putin's popularity following Crimea's annexation, despite the resulting Western sanctions, collapse of the Russian ruble, and general economic downturn.

Russian policy makers may have thought that the Western sanctions regarding Ukraine would weaken over time, given the rapid reversal of their earlier sanctions imposed after the 2008 Russia-Georgia War. This experience likely dissuaded Russian leaders from making major concessions to end the sanctions.

Russian policymakers may also have hoped that Western businesses, certain Russian-friendly political figures, and other interest groups that favor good economic or energy ties with Russia would dilute or circumvent the sanctions. European political movements opposed to sanctions have been especially prominent in Austria, Greece, Hungary and Slovakia.

Russian strategic communications and counter sanctions on EU imports have sought to feed European resentment at being forced to "pay the bill" for U.S. policy in Ukraine.

(The main Russian sanctions on the United States have been entry visa bans on current and former U.S. officials such as ex-U.S. Ambassador to Russia [Michael McFaul](#)).

Russian policymakers may also have expected that bellicose nuclear rhetoric and assertive military maneuvers might have aroused Western peace groups alarmed by the recent war threats in Europe, which have reached Cold War levels.

In Asia, Russian policymakers may have anticipated that Japan and South Korea would avoid harsh sanctions that could threaten diplomatic ties with Russia.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has strived to reach a deal with Moscow over their islands dispute (what Russians call the Kuril Islands, and the Japanese their Northern Territories), while South Korean officials want Moscow to press Pyongyang to curtail its aggressive actions and join Russian-sponsored economic integration plans between the Koreas.

Yet, until now the Western governments have shown surprising solidarity behind the sanctions on Russia.

In particular, European governments have renewed them on several occasions despite suffering much greater economic losses than the United States from the foregone trade and investment.

Donald Trump's election as the next U.S. president has increased Moscow's prospects for sanctions relief.

Many expect Russian-U.S. relations to improve under Trump, leading to a repeal of at least some U.S. sanctions, along with those of Asia and, despite deeper misgivings about Russia's intentions, some European countries.

At a minimum, the change of power in Washington has made it unlikely that the United States, NATO, and the EU will adopt more comprehensive (Iran-style) sanctions on the Russian economy and society, deny Russia access to U.S. and EU financial systems like the SWIFT global electronic payments system, or curtail additional science and technology projects, including in the civilian space and energy sectors.

At Valdai, most of the Russian officials downplayed the negative effects of Western sanctions, describing them as strengthening the Russian economy by promoting diversification as well as self-sufficiency.

They also highlighted the costs to European countries in maintaining them.

They agreed that Russia needed further integration with the world economy to spur innovation and efficiency, but insisted that they would never compromise Russian national security imperatives to do so.

One senior Russian official who spoke at the conference said that the sanctions had made it harder for Russia to secure foreign investment and loans to pursue large infrastructure projects and other undertakings, citing the first quarter of 2015 as being particularly difficult.

However, he still claimed that through “internal administrative mobilization” and “active economic policies,” Russians have been able to mobilize their internal reserves while government policies, including privatization of major state corporations, have encouraged domestic entrepreneurship. In the assessment of one official, “the combined effect, at the present time, is more positive than negative.”

Another official, taking a long-term perspective, noted that the recent setbacks had not erased the large growth in Russia’s GDP that had occurred during the past two decades: “despite all the turbulence in the economy and the international scene. In 15 years we moved from low-income country to a medium income country.”

In a public session, Putin argued the adverse impact of the sanctions had been overstated, and that they cost Russia well below 0.5 percent of its GDP.

He also said that European countries “have lost almost 60 billion dollars or euros – I don’t remember exactly” in foregone exports to Russia.

Putin stated that the fall in oil and gas prices began a cascade that pulled down the value of Russia’s exports of related products like petrochemicals and fertilizers. Putin also acknowledged that the sanctions had discouraged investment in Russia due to the uncertainty.

Putin said that Russia “will work to get rid of them but this should be a two-way street.”

In contrast, former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin estimated the sanctions annually cost Russia one percent of its GDP growth.

He told the media on the sidelines of the Valdai conference that, “whoever says that these sanctions are insignificant” does not understand that they “seriously affect our economy, growth, and standard of living.”

Given this burden, he argued, “we should take measures to reduce the sanctions for the sake of our people.”

Valdai Conference Insights on Russia’s Political and Economic Development

2016-11-16

By Richard Weitz

Although the Valdai Conference's major panels focused on globalization and its discontents, in the closed sessions the Russian officials mainly addressed Russia's political and economic situation.

They were generally optimistic about the country's political stability, but were divided over its whether Russia could overcome its major domestic and foreign economic challenges.

According to the official line, under President Vladimir Putin's guidance, the Russian political system has become more competitive, representative, transparent, fair, and effective. In contrast, critics described the recent parliamentary elections as flawed as previous ballots and attributed the lack of popular protests to political apathy rather than mass approval.

Although one legislative leader said that the Russian Duma has become more important, he reaffirmed the slogan, "No Putin, no Russia," stressing that Russia has a presidential system with an indispensable political leader who has successfully surmounted past economic and political challenges and was expected to do likewise in the future.

At Valdai, Putin turned aside the opportunity to discuss his future plans at the final public session, declining to comment on his retirement plans or his place in Russian history. Most experts at the conference expected him to run for reelection in March 2018.

Russian officials who spoke in the closed sessions believed the Russian economy could thrive without the political system's transformation, citing the examples of Singapore and China.

A former Russian official, however, argued that the Russian government's constraints on civil society were seriously constraining the country's economic and political development.

In response to a question from the audience, a current Russian political leader denied that Russia now had a "Kamikaze Duma"—one that would have to take unpopular steps like pension reform, increasing the retirement age, cutting education and health, increasing taxes, and redistributing money from the regions in order to maintain the president's popularity when he runs for reelection in 2018.

Russian officials insisted that even potentially controversial decisions, such as the planned rise in the age eligibility of pensions, would not have any negative social consequences—an implicit reference to mass public protests in 2011 and 2012.

In another session, Russian speakers spoke optimistically of the Skolkovo Innovation Center; a \$3-billion science and technology entrepreneurial center near Moscow.

The government's aim has been to use administrative and regulatory reforms as well as targeted financial assistance to promote high-tech startups. The projects would then ideally commercialize Russian applied technological and scientific achievements in the information, energy, nuclear, biotechnology, and outer space sectors.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology has been helping develop research, education, and entrepreneurship programs at the Center's new graduate training organization, the Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology ("Skoltech").

Yet, various impediments have kept Russia from emulating California's "Silicon Valley," despite the earnest engagement of Russian and foreign scientists.

These have included reduced government funding, the annulment of some regulatory waivers, the failure to enact the base law on technological parks for existing universities, the departure of some startups from Russia, and anti-corruption concerns that have disrupted various initiatives.

Skoltech has become operational but still lacks a university campus at the site, whose opening is now scheduled for September 2017.

Russian officials disputed contentions that insufficient government support had limited the planned growth of the small and medium-sized businesses in the economy.

However, they confirmed that some small businesses believe they have to partner with larger state-owned corporations to access certain government resources.

As one observed, "businesses feel like they should depend on the administrative connections rather than the quality of the products."

However, one Russian speaker recognized that for innovation to prosper, his country needed a stronger private sector and more opportunities for the "creative sector." He calculated that the Russian state was investing more in its technological development than many foreign governments, including Japan and Canada, but that these countries private sectors generated many more technological advances than Russia.

The senior Russian officials who spoke at Valdai downplayed Russian corruption concerns, arguing that government policies had reduced corruption over time.

They claimed that, “Our anti-corruption legislature and practices are far more advanced” than before and in other former Soviet republics like Ukraine. For example, they stated that new regulations and legislation made it easier to start a business without having to pay bribes to government officials and provides better safeguards against conflicts of interests.

The officials said no government plans exist to make major changes in the Russian tax system before 2018, except for some possible increases in excise taxes on tobacco and alcohol (partly for health reasons) as well as additional taxes on the oil and gas sector. They are currently debating whether to adopt a more progressive tax system in the future.

They said they wanted to avoid making major cuts in government spending and hoped that the privatization of state corporations such as Rosneft, anti-monopoly legislation, and further deregulation of private industry would generate enough economic resources to sustain high employment, restore national economic growth, and avoid depleting the government’s major reserve funds.

In practice, the privatization process has proven controversial. Some observers question its wisdom or, conversely, claim that large corporations will still be subjected to substantial indirect Russian state control. Even if successful, this privatization would lead to only short-term debt relief as the state assets are sold off; the country needs long-term growth to boost public revenue and private income.

A return to high oil prices would also solve this problem, but most Russian officials cautioned against relying on being too optimistic, saying it was prudent to plan on low oil and gas prices for the indefinite future.

As for the international economy, the Russian officials said that they were being proactive in seeking foreign markets and remained open to participation in principle in regional trade agreements. They also planned to continue allowing the ruble to float freely on international exchange markets, with the Central Bank prepared to intervene in an emergency if required.

Some Russians implied that the government hoped that its deeper integration into Eurasia and East Asia would compensate for Moscow’s constrained economic ties with the West.

Still, they insisted that Russia wanted “to reach a balance” and saw “no real obstacles to our collaboration apart from current sanctions.” Although the sanctions “violated...cooperation and mutual understanding,” Russians

remain open to future economic collaboration with the West based on mutual interest and reciprocity.

One Russian speaker correctly observed that continued progress in diversifying Russian exports beyond energy commodities would help reduce the ruble's volatility.

He also cautioned that Russia's demographic challenges could become more serious in some areas due to the incoming migration of Russians from other countries that had helped compensate for the declining number of working age people in Russia.

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Perspectives at the Valdai Conference on Russia, Europe and the United States: What Will Be Impact of the Coming to Power of President Elect Trump?

2016-11-10

By Richard Weitz

Pessimism about Europe's global power potential was pervasive at the Valdai Conference.

Many speakers, from Russia and elsewhere, saw the Continent in current crisis and generation-long decay.

In particular, they cited deep dissatisfaction with the bureaucratic, technocratic, and formalistic nature of the institution and its disrespect for national diversity and traditional European values.

Europe's defenders countered that there were no wars between EU members and that Europeans enjoy good housing, wages, and life expectancy. They denigrated European populists as nostalgic for an old but lost Europe that was much less developed and cannot be recreated.

Even so, hopefully the shock of Donald Trump's election as the next U.S. president will act as a catalyst for imparting new momentum in Europe.

The international shock is clearly evident.

Carl Bildt, former Swedish foreign minister, [described](#) Trump's election, along with the Brexit vote, as a "double disaster" for the West. Ursula von der Leyen, Germany's defense minister, [described](#) the result as a "huge shock" that might signify the end of "Pax Americana" in Europe and the world. Jean-Marc Ayrault, France's foreign minister, [said](#) Trump's elections "raised questions" for Europe's foreign-policy plans.

The most prominent Europeans welcoming the results were representatives of Europe's leading anti-immigration parties, such as France's National Front and the Alternative for Germany party.

Russian President Vladimir Putin was one of the first foreign leaders to [congratulate](#) Trump on his victory and pledged to work with the new administration to resolve Russian-U.S. differences and expand cooperation in

other areas.

Other Russian leaders also expressed cautious optimism about future progress provided Trump could overcome the expected opposition from what is seen as the pervasively Russophobic U.S. bureaucracy and Washington political establishment.

At Valdai, Putin and other Russian officials said they regretted this animosity and wanted a strong Europe. The sincerity of these statements can be questioned, but the Russian speakers described Russia as a European nation (the largest in terms of population) with critical mutually beneficial social and economic partnerships with Europeans.

Some Russians also recalled how Russia has saved Europe on several previous occasions and, without offering details, insisted that Europeans cannot overcome their current crises without Russia's assistance. Yet, one British speaker countered that a Europe stretching from London to Vladivostok would fail due to Russia's unique traditions and interests that must be respected.

More interestingly, some Russian speakers argued Russian-European cooperation could be improved by focusing more on pragmatic interests instead of ideological principles (though many Russian participants stressed that they saw themselves as upholding traditional European social conservative values that have lost favor in many European countries).

One Russian participant believed that Russia-EU relations might improve if the parties followed "the principles for resolving contradictions in Central Asia between Russia and China...[with] recognition of the strategic interests of the partner in the region, advance warning about projects and actions to be taken, their coordination and discussion, as well as a multilateral, rather than a unilateral, approach."

Even under current conditions, some European speakers noted that Russia had been able to circumvent the EU as an institution and cultivate good relations with key European leaders of various left- and right-wing movements in Europe.

Moreover, one speaker expected that Britain's withdrawal from the EU would weaken trans-Atlantic ties since Britain has historically played an indispensable role in anchoring the United States in Europe and treating Russia as an external actor within Europe.

Former President of Austria Heinz Fischer, citing how Wallonia, a province in Belgium, was able to block a trade agreement negotiated by all EU national governments and Canada, and said that Europeans needed to strengthen the authority of the EU's central institutions—the Parliament, the Commission, and other policy

organs—to make the EU more effective.

Yet, Fischer noted that, for many Europeans, jealous of their autonomy and suspicious of EU centralism this was a sensitive point: “So if somebody says, let’s start the process of modernizing and changing institutions of the European Union, at this moment ... it would create a very bitter fight in most or in several European countries.”

Perhaps tongue in cheek, Putin followed Fischer’s comments by observing that, while the EU’s rules may need to change due to the transformation of the organization’s environment in the decades since its founding, “in this case, you would first have to give the people who created this organization a chance to change it through a democratic process and then obtain their approval.”

In the security domain, Putin accused NATO leaders as talking up the Russian threat to simply sustain high military spending, despite knowing Russia would not go to invade anyone and that NATO’s population was more than four times larger than Russia: “they continue to churn out threats, imaginary and mythical threats such as the ‘Russian military threat’. This is a profitable business that can be used to pump new money into defense budgets at home, get allies to bend to a single superpower’s interests, expand NATO and bring its infrastructure, military units and arms closer to our borders.”

Other Russian speakers also believed NATO is an outdated organization and its existence, and especially its membership expansion, harms European-Russian relations, something some of Trump’s advisors also believe.

Sergei Karaganov, one of Russia’s most notable international relations experts, said that he did not expect Europe to stop its decline for at least a decade since, in his view, a new generation of European leaders was needed to take charge and fundamentally change their nations’ policies. This is why he advocated that Russians focus on building deeper ties with Asia and Eurasia, which he believed would eventually make Russia a more attractive partner for Europeans.

Meanwhile, prominent U.S. political scientist John Mearsheimer warned that NATO and transatlantic ties faced long-term decline if Europeans, as he expected, do not help the United States balance against China. He expects Europeans to instead prioritize their own trade and other economic ties. As other speakers noted, these will likely deepen as China builds its Silk Road Economic Belt connecting Europe and China through Eurasia.

Trump has stated that he would pursue a much tougher negotiating stance with China; and might be concerned if Europeans fail to support Washington’s tougher policies towards China. One Chinese speaker described his country as having become a major stakeholder in European stability and prosperity, given Europe’s status as China’s primary economic partner. However, he lamented that Europeans cannot get their act together on economic policy, immigration, and other issues.

Still, one prominent European speaker what they saw as the end of Pax Americana as forcing Europeans to come together and solve their own problems.

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<http://valdaiclub.com/about/valdai/>

Putin's Syrian Policy: "We need to Fight the Terrorists: There is No Alternative."

2016-11-07

By Richard Weitz

At this writing, a Russian naval battle group is assembling in the East Mediterranean off Syria's coast. It includes Russia's only aircraft carrier, the *Admiral Kuznetsov*, which is now making its first combat mission following years of repair and modernization.

The small carrier carries four Su-33 fighter jets, 10 MiG-29K/KUB ground-attack planes and a dozen Ka-52 attack helicopters; these planes are armed with various air-to-surface missiles.

Along with some smaller surface vessels, several submarines equipped with Kalibr long-range land cruise missiles accompany the *Kutnetsov*. The recently launched *Admiral Grigorovich* frigate, armed with the same land-attack missiles, will join the battle group from Russia's Black Sea Fleet.

The flotilla's tactical mission is to provide maritime naval and air power in support of Assad's ground offensive in the Aleppo city region and perhaps in the greater Damascus area and elsewhere.

Yet, the strategic goals of the deployment are more important, since the Russian Air Force and Caspian Sea Flotilla can already provide comparable air and naval missile strikes against targets in Syria.

These strategic goals include exhibiting Russia's naval power to foreign observers, ideally to generate more foreign arms sales, strengthening Russia's image as a naval power, and compel the United States and other Western governments to negotiate with Russia and Syria on other issues.

At the Valdai Conference, former Russian ambassador and regional expert Alexander Aksenyonok introduced the panel on the Middle East by calling the situation increasingly confusing and lamenting how entire civilizations in this region were being destroyed. Aksenyonok hoped that the imperative of cooperation would override the competitive geopolitical dynamics dividing Russia from its Western partners.

Other Russian speakers at Valdai claimed that the region's instability, designed to appear as an internally driven reform process, is actually being geopolitically engineered by the West in support of a campaign to overthrow undesired regimes there.

Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, Putin, and other Russian speakers maintained that the Western-led coups and the destabilization of existing regimes has created vacuums that terrorists, allegedly backed by the United States and its allies as instruments of regime change, rushed to fill.

In Putin's words: "Attempts were made to train these terrorists and set them against al-Assad, because there were no other options and these groups were the most effective.

This continues today because these are the most effective fighting units and some think that it is possible to make use of them and then sort them out later. But this is an illusion. ...

This is a very dangerous game and I address the players once again: The extremists in this case are more cunning, clever and stronger than you, and if you play these games with them, you will always lose.”

Bogdanov **said** this issue stymied Russia-U.S. cooperation in Syria. He related that, following U.S. criticism that the Russian Air Force was attacking both pro-Western insurgents and terrorists, the Russian military asked Washington for the location of the moderate forces. After months of back and forth, Moscow realized the problem was that the U.S.-backed forces were co-located with the extremist groups.

Given this situation, the Russian officials asked the Americans to separate the groups, which they agreed to do.

But Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed that Washington had proven unable, or unwilling, to fulfill these pledges to Moscow.

In Putin’s **assessment**, “There were people in Washington ready to do everything possible to prevent these agreements from being implemented in practice.”

However, the Russians at the conference now viewed the West as experiencing a devastating blowback from terrorist attacks in many European cities. Bogdanov read from a long list of terrorist attacks in European and other countries. “Looking at the world as a whole,” Putin **added**, “there are some results in particular regions and locations, but there is no global result and the terrorist threat continues to grow.”

The Russian officials also believed their countermeasures in Syria and elsewhere made the West understand that it could not isolate Russia in the region. For this reason, Putin, Lavrov, and other Russian representatives renewed their offer of some kind of grand bargain in which Moscow and the West would set aside their differences and form a global coalition against terrorism.

Donald Trump has endorsed, in principle the Russian proposal. However, Hillary Clinton’s advisers, including some at Valdai, **insisted** that the United States could never support Assad, that the Russian and Syrian forces were deliberately attacking pro-Western insurgents and civilians using saturation bombing, and that Moscow’s policies in Ukraine and other places also had to change.

Both the Iranian and Turkish speakers at Valdai **supported** the grand coalition idea. Mehdi Sanaei, the Iranian Ambassador to Russia, believed the Middle East’s instability reflected the general transformation from a unipolar to a multipolar world. Due to this transition, the United States either could not prevent regional

instability or fanned it as a means of sustaining its primacy by dividing potential rivals.

He argued that the United States and its allies needed to reverse course, respect the national sovereignty of other countries, and cooperate with Russia and China to manage terrorism and other mutual threats.

Former Turkish Foreign Minister Yaşar Yakış essentially apologized to the audience for the current Turkish government's misguided policies towards the Syrian conflict. In his evaluation, Ankara mistakenly assumed Bashar Al Assad's regime would soon fail. Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, descended from the Muslim Brotherhood, saw an opportunity to establish a likeminded regime in Syria. Turkey therefore armed rebel groups to remove Assad despite growing evidence that extremists were assuming control of the insurgency.

According to Yakış, the Turkish government only recently changed its goals to now prioritize maintaining Syria's territorial integrity by fighting the Kurdish militia in Syria, leaving the defeat of ISIS there to Russia and other foreign forces. Turkey's recent Operation Euphrates Shield offensive sought to clear the Kurdish PYD (which he described as a re-formation of the outlawed Kurdish PKK terrorist group) away from Turkey's border.

With a stretch of logical and overlooking divisive factors among them, Yakış argued that since preserving Syria's territorial integrity has now become a shared goal among the United States, Russia, Iran, and the Syrian government, there is now a "golden opportunity" for international cooperation regarding Syria.

The Russian speakers bristled at the Western criticism of the large number of civilian casualties caused by the Russian air campaign in Syria. They saw these complaints as hypocritical, given the numerous civilian casualties in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, and other Middle Eastern war zones.

They also blamed the West for failing to fulfill the requirements for a ceasefire, namely the separation of civilians and moderates from the extremist Al-Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda affiliated; now called Jabhat Fateh al-Sham), which at times the Russian speakers described as a more serious threat than ISIS, at least in Syria.

Putin made it clear that Russia would persist in its air strikes, which have been temporarily halted pending arrival of the flotilla, regardless of the civilian casualties:

"Do we leave the nest of terrorists in place there, or do we squeeze them out, doing our best to minimize and avoid civilian casualties? ...

Look at Israel's example. Israel never steps back but always fights to the end, and this is how it survives.

There is no alternative.

We need to fight.

If we keep retreating, we will always lose.”

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The State of the Russian Military: An SLD Site Visit

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by Richard Weitz

I have had the opportunity to participate in the first Defense and Security section meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club in Moscow from May 25-27. The discussions focus on the modernization of Russia’s Armed Forces and cooperation in international security. The meeting was co-organized by Russian government RIA Novosti news agency, the independent Council on Foreign and Defense Policy think tank, and the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technology (CAST) research institute. According to its website, “the Valdai Discussion Club provides a global forum for the world’s leading and best-informed experts on Russia to engage in a sustained dialogue about the country’s political, economic, social and cultural development.”

The participants included about a dozen foreign military experts from Belarus, France, Germany, Norway, Turkey, and the United States. Almost a dozen other participants came from various Russian organizations.

On May 25, the first program day, we traveled an hour outside Moscow by bus to visit the 5th Guards Independent Motor Rifle Brigade. The acting commander led us on a tour of what was formerly known as the Division Tamanskaya. We first learned about the history of the unit through an hour-long tour of its museum. The unit was formed as the 127th Infantry Division in Kharkov on July 8, 1940. It achieved full combat readiness the following year, only two weeks after NAZI Germany launched its surprise attack on Stalin’s underprepared Red Army. The unit fought with distinction throughout the war. It also served in the North Caucasus in the late 1990s, helping to “restore constitutional order to Chechnya.” In line with the current Russian military reform program, the division was restructured as a brigade in the last few years.

After the museum tour, we then visited a barracks for the enlisted personnel. We also toured the gym and ate a decent meal in the canteen. Everything looked very nice though the question naturally arises how representative

the facilities on display are of conditions in other parts of the Russian military. The brigade is special in at least one respect: the Russian Army uses the unit to test new tactics, techniques, and procedures.

The most interesting part of the tour was the live fire drill. The acting commander explained to us that new recruits undergo three stages of combat training. First, they study theoretical topics in the form of academic lectures. Then they go to the practicing ground near the dormitory to undertake small-scale simulated training. The final stage involves live-fire training in an open field.

We had the opportunity to watch them engage in the latter two stages of live-fire drills. It was quite a show, with loud explosions and fireworks simulating various combat conditions at the practicing ground. We saw units practice artillery attacks, small unit assaults, medical operations, and even nuclear, biological, and chemical decontamination of a tank with soldiers in personnel protection suits. All the soldiers were male conscripts except for a few male officers and technical specialists.

We then saw an exhibition of some of the most modern equipment of the Russian Army. For example, we were given a detailed briefing on the T-90 main battle tank. The commander said that the T-90 had no equivalent in the world. Unlike the M-1 Abrams, which uses a gas turbine engine, the T-90 uses a diesel engine, which is easier to upkeep and more suitable for Russian winters. The T-90 is also much smaller than the Abrams. We also saw the BTR-80 [GAZ 5903] Armored Personnel Carrier, the 2S6 Tunguska integrated air defense system (armed with cannons as well as surface to air missiles), and other combat systems as well as the Ural system of trucks. We also were able to handle a number of small arms and light weapons as well as uniforms and other military equipment.

We then went back to downtown Moscow to visit the RIA Novosti press club for a discussion on recent Russian military reforms, introduced by Sergey Karaganov, chairman of the “Valdai” Club. I had the opportunity to work with Sergey in the mid-1990s, when I was a post-doc at the Center for Science and International Affairs (CSIA) at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government. The CSIA, then led by Graham Allison, collaborated with Karaganov’s Institute on several security projects, sometimes in collaboration with a European institution.

At RIA Novosti, Ruslan Pukhov, the head of CAST, reviewed some of the key Russian military reforms. According to his briefing, the Russian army before the reform process began a few years suffered from several major flaws.

These defects included excessively large command and administrative structures given the number of 100,000 combat-ready troops; a disproportionate number of officers and warrant officers, who comprised approximately half of Russia’s military personnel; less than 13 percent of units being fully manned and combat ready; and

hardly any procurement of modern weapons. Several other contextual factors drove the reform process, including a radical transformation in Russia's military-political situation due to the declining probability of large-scale wars and the growing prospects of Russian military involvement in regional conflicts, insurgencies, and counterterrorism operations.

In addition, modern warfare had evolved with network-centric operations and tactics replacing those for deep attacks, resulting in a rising relative importance of the Air Force and cyber systems and decreasing need for traditional conventional ground forces.

One of the main elements of the reform included transitioning from a mass-mobilization army to a smaller number of better trained and effective permanent combat readiness forces, with the undermanned ("cadre") units consolidated into a smaller number of fully manned and combat ready brigades. Most of the personnel cuts were directed against the officer corps, which was to be reduced by more than half, from 355,000 to 150,000, with all warrant officers eliminated and a new noncommissioned officer corps replaced. The main administrative unit was to change from divisions and regiments to smaller and more flexible brigades. The number of Army units was to decrease from 1,890 to 172 units, the number of Air Force units from 340 to 180, and the number of Navy units from 240 to 123.

The reform also envisaged an end to efforts to replace all conscripts with professional contract soldiers because conscript soldiers are cheaper, provided a large well-trained reserve component after they leave active service, and represent a practice more in harmony with Russian history and tradition.

The problem is that the length of the conscription, 12 months, does not provide sufficient time to train soldiers in modern combat operations. The reforms sought to improve the conditions of conscription by allowing them to serve close to their homes in some cases, by establishing a five-day work week (with two days off), and some less pleasant non-combat tasks (such as cleaning and cooking) outsourced to contractors.

Thus far, the reforms have achieved mixed results. Critics complain they have been proceeding too rapidly, with insufficient development and planning. The Russian government's ability to provide adequate financial and other resources to the reform process has also been questioned. The transformation of the units has been criticized for having insufficient command, reconnaissance, logistics, and rear services components. The ability of civilians to replace so many military personnel is also uncertain. The Ministry of Defense has also not yet made clear how it plans to train and maintain the reserve component.

Konstantin Makienko of CAST delivered a report on "State Armament Program 2011-2020." The reforms have sought to increase the large-scale acquisition and procurement of modern military equipment. Most of this equipment is Russian-made, but some foreign systems are being imported from foreign countries to help keep

the Russian defense industries, not wishing to lose their domestic market, competitive. In contrast, the large size of the State Armament Program (SAP) 2011-2020 means that Russian defense industries will now give priority to providing weapons to the Russian military rather than manufacturing systems for exports.

The SAP aims to increase the proportion of modern weaponry in service with the Russian military to 30 per cent by 2015, and to 70 percent (up to 100 per cent for some types of weapons) by 2020. The Ministry of Defense (MOD) will spend 19.5 trillion roubles for its share of the program, with other security services paying smaller sums for their orders. The Ministry's priority procurement areas will be strategic nuclear forces, high-precision conventional weapons, and command, control, computers, and Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems. Military research and development spending will decrease considerably from current levels to 10 per cent of overall spending, while 80 per cent of the MOD SAP will now go to buying new weapons, with the remaining 10 per cent paying for the repair and upgrade of existing equipment.

Under the SAP 2011-2020, the Air Force will procure up to 70 fifth-generation T-50 Fighters, 96 multirole Su-35S fighters, as many as 100 Su-34 frontline bombers, up to 20 An-124 heavy transports, 50-90 Il-476 transports, and as many as 120 Yak-130 advanced jet trainers. The Air Force will also order 900-1000 helicopters, which includes 250 Mi-28N attack helicopters, as many as 120 Ka-52A and Ka-52K attack helicopters, 22 Mi-35M attack helicopters, and as many as 200 air defense systems.

Meanwhile, the Navy will procure 6-8 Project 955A and 955U strategic ballistic missile submarines, 150 R-30 Bulava submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), about 40 R-29RMU-2 Sineva SLBMs, 6 Project 885/885M nuclear-powered submarines, 2 Project 677 diesel-electric submarines, 3 Project 06363 diesel-electric submarines, and 2 foreign-made landing helicopter docks (perhaps France's Mistral-class ships), 8 Project 22350 frigates, 6 Project 11356M frigates, 1 Project 11661K frigate, and 35 corvettes, including at least 4 of the advanced Project 20381/20385. The Navy will also receive 26 MiG-29K carrier-based fighter planes. The SAP will also finance the repair and upgrade of the Project 11435 heavy aircraft carrying cruiser and the Project 11442 heavy nuclear-powered guided missile cruiser.

The main threat to the fulfillment of the SAP is Russia's uncertain macroeconomic situation. Another problem could be the persistent weaknesses in some elements of Russia's military-industrial complex, which has yet to fully recover from the break-up of the integrated Soviet complex in which defense orders received priority resources. The problems with the development program for the Bulava SLBM are particularly indicative of the problem Russian defense firms have in integrating complex weapons systems when a number of small sub-contractors are responsible for developing and manufacturing key components.