

From Constructive Destruction to Gathering

An Art Essay on the Future of Russian Politics

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Note from the Editors: This article had been written and accepted for publication before the start of Russia’s military operation in Ukraine. The author chose not to make any amendments as his major position, assessments, and insight remain valid.

DOI: 10.31278/1810-6374-2022-20-1-50-67

In 2021, Russia’s foreign policy seems to have entered a new stage. Let us call it the “constructive destruction” of the previous model of relations with the West. Elements of this policy kept piling up for some fifteen years, approximately since Vladimir Putin’s well-known speech in Munich in 2007. But residual attempts to fit into the Western system with a defensive approach still prevailed in politics and rhetoric.

Constructive destruction is not aggressive. Russia is not going to attack or destabilize anyone. There is simply no reason to do that. From a purely geopolitical point of view, the outside world

creates increasingly favorable medium-term prospects for Russia's development. But there is one major exception—NATO's continuing expansion and attempts to draw Ukraine into the bloc, formally or informally, which creates a security situation unacceptable to Russia.

The West is on the path of slow but steady decline internally, internationally and even economically. It is this decline—after almost five hundred years of dominance in world politics, economy, and culture, and especially after its seeming final victory in the 1990s and mid-2000s—that is the main reason why the West has unleashed a new Cold War. In my opinion,¹ it is likely to lose it and give up the role of global leader. This will probably make it a more constructive partner just in time for Russia to counterbalance friendly but increasingly powerful China.

In the meantime, the collective West is on the desperate and verbally aggressive defensive, trying to consolidate itself and use the remaining trump cards in order to reverse the prevailing trend. One of them is to use Ukraine in order to harm Russia and tie its hands. It is important to prevent these convulsive attempts from developing into a full-scale clash, and keep the United States and NATO from continuing their current policy. It is unbeneficial and dangerous for everyone, but so far relatively cheap for its initiators. It is necessary to convince the West that this policy is counterproductive for itself.

Another trump card is the dominating position in the Euro-Atlantic security institutions that developed after the end of the previous Cold War when Russia's combined power had hit its all-time lowest. This structure needs to be consistently destroyed, above all by non-participation and refusal to play by its long-outdated rules that were never beneficial to Russia. The Western track should be made secondary for Russia as soon as possible, only as an option supporting its Eurasian push. Integration in Greater Eurasia will be easier if Russia builds constructive relationships with countries located on the western tip of the continent, but the system of institutions that

¹ See: Karaganov, S. A., 2021. On a Third Cold War. *Russia in Global Affairs*, 19(3), pp. 102-115. Available at: <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/on-a-third-cold-war/> [Accessed 7 February 2022].

reminded from the past is an obstacle to building such relations. Therefore, we are not interested in preserving it.

The most important step towards building a new system is (alongside dismantling the old one) “the gathering of lands,” not even because Moscow wants so, but out of necessity. I wish we could do it later. But thirty years after the disintegration of the USSR, it has transpired that most post-Soviet countries have failed to become viable states. And some of them probably never will. There are many reasons, and they need to be analyzed. For the time being I will turn to the one that lies on the surface—most local elites have no historical and cultural experience of statecraft. They could not, and did not have time to, become state-forming. In fact, small countries lost the most after the collapse of the empire’s intellectual and cultural space. The road to the West that had opened up after that could hardly offer an adequate alternative. The absence of a state-forming core led to excessive compradorial ambitions entertained by those at the top.

Most of these states will either fall under external control, as the Baltic republics did, or continue to come apart. The Somaliazation of neighboring countries is unacceptable.

It is, therefore, necessary to think about how to make this “gathering” more effective and beneficial for Russia, taking into account the bitter experience of the tsarist and especially Soviet governments, which extended the sphere of influence beyond reasonable measure, and then had to keep these lands at the expense of the indigenous Russian peoples.

How to deal with the “gathering” imposed by history is the subject of future articles. In this one, I will focus on the objectively overdue, although equally difficult, policy of “constructive destruction.”

PAST MILESTONES

The new stage of Russian foreign policy was preceded by three others. The first one was a period of weakness and illusions that began in the late 1980s. We had no more strength to resist, we wanted to believe

that democracy and the West would help us.² That period ended in 1999, when, after the first waves of NATO expansion, perceived here as backstabbing, the collective West committed something similar to the gang rape of what remained of Yugoslavia.

Implicitly and covertly (we had to smile and bow in public), Russia began to “rise from knees.” It started rebuilding the state. After the United States had withdrawn from the ABM Treaty, which signaled its desire to regain strategic superiority, the country that was still poor made a pivotal decision to create a series of weapons that would put an end to the American hopes. Putin’s speech in Munich, the war in Georgia, the deep reform of the general-purpose forces amid the unfolding global economic crisis, which meant the failure of Western liberal globalist imperialism (I borrowed this term from brilliant British international relations expert Richard Sakwa), marked a new stage in Russia’s politics—regaining the role of a major world power capable of defending its sovereignty and interests. Milestones along the way were Crimea, Syria, military strengthening, consistent efforts to limit the West’s ability to influence Russia’s internal policies, and steps to force compradors out of the Russian ruling class, including by cleverly using the West’s reaction. In the situation of growing hostility, it has become unbeneficial to look to the West and keep money in Western banks.

China’s fantastic rise, the development of de facto allied relations between Moscow and Beijing, which began in the 2010s, Russia’s turn to the East, and the West’s sliding into a multidimensional crisis have led to a large-scale redistribution of political and geoeconomic power in favor of Russia. This is particularly evident in Europe. While only a decade ago Russia was seen as the weak but bristling fringe of the continent, now the EU is desperately fighting to keep its slipping geopolitical and geoeconomic agency on the world stage.

The period of “regaining greatness” had ended, relatively speaking, by 2017–2018. We leveled off, with modernization underway, but slow economic development was fraught with a decline. This hitch annoyed

² See: Zubok, V., 2021. Zapad nam pomozhet... [The West Will Help Us...] // *Rossiia v globalnoi politike*, 19(6), pp. 30-43. Available at: globalaffairs.ru/articles/zapad-nam-pomozhet/ [Accessed 7 February 2022].

many, including myself, who began to fear that Russia would once again “snatch defeat out of the hands of victory.” But, as it turned out, it was another period of accumulating strength, primarily in the military field. Russia has since gone far ahead, securing its relative strategic invulnerability at least for a decade and consolidating its ability to “remain dominant during any escalation,” should conflicts break out in regions vital to it.

The end of 2021, with Russia’s ultimatum to the United States and NATO to stop building up military infrastructure near the Russian borders and expanding the bloc to the East, marked the beginning of “constructive destruction.” The purpose is not just to stop the declining but still extremely dangerous inertia of the Western geostrategic offensive, but also to take serious steps towards laying the foundation for changing the relations that developed between Russia and the West in the 1990s.

Russia’s military strength, renewed sense of moral righteousness, experience of past mistakes, and a nearly allied relationship with China allow us to hope that the collective West, which has appointed itself as an opponent, will act reasonably (despite all inevitable fluctuations). And then in a decade from now—I hope sooner—we will start jointly building a new system of security and cooperation in Greater Eurasia and renovating the global system based on the UN and international law, not on the unilateral “rules” that have been imposed in recent decades.

CORRECTION WORK

Let me say right away that I consider Russian diplomacy of the last twenty-five years brilliant. Playing very weak cards, Moscow first avoided being “finished off,” retained the formal status of great power in the UN Security Council, preserved its nuclear capabilities, and then, pouncing on the mistakes and weaknesses of competitors, and using the strengths of partners, gradually strengthened its position in the world. Building a deep and friendly relationship with China was a great achievement. Russia has a more advantageous geopolitical position than the USSR, unless, of course, it strives for the role of global superpower that destroyed the Soviet Union.

But we must not forget the miscalculations we made, so as not to repeat them again. Our weakness, mental laziness and bureaucratic inertia helped create and maintain the present unjust and unsustainable European security system.

The splendidly sounding Charter of Paris for a New Europe, signed in 1990, contained a provision, unthinkable for the Helsinki Act of 1975, that gave countries the freedom of choosing unions. Since the Warsaw Pact Organization was already at the end of its rope, this meant the freedom of NATO's enlargement. This document is still cited, even in our country. But in 1990, the North Atlantic Alliance could at least be considered a defensive bloc. Since then, the organization and the vast majority of its member states have committed a series of aggressive acts against the remains of Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Libya.

After a warm meeting with Lech Walesa, in 1993, Boris Yeltsin signed a document stating "Russia's understanding of Poland's plans to join NATO." Having learned in 1994 about the plans to begin NATO expansion, then Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev started bargaining, without presidential approval, over conditions for Russia's consent. The other side immediately spread the word that since the Russians were bargaining, they did not mind. In 1995, Moscow hit the brakes, but it was too late—the dam had burst and those in the West who questioned the feasibility of NATO's expansion were sidelined.

In 1997, faced with a desperate economic situation and dependence on the West, Moscow signed the Russia-NATO Founding Act. We secured some concessions such as the promise not to station substantial military contingents in the new member countries. This obligation has been breached for several years now. It was also agreed that no nuclear weapons would be deployed in these countries. But this was not entirely in the interests of the United States, which had long sought (contrary to the wishes of its allies) to get away from a potential nuclear conflict in Europe, which would almost inevitably have led to nuclear strikes against the United States. The Act de facto legitimized the bloc's expansion.

There were also smaller, but more bitter, mistakes. Russia participated in the Partnership for Peace program aimed at creating the

impression that the bloc was willing to listen to Russia, thus justifying its continued existence and expansion. An even more unfortunate blunder was made later, when, after the NATO aggression against Yugoslavia, Moscow joined in the work of the Russia-NATO Council with an astonishingly worthless set of issues for discussion. The only issue that should have been discussed—preventing NATO's expansion and the advancement of its military infrastructure to the Russian border—was not on the agenda. The Council continued to work even after the aggression committed by most NATO countries against Iraq and Libya in 2011.

It is a pity that we have not so far called NATO what it has really become—an aggressor that has committed numerous war crimes. I think that this would be a wake-up call for many political circles in Europe, for example, in Finland and Sweden, which are considering the expediency of joining NATO, and for all others who habitually keep repeating the mantra about the defensive nature of the bloc and the need to strengthen it in order to deter fictional enemies.

I understand those in the West who got accustomed to the existing system that allows Americans to buy the obedience of junior partners, not only in military terms, and the latter to save on security expenses by selling part of their sovereignty. But why would we need this system? Especially since it clearly leads to the reproduction and even escalation of confrontation on our western border and in the world as a whole. NATO exists by ramping up artificial confrontation, and the longer the organization survives, the deeper this confrontation will be.

At the same time, the bloc, in fact, is dangerous for its members as well. While provoking confrontation, it does not guarantee protection. It is not true that Article 5 of the Washington Treaty ensures collective defense in the event of an attack. It contains no automatic guarantees. I know the history of the bloc and the American discussion around its creation and I am absolutely certain that the United States will under no circumstances use nuclear weapons in “defense” of allies if it is a conflict with another nuclear power.

The Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) has long outlived itself. The prevailing NATO and EU majority uses

it to prolong confrontation or to impose, fortunately increasingly less effectively, modern Western political values and standards. In the mid-2010s, I happened to work in the grand-sounding group of “wise men” at the OSCE, designed to work out a new mandate for this organization. While before that I had had doubts about its usefulness, in-depth interaction made me firmly believe in its harmfulness. It has long outlived its time and only conserves the archaic legacy. In the 1990s, the OSCE was used to wreck attempts by Russia and other countries to create a pan-European security system; in the 2000s, the so-called Corfu process was used to rein in Russia’s new initiative to build such a system.

UN bodies have actually been forced out of the continent: the UN Economic Commission for Europe, the UN Human Rights Council, and the UN Security Council. The OSCE was once seen as a useful continuation and extension of the UN system for an important subcontinent. But it did not work out.

What our policy towards NATO should be like is obvious to me: moral and political delegitimization of the bloc, rejection of institutional cooperation, which has proved counterproductive, and preservation of contacts only between the military, and only as an addition to the dialogue with the U.S. Department of Defense and the defense ministries of leading European countries. None of serious military decisions are made in Brussels anyway. Our policy towards the OSCE should be similar, considering the fact that this organization is rather harmful than not, although it is not directly responsible for aggression, extermination of people, or destabilization. Consequently, Russia should bring its participation in it to an absolute minimum. Sometimes we hear that this is the only place where the Russian foreign minister can meet with his colleagues. This is not true. There are many such places in the UN system. In any case, bilateral dialogues are much more fruitful than such gatherings where bloc discipline reigns supreme. It would be much more effective to send observers and peacekeepers through the UN system.

The limited format of the article does not allow me to elaborate on policies regarding other European organizations such as the EU and

the Council of Europe. But the general approach should be the same: we cooperate where and if it is beneficial, and refrain where it is not.

Thirty years of experience have proved convincingly that maintaining the present system of institutions in Europe is harmful. Their inertia, which leads to the reproduction and aggravation of confrontation, even military threats in the subcontinent and around the world, cannot benefit Russia. Once we dreamt that they would help strengthen our security and promote the political and economic modernization of our country. But instead they undermine security. So should we copy the increasingly dysfunctional political system of the West? Do we really need the latest Western values?

We will have to curb expansion and contribute to the erosion of the system, which is already underway, by refusing to cooperate in the hope that the strong opposition and the prospect of stewing in their own juice will prod the elites in the neighboring Western states into pursuing a policy that will be less suicidal for themselves and less dangerous for others. Of course, while exiting this system of relations and thus helping accelerate its self-destruction, we must limit as much as possible the inevitable collateral damage to ourselves. But keeping it further would simply be dangerous.

POLICY FOR TOMORROW

In this crumbling world, it would be better to stay longer in the neo-isolationist “fortress Russia,” focusing on internal development. But history makes us act faster. Many of my proposals on the policy, which I tentatively call “constructive destruction,” stem from the previous analysis.

We should not intervene in a bid to influence internal processes in the West, whose elites have unleashed a new Cold War against Russia out of despair. We should restrain them, including militarily and, if necessary, using military-technical instruments, thus reinforcing the tendency towards moral, political, and economic degradation of the Western system. This will inevitably strengthen geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geo-ideological—cultural—positions of the non-West, of which Russia has historically been the most important part.

The West is predictably trying to drag out Russia's demands, seeking to extend the life of its institutions. We should not reject discussions and cooperation on economic, political, cultural, educational, and health issues, wherever it is beneficial. But at the same time we will have to ratchet up military-political, psychological, and even military-technical pressure not so much on Ukraine, which has been turned into the cannon fodder of the new Cold War, but on the collective West to make it come to its senses and give up the policy of recent decades. There is no need to fear an aggravation of confrontation. It intensified even when we tried to appease the West. But we must be prepared for unavoidably strong countermeasures, while at the same time offering a long-term alternative—a new policy of peace and cooperation. The West is not the only one who can threaten destructive sanctions; we can also deter it by threatening to destroy its economy and society with asymmetric measures. Naturally, we should keep reminding everybody of an alternative approach beneficial to all.

With a sensible and active policy, not least domestic, it will be possible to survive another surge of Western hostility more or less peacefully. I have already written that we have a good chance of winning this Cold War.

Our own historical experience inspires optimism, too: we have many times managed to tame imperial ambitions for the benefit of ourselves and all humanity, turning their carriers into relatively vegetarian and convenient neighbors: Sweden after the Battle of Poltava, France after the Battle of Borodino, and Germany after the battles for Stalingrad and Berlin.

A slogan for the new Russian policy towards the West may be a quatrain from Alexander Blok's brilliant, and very appropriate now, poem *The Scythians*:

“Join us! From horror and from strife,
Turn to the peace of our embrace!
There is still time. Keep in its sheath your knife.
Comrades, we will be brothers to your race.”

But, while trying to remedy, albeit with a bitter medicine, our relations with the West, we must remember that being close to us culturally,

for two decades it has been a dying breed. Its policy is that of limited damage and, if possible, cooperation. Real prospects and challenges of the present and the future are in the East and the South. And so we must not allow a harsher and stronger stand towards the West to distract us from the further turn towards the East. Sadly, this turn, especially the development of the territories beyond the Urals, has slowed down in the last two to three years.

It is necessary to prevent Ukraine from becoming a source of military threat. But it would be counterproductive to spend too many managerial, political, and even economic resources on that. We need to manage instability. Most of Ukraine's territory has been emasculated by its own anti-national elite and the West, and infected with the bacillus of militant nationalism.

It would be much more productive to invest in our own eastern territories, in the development of Siberia. By creating favorable working and living conditions, we will attract not only Russians, but also other residents of the former Russian Empire, including Ukrainians. In fact, they made a significant contribution to Siberia's development in the past.

Let me repeat what I have written in my other articles: what made Russia a great power was the incorporation of Siberia under Tsar Ivan the Terrible, certainly not the incorporation of Ukraine under Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich nicknamed "Quiet." It is time to stop repeating Zbigniew Brzezinski's dubious remark, dictated by his Polish genes, that Russia cannot be a great power without Ukraine. The opposite is much closer to the truth: Russia cannot be a great power with the totally unbearable Ukrainian yoke, created by Lenin and expanded to the west under Stalin.

The most promising track is, of course, the development and strengthening of relations with China. This will increase the capabilities of both countries immensely. If the West continues its desperate feud, we could consider forming a temporary—for five years—defensive alliance. Naturally, we should also think about safeguards if China becomes intoxicated by its own success and invokes its medieval policy of the Middle Kingdom designed to turn neighbors into vassals. We must help Beijing in whatever we can to prevent its even temporary

defeat in the Cold War unleashed against it, because its defeat will weaken us too. On top of it all, now we know what the West turns into when it believes it is winning. We have to take harsh measures to treat its hangover after intoxication from the successes of the 1990s.

Clearly, our Eastern policy should not focus entirely on China. The Eastern and Southern worlds are rising in global politics, economy, and culture, partly because we have undermined the West's military superiority, which served as a basis for its hegemony over the last five centuries.

When it comes to building a new European security system instead of the dangerously decrepit old one, it will have to be built as part of a larger Eurasian project since hardly anything worthy can be created in the old Euro-Atlantic area anymore.

It is self-evident that an important prerequisite for success is the development and modernization of the country's economic, technological and scientific potential—the basis of its military power—which remains the backbone of security and sovereignty. Russia cannot be successful without improving the quality of life of the majority of its people, which means prosperity, health care, education, and the environment.

The restriction of political freedoms, inevitable during confrontation with the collective West, on no account can be extended to the intellectual sphere no matter how hard this may be. Talented and creative people who are ready to serve their country should have maximum intellectual freedom. Scientific development through the Soviet-era *sharashka*-like clandestine research and development laboratories will no longer be possible. Freedom boosts the talents of our genetically inventive people. Even in foreign policy, our current freedom from ideological fetters gives us important advantages over our close-minded neighbors. Historical experience also teaches that the restriction of the freedom of thought imposed by communist mankurts led the country to disaster in its Soviet past. Preserving personal freedom and will is a condition for development and movement forward and up.

If we want to develop and win, we will badly need a spiritual core—a national idea, an ideology that unites and leads forward.

It is axiomatic that great countries cannot be great without such an idea. This happened to us in the 1970s and the 1980s. I do hope that the ruling leadership, fed up with the communist era dogmas, will ease its resistance to the advancement of a new ideology. In this sense, Vladimir Putin's speech at the annual meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club in October 2021 sent a strong and inspiring signal. I have proposed my versions of such a "Russian idea" more than once among the growing number of Russian philosophers and publicists.³ (I apologize for repeatedly quoting myself, but this is due to the lack of space in a journal article).

QUESTIONS FOR TOMORROW

And now about a very important, pressing, but so far barely discussed aspect of the new policy. Its success and the policy per se are impossible without overcoming and revamping the outdated, and often admittedly harmful, ideological foundation on which our social sciences and—to a large extent—practices, rest.

Naturally, the need to overcome it does not mean that we will once again reject the achievements of the political, economic, and foreign policy thoughts of the previous generations. The Bolsheviks once threw Russian public thought into the "dump of history" and, as we know, the result was dire. Just recently we delightedly pushed Marxism aside. But now, having had enough of other dogmas, we understand that we hurried to do so—Marx-Engels and Lenin voiced sound ideas worth relying on, particularly in what concerns the latter's theory of imperialism.

Social sciences, which study the lives of people and societies, cannot but be national, no matter how cosmopolitan their adherents try to appear. They grow on national historical soil and are ultimately aimed at serving their countries and/or their ruling and proprietary classes.

³ The shortened version is available in: Karaganov, S.A., 2021. *Idya v Sibir', my idyom i v budushchee, i k istokam nas kak derzhavy* [By Going to Siberia, We Go Both to Our Future and Our Origins as a Power]. *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 28 November. Available at: rg.ru/2021/09/27/reg-sibfo/karaganov-idea-v-sibir-my-idem-i-v-budushchee-i-k-istokam-naskak-derzhavy.html [Accessed 7 February 2022].

Attempts to uncritically transfer the postulates from these sciences into a different environment are inevitably fruitless or produce monsters.

Having achieved relative military security, and regained political and economic sovereignty, we should start working to obtain intellectual independence—one of the absolutely necessary conditions for development and influence in the new world. Prominent Russian political scientist Mikhail Remizov was the first, I think, to call this process “intellectual decolonization.”

After decades of living in the shadow of Marxism that came from outside, we started preaching another foreign dogma—this time liberal democratic—in economic thought, in political science, and even to a large extent in foreign and defense policy. Blinded by this fascination we hit a rough patch: we lost part of the country, its technologies and their authors. We started to pursue an independent policy in the mid-2000s, but we acted in many ways intuitively, without relying on clear national-oriented (I repeat, they cannot be any other) scientific and ideological postulates. We still do not dare tell ourselves that the ideological and scientific worldview we have been guided by in the last forty to fifty years is outdated and/or initially aimed at serving the elites of other countries.

To illustrate my point, let me put a dozen or so questions picked up from my very long list practically at random.

I will start with almost eternal ones from high philosophy. What is primary in man and society: spirit or matter? In a more mundane and political way, what interests drive people and their communities—states—in the modern world? Vulgar Marxists and liberals claimed it was economic interests. We all remember Bill Clinton’s catch phrase “It’s the economy, stupid,” which seemed to be an axiom just recently. Once people satisfy the elementary feeling of hunger, they begin to be driven by interests of a higher order: love for the family and homeland, the desire for national dignity, personal freedom, but also power, and glory. In principle, the hierarchy of values has been known for a long time—since the famous Maslow Pyramid was adopted by the academic community in the 1940s-1950s. It is another matter that modern capitalism has distorted this pyramid by imposing, first

through conventional media and now through pervasive electronic networks, a philosophy of ever-expanding consumption for both the rich and the poor at their respective levels.

What should one do now that modern capitalism, devoid of ethical and religious ground, is pushing for unbridled consumption, seeking to eliminate all limits both ethically and geographically, coming into increasingly obvious contradiction with nature, and beginning to threaten the continuation of human life? And at the same time, we Russians know particularly well that attempts to stop some people's pursuit of gain and wealth, and to get rid of those who possess this wealth—entrepreneurs and capitalists—have terrible consequences for both society and the environment (the socialist economy was not very mindful of environmental conservation).

How should one go about the latest “values” such as the denial of history, homeland, gender, and faith, aggressive LGBTism and ultra-feminism? I recognize the right of other people to espouse them, but I consider them posthuman. Should we view this as a normal stage of social evolution? Hardly. Should we try to fence ourselves off, limit societies' development opportunities, and wait for them to survive this moral epidemic? Or should we start a fight, leading the vast majority of people adhering to what is called conservative values, which in fact are normal human values? Should we get involved in a fight, thus further raising the already dangerous level of confrontation with Western elites?

In the modern world, the development of technology and the growth of labor productivity have given most people the feeling of satiation, but at the same time the world itself has come into a state of habitual anarchy and the loss of customary guidelines by the majority of people globally. Could it be that not economic, but security interests, and the military-power instruments and political will that ensure them are coming to the fore once again?

What is military deterrence in the modern world? Is it a threat to damage national and physical assets or foreign assets and information infrastructure to which the present-day cosmopolitan Western elites are connected so closely? If this infrastructure is destroyed, what will happen to Western societies?

A related question is: What is strategic parity, a concept we still use? Is it not the nonsense concocted in the West to trap the Soviet leaders afflicted by a complex of inferiority and the June 22, 1941 syndrome, who plunged into an arms race that eventually wore out the country and its people? It seems that we are already answering this question, although we still keep talking about equality and symmetric solutions.

And what is arms control, which many people in our country think is useful? Is it a way to curb a costly arms race that benefits the richer opponent and reduces the threat of war or is it more of an instrument to legitimize this race, develop new weapons, and impose unnecessary programs on the antagonist? An unambiguous answer is not so obvious.

But let us go back to issues of a higher order.

Is democracy really the culmination of political development? Or, if we are not talking about direct Aristotelian (also limited) democracy, is it one of the tools for the ruling oligarchies to govern societies, tools that come and go, depending on the state of societies and the world around them? In an unfavorable environment, these tools are discarded only to reappear when appropriate external and internal conditions develop and such a need arises. This is not a call for rampant authoritarianism or monarchy. It seems we have already gone too far with centralization, especially at the grassroots, municipal level. But if this is only a tool, maybe we should stop pretending that we are striving for democracy and should say straightforwardly that we want a society of personal freedom, prosperity for the majority, and security and greatness for the country? But then how can the authorities be legitimized in the eyes of the people?

Will the state really die off, as Marxists or liberal globalists thought, dreaming of an alliance of transnational corporations and international NGOs (both are being nationalized and privatized everywhere) or supranational political associations? Let us see how long the European Union will last in its present form. Again, this does not mean questioning the expediency of joint efforts by states and nations for the common good, for example, to remove costly customs barriers or

develop joint environmental policies. Perhaps, after all, we should focus on strengthening our own state and supporting countries that are close to us, leaving aside the global problems created by others? Or will then these problems bear down on us even more?

What is the role of territory? Is it a shrinking asset, a burden, as many of us have thought just recently, or is it the most important national treasure, especially amid environmental crises, a changing climate, and the growing shortage of water and food, relative or absolute in some regions?

What is to be done with hundreds of millions of Pakistanis, Hindus, Arabs, and residents of other territories that may become uninhabitable? Should we invite them over here already now, as the United States and Europe did in the 1960s when they attracted migrants in order to reduce the cost of local labor and undermine the influence of trade unions? Should we fence ourselves off or develop a model that would make the indigenous peoples of Russia defenders and masters of their territory? But in this case, we will have to abandon all hope for the development of democracy. Suffice it to recall Israel's experience with its Arab population.

Or will the advancement of robotics, currently seriously lagging behind, help avoid a shortage of people for the development of these territories? In general, what is the role of Russians by blood in a situation where their share in the population of Russia is inexorably shrinking? I think that, given the historical openness of the Russian people, the answer can be optimistic. But there is no certainty.

I can raise many more questions, especially in the field of economics. It is important to ask them and try to find answers as quickly as possible. This is a crucial condition for development and success. We need a new political economy, free from the dogmas of Marxism or liberalism, which will be more than just the current harsh realism that underlies our foreign policy. It must be multiplied by future-oriented offensive idealism, a new Russian idea based on our history and philosophical tradition. Professor Andrei Tsygankov has repeatedly voiced a similar idea.

I am convinced that this is the most important task for all our international relations experts, political scientists, economists, and

philosophers. This is a truly herculean challenge as we will have to break customary and convenient thinking stereotypes in order to be useful to society and the country. To sweeten up this task, I will finish with a half-joking remark. Maybe it is time to understand that the subject of our research—foreign, domestic, and economic policy—is the result of creative work by the masses of people and leaders, that it is an art? There is a lot of inexplicable in it, based on intuition and talent. And as art historians, we describe, identify trends, teach history, and do useful work for the creators—peoples and leaders. It is true, though, that we often turn into scholastics and create theories that are barely connected with reality and distort it through fragmentation.

Sometimes representatives of our professions, such as Yevgeny Primakov or Henry Kissinger, make history. But I am not sure they thought about what school of art history they represented: they simply relied on knowledge, their human experience, moral principles, and intuition. Aesthetically, I like the idea that we are all art historians, for this can make the difficult task of revising dogmas a bit easier.