

Transition Project



Russia at Peace with the World



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Russia's position on the world map is such that it cannot but play a key role in international politics. It is all the worse for it that this role in recent years has been exclusively negative and harmful to the existing world order.

By seizing Crimea in March 2014 and further annexing four regions of Ukraine in September 2022, Russia has called its own borders into question. Before the current crisis, no one in the world doubted or attempted to challenge the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. Its borders were defined following the dissolution of the Soviet Union by bilateral agreements with neighboring countries and recognized by the rest of the international community. When the Russian authorities changed its borders with the seizure of Crimea, they themselves abandoned the status quo that existed and suited all sides. Now it is not obvious where those borders are. A grave crime has been committed against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia, and the president and parliament of the country allowed it. They unilaterally incorporated new territories into the state, and now Russia's borders are not under the protection of international law, but can be held only at the expense of its own military force. What will happen to Russia's borders when its military potential is exhausted?

The liberal or idealistic thesis of this chapter is as follows: **despite the current crisis, Russia has a chance to survive as a significant subject of international relations in the 21st century only if it builds a stable democracy at home, because this will make the foreign policy course of our country predictable, peaceful and relevant to the norms, rules and institutions of the liberal international order.** Otherwise, Russia will face long decades of isolation from the developed world and almost inevitable disintegration into states of different levels of insolvency and backwardness at war against all.

Theoretical framework

Two main theoretical paradigms are pitted against each other when defining international relations in contemporary science: realism and liberalism, also called idealism. Both traditions assume anarchy as the initial state, in which sovereign states have their own significant share of power and act freely, at their own risk. Realists recognize a balance of power that guarantees unacceptable damage to one state in the event of an attack on another as the main factor precluding wars. They refuse to consider the influence of a state's internal political structure on its behavior in the international arena and do not believe in the possibility of humanity's evolution to a world without wars. As Richard Ned Lebow rightly wrote, this is a truly «tragic vision»¹ of world politics.

The prism of realism dominates the foreign policy doctrines of modern states. But in terms of projecting the future of foreign policy, a liberal view of international relations seems more relevant. Recognizing the fact of international anarchy and not denying the importance of the balance of power currently, the proponents of liberalism also allow the possibility of evolution of policy between states through their cooperation with each other on the basis of complex and prolonged joint work on the development of jointly adopted norms, rules and institutions of multilateral regulation. At the same time, liberals pay special attention to the development of the political structure of states toward greater democratization and the establishment of the rule of law. The liberal concept of a «democratic world» assumes that modern democracies are less likely to wage war against each other² (as confirmed by the experience after World War II), and therefore assert the need to spread democracy globally.

Liberal position is the most relevant when it comes to projecting the future of international relations. Realists are good at defining the foreign policy objectives of the present on the basis of predominantly negative experiences. If we consider the future of Russia's foreign policy using realism, we are unlikely to find room in it for the successful development of a sustainable democracy, we cannot ignore the enormous influence of the army and special services on Russian politics, and we will end up proposing a policy of containment for a potentially aggressive and revanchist power³. From the perspective of many

1 Dunne T., Kurki M., Smith S. (Eds.) *International Relations Theories*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. PP. 74-75.

2 Doyle M. *Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs // Philosophy and Public Affairs*. 1983. Vol. 12. No. 3. PP. 205-235.

3 As a stark example of such an approach, one can look at the latest report of the American Center for European Policy Analysis with a very telling title *Containing Russia, Securing Europe* by Sam Greene, Elina

«realists», Russia will always be like this, including after Putin.

The idealist optic, on the contrary, perceives the democratization of Russia inevitable, and, as a consequence, its transformation into a peace-loving force participating in the formation and strengthening of a liberal international order on a global scale. This approach allows for the possibility of the evolution of the internal political structure of individual states and the system of international relations as a whole towards more stable forms of international cooperation under conditions of peaceful coexistence. Russia can be envisioned as in peace with the whole world only within the framework of the liberal paradigm of international politics. Realism promises us nothing in the future but an endless war, and, at best, a cold war.

At the same time, both realists and liberals use the concept of international order as a set of patterns (models) of behavior that create the structure of relations between actors on the world stage. The goal of the international order is peacekeeping, but this goal is only very partially achievable. Low-intensity local conflicts are almost inevitable and not so dangerous if they do not disturb the general status quo. However, major and even more so high-intensity global conflicts (such as World Wars I and II) usually signal the failure of the previous international order, which is being replaced by a new one. Norms, rules and institutions are challenged and changed by the outcome of the next major crisis. While realists place the greatest emphasis on the balance of power and hegemony in the maintenance of international order in a given historical period, liberals stress the importance and continuity in the gradual evolution of existing norms, rules and institutions.

The tradition of realism continues to dominate the discourse within international relations. Imagine that you are speeding across a very long bridge over a deep abyss, a bay or the mouth of a wide river. Suddenly, another car cuts you off on the right without warning, violating traffic rules. There is no traffic police station near you, and security cameras will only record the fact of your death in the accident. You need to act at your own risk, assessing in a flash the possible consequences of a collision, braking in your lane or turning sharply to the side.

In international relations, sovereign states are the main participants in the movement. This movement itself is constantly taking place on the very endless bridge where there are no police and cannot be. Yes, the cameras of the world's

Beketova, Elena Davlikanova, Olya Korbut, Federico Borsari, Mathieu Boulègue, Lera Burlakova, Ben Dubow, Aura Sabadus, Katia Glod, Olena Pavlenko, Pavel Luzin, Volodymyr Dubovyk, Vitalii Dankevych, SaraJane Rzegocki and Center for European Policy Analysis of January 31, 2024. Text available here: <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/containing-russia-securing-europe/>

news agencies can record a violation of the rules, but these rules are quite conditional: everyone understands them in their own way and sees the violation not where others see it. A rational road user in such conditions will keep a close eye on the road and constantly maneuver to avoid a collision with human casualties or a fall into the abyss.

The modern world order is very fragile and teetering on the edge of an abyss; in the scale of the history of human civilization, it has existed for a negligible amount of time. The first international order in the world history emerged after the conclusion of the Westphalia Peace Accords in 1648, it included neither England nor Russia at that time. We can speak of a global order in international relations no earlier than the end of World War I (given that most of the world in the interwar period remained divided between European colonial empires).

The modern world order began to take shape only after World War II, and its formation was completed only in the early 1990s with the collapse of the USSR and the Soviet bloc. At that time, as Eric Hobsbawm puts it, there were “more than a dozen new territorial states ... without any independent mechanism defining their borders”⁴. Thanks to the collapse of the world colonial system, the modern palette of the political map of the world was formed, which today includes 193 UN member states.

The norms, rules and institutions of global governance have reached their maximum degree of development since the second half of the 1940s. The liberal internationalism of the UN and its World Declaration of Human Rights, the economic liberalism of the IMF and the WTO, the openness of world markets and the general trend towards democratization of political regimes around the world — even in the context of the Cold War, all of this gave optimism about the future of the world. The rapid end of the Cold War and the democratization of the Soviet bloc countries in the late 1980s allowed Francis Fukuyama to proclaim the “end of history” marked by the final victory of democracy. However, in the same 1989 essay, soon to be published in Russian translation in the Soviet Union, Professor Fukuyama warned that Russia would not necessarily follow the postwar path of Western Europe toward democracy and open society. If, confident in its own uniqueness, it “stagnates,” he wrote, then, given the size of the state, it will “continue to absorb our attention”⁵ and prevent us from realizing the end of history.

The events of the spring of 2022 have once again demonstrated the

4 Hobsbaum E. Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century. 1914-1991. London: Abacus, 1997. P. 558.

5 Fukuyama F. The End of History // Voprosy filosofii. 1990. N° 3. P. 147.

limitations of international liberal institutions as a mechanism for maintaining world order. The UN Security Council is effectively paralyzed, and the norms of international law prohibiting waging wars of aggression are shattered. The institutions that govern the world economy are faltering (IMF) or in decline (WTO), at risk of being destroyed by new financial crises. Finally, even stable regional groupings such as the European Union and NATO are under severe internal stress and almost threaten to disintegrate under the influence of growing centrifugal forces. International anarchy remains the only constant that describes the state of world politics. There is simply no one to maintain global order.

What makes a state's foreign policy predictable

How can we achieve peace, especially peace forever, eternal peace? There is no more inappropriate time to talk about this subject than now. However, even in 1795, it seemed that only a very distant and naive person could talk about the establishment of sustainable peace. However, it was then, now long ago, that Immanuel Kant wrote his famous classic treatise “Toward Perpetual Peace”. In that year, French troops occupied the Netherlands, the three great powers of Europe — Russia, Austria and Prussia — made the last and final partition of Poland, the troops of the Shah of Iran invaded Transcaucasia and devastated Tiflis, and the British captured Ceylon.

Like all philosophers raised by the Enlightenment, Kant was guided by the principles of reason and book tradition. He was well aware of the existence of the basic natural law formulated in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*: “the precept or general rule of reason” states that “every man ought to pursue peace as he has a hope of attaining it”⁶. And it is to this end that every man, and especially one endowed with great power, needs to limit his own arbitrariness. Since the Enlightenment, political thinkers have had no choice whether to be on the side of peace or to call for war. Even if common sense, which is equally possessed by the cab driver and the highway robber, sees no logical contradiction in making another “little victorious war,” **those who serve the laws of reason are obliged**

6 Hobbes T. *Leviathan*. Moscow: RIPOL Classic, 2016. P. 186.

to seek peace in any situation. Always and everywhere, as long as humanity exists.

Who in Kant's time would have believed in the possibility of total annihilation of humanity as a result of global war? Today, the threat of nuclear war is part of our everyday life. And the truly great politician will not be the one who will annex new lands to his empire, but the one who will be able to make this deadly threat less, if not completely eliminated.

Kant himself did not use the word "democracy" when describing the internal organization of the state, which would contribute to its more peaceful foreign policy. Much more important is the proposed rational principle, when all political decisions are made collegially, when the executive power is separated from the legislative and is under civilian control, when the first person of the state is only one of equals, temporarily elected to his post. And when decisions are not made at the arbitrary will of a sole ruler, but on the basis of the interests of citizens and the law.

There are different interests. Using unlimited power, one may want world glory and for the sake of it go to war, allow the death of people and destruction. However, usually an adult person, burdened with his business, personal property, family and endowed with at least a modicum of reason, wants the simplest things — a long life and prosperity for himself and his loved ones. Neither of these things can be achieved in a war. Even if this war turns out to be victorious, it will have to be paid for — with the lives and well-being of specific people. Therefore, Kant states the following:

If ... to decide the question: To be war or not to be war? — requires the consent of the citizens, it is only natural that they should think carefully before starting such a nasty game. After all, they will have to bear all the burdens of war — to fight themselves, to pay the war expenses from their own resources, to repair the devastation caused by the war, and on top of all the troubles to bring upon themselves another one, poisoning the peace itself — never (because of always possible new wars) never disappearing burden of debts⁷.

A republican system makes a state more peaceful. This is why republics where citizens are allowed to discuss and make decisions are so reluctant to start wars and seek peaceful solutions to the end, even when dealing with bloody dictators and aggressors like Hitler and his kind.

7 Kant I. op. cit. P. 259.

The path to eternal peace that is possible for humanity is through universal republicanism in all states of the world instead of the principle of “the state is me”, through voluntary self-restraint of ambition and arbitrariness at the level of both individuals and states, through trust instead of fear, through disarmament instead of constant combat readiness. This path requires an incredible effort on the part of humankind, especially those burdened with political power.

This path has an alternative. But the alternative — the death of humanity — is so terrible and unacceptable that the effort to find peace in the lifetime of humanity must continue. Not to make history by any means, but to ensure that our common history continues.

Thus, the idealistic, aka liberal, view of international relations implies the search for conditions of sustainable and long-term peace, the possibility of evolution of social relations from international anarchy to greater cooperation between competing nations. An important condition for peaceful coexistence should be the transition from a monarchical to a republican system in most countries of the world. Even in Europe, where the king in some cases remains the formal head of state, his power is limited by the rule of law and parliamentary control over the government. In essence, this is a republic — unlike regimes where the dictator confirms his powers by popular vote for his virtually non-alternative candidacy and where law and courts are subordinate to the will of the ruler rather than vice versa.

If Russia can finally become a democratic republic in the 21st century, it will make its foreign policy more transparent and predictable to the rest of the world. Moreover, it will allow our country to join that federation of republics that is an alliance of the United States, Europe, and their allied democracies around the world. In 2024, this looks like a naive dream, but what but a dream remains when you see your country falling inexorably to the bottom of the abyss? Political imagination is what today’s politicians lack. It is the only thing that can change us and the world around us for the better.

Historical context

The current situation in relations between Russia and the West can hardly be characterized otherwise than as a deadlock. However, both sides feel themselves in this state quite organically. No one is ready to propose any long-term strategy, acting largely inertially, according to the well-known and repeatedly tested algorithm of mutual confrontation.

Cold War inertia

The current crisis is commonly associated with the figure of Vladimir Putin. Without attempting to diminish the importance of his personal actions in returning Russia to a neo-imperialist rut and, as a consequence, to a new confrontation with Western partners, it is hardly possible to explain complex political processes through a single person. This has already happened: the end of the Cold War, wrote Kjell Goldmann, a professor at Stockholm University, was attributed solely to the fact that Mikhail Gorbachev found himself at the head of the Soviet Union⁸. Such constructions are very simple, they give an understandable image for mass media, playing on the emotions of the audience. But from the point of view of rational political analysis, they are valuable, perhaps, only because they can question its very necessity.

Mr. Putin has indeed ruled Russia for a very long time, so many people today have forgotten that his emergence as Russian president 24 years ago generated public enthusiasm not only at home but also abroad. Putin came to power as a pro-Western leader and reformer intent on continuing Russia's transit from its Soviet past to a future based on a market economy, democracy and integration into the global world. His initial program was the fight against separatism and terrorism, the "equidistance of oligarchs" and the "dictatorship of the law," which, along with the restoration of normal functioning of the state apparatus, were perceived as steps of positive development. In this context, the expansion of cooperation with the U.S., EU and NATO was seen as a necessary and realistic prospect of the "German in the Kremlin" policy.

It is worth remembering that the 1990s were not a cloudless period in relations

8 Goldmann K. Bargaining, Power, Domestic Politics and Security Dilemmas: Soviet "New Thinking" as Evidence // The End of Cold War. Evaluating Theories of International Relations. Preprint and Postscript / Ed. by Pierre Allan and Kjell Goldmann. Boston; London: The Hague, 1995. P. 82.

between post-Soviet Russia and its North Atlantic partners. The very emergence of an independent Russia against the backdrop of the unpredictable and rapid disintegration of the USSR was rather against the will of the United States, which was interested in preserving the stability and integrity of the second nuclear superpower. The collapse of the Soviet empire, the accompanying economic hardship and outbreaks of violence created fears of a massive flow of refugees into Europe, forcing prosperous European countries to consider strengthening their eastern borders. The short “honeymoon period,” marked more by declarations and promises than by concrete actions, was soon followed by a slow cooling. Already in the mid-1990s, it became clear to outside observers that structural transformations in Russia were not yielding the desired results. The promise of democratization turned into a monarchical constitution with a new decrepit “czar” in the Kremlin, and the chosen model of privatization gave rise to a class of oligarchs. The ongoing failure of social policy and the education system has tragically undermined the already limited human resources, giving rise to the “Weimar syndrome” in a demoralized and impoverished Russian society.

The West and Russia were no longer a threat to each other — this was the common leitmotif of the first decade after the end of the Cold War. The euphoria did not allow us to see the structural grounds for a return to confrontation, much less to change them by making the transition to partnership at the level of alliance relations. Zbigniew Brzezinski dated the missed chance for cooperation to the second half of 1993⁹. At that time, President Yeltsin recognized that Poland’s desire to join NATO was not contrary to Russian interests. Washington’s response could have been a deal with Moscow establishing a special relationship between Russia and NATO. But the Bill Clinton administration did not seize the moment, and two years later, in late 1995, against the backdrop of the human rights scandals of the First Chechen War and the retaliatory demarches of the Russian leadership, observers spoke openly of a “cold world,” if not a new cold war. Soon, against the backdrop of the unfolding total propaganda campaign to elect the unpopular Yeltsin for a second term, Moscow protested quite sharply against NATO’s expansion to the East and U.S. plans to develop its own missile defense system.

Another stumbling block was the conflict in the former Yugoslavia: motivated by national romanticism, Russia openly supported the Milosevic

9 Brzezinski Z. *The Grand Chessboard. American superiority and its geostrategic imperatives*. Moscow: International Relations, 2010. P. 124.

regime while the Western allies sought his removal from power and submission to an international tribunal. As a result, the last year of Yeltsin's presidency was marked by two demonstrative moves. The first was the turning around of Prime Minister Primakov's plane over the Atlantic on his way to Washington to protest the U.S. bombing of Belgrade. In June 1999, when Primakov was already retired, a Russian Airborne Troops battalion, part of the peacekeeping force in the Balkans, made a dash to Pristina airport to prevent NATO forces from landing there and launching a ground operation against Milosevic's Yugoslav army. Given the unequal balance of forces, the plans of the Russian military were kept in the strictest secrecy, and their actions were unexpected and lightning-fast, designed primarily for media effect. Thus, perhaps for the first time, the world was shown a new signature style of Russian power politics, a new edition of which in the 2010s the seizure of Crimea and the intervention in Syria took place.

“Great Russia is rising from its knees” — these words, uttered by President Yeltsin during his inauguration in the summer of 1991, were understood in a special way by the new generation of Russian civil servants who replaced Gorbachev's nomenclature. Their cause, as is now clearly evident, was the revival of the empire in a special, postmodern format. As a result of Ukraine's withdrawal from the negotiations on the union treaty and the collapse of the USSR, the new Russian ruling class found itself in a dual position. On the one hand, they managed to literally wrest the Kremlin from the hands of the union center, gaining the opportunity to have undivided control over power and property in the most resource-rich Soviet republic. On the other hand, a significant part of the territories of the former empire, which in the minds of these people was still associated with historical Russia, formally and actually ended up abroad. Unable to compete on an equal footing with developed external players, from the very beginning the Kremlin was forced to resort to cunning tricks and desperate adventures to maintain at least a semblance of influence within the lost imperial borders. These included supporting unrecognized states in order to weaken and obtain leverage against the Western-oriented sovereign governments of Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia, and later Ukraine.

The very notion of “post-Soviet space,” which has little relevance outside the Russian Federation, has acquired a truly sacred meaning for the Russian political class. Geopolitics has become an almost mystical tool that justifies not so much Moscow's claims to its former colonies as its stubborn defense of restricting the activities of other, more powerful players on this territory. This primarily concerned the U.S. and the EU, which sincerely did not understand why, in the conditions of the modern world, they could not act in Ukraine and

Georgia in the same way as in Kenya or Ecuador.

Against this background, it is not surprising that long before Crimea, Donbass, and even more so the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, both in the West and in Russia itself, there were rather pessimistic forecasts about its European transit. Samuel Huntington was one of the first to recognize the growing civilizational gap between the West and post-communist Russia: while a Western democrat could have an equal intellectual debate with a Soviet Marxist, a dialogue with a Russian Orthodox nationalist was hardly possible for him¹⁰. Huntington predicted that the West's relations with Russia would range "from coldness to violence," balancing between these two extremes¹¹. The most accurate prediction belongs to Russian researcher Nikolai Kosolapov, who wrote back in 1995 that at the beginning of the new century Russia "risks becoming a center of social and political reaction," which could "once again pit it against the West and other regions and cultures."¹²

On the road to disaster

Were there any alternatives to today's failure in relations between Russia and the West, more severe than even during the most difficult years of the Cold War? Today we can say with certainty that by refusing to make decisive changes and choosing to go with the flow, the now permanent president of Russia, originally a mediocre special service enforcer, pushed the postmodern feudal-imperial system to its limits. And this was fully reflected in his foreign policy course.

For a long time, Putin, as well as the entire new Russian elite, looked at the West from two conflicting perspectives. They saw the West with its capital and technology as a resource for development and enrichment, but the West's liberal political system was a dangerous temptation that threatened the interests and peace of the Russian bureaucracy and oligarchy. The **view of democratic revolutions in neighboring countries as a rehearsal for a coup in Russia itself, against the backdrop of the rejection of structural reforms and the euphoria**

10 Huntington S. The Clash of Civilizations. MOSCOW: AST, 2017. P. 234.

11 Ibid. P. 351.

12 Kosolapov N.A. Changing Russia and the strategy of the West // N.A. Kosolapov, M.V. Sterzhneva, Y.F. Oleshchuk et al. Russia and the Future European Structure. Moscow: Nauka, 1995. P. 270.

of the oil boom, led to fear trumping rational motives for cooperation. By the early 2020s, Putin's Russia had finally chosen China, which combines modern technology and a successful strategy in global markets with a rigid authoritarian political structure, as its main international reference point. Thus the divorce with the West was predetermined, which finally took place after the launch of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

In turn, Western public opinion, after briefly expecting change from the then young and European-looking Russian leader, after Nord-Ost, Beslan, the Khodorkovsky case and the Politkovskaya murder, was increasingly alienated from the hope of seeing real renewal and change for the better in Russia. In the 15 years since Putin's Munich speech in 2007, a new Cold War has finally become a reality.

One can only agree with the Australian researcher Bobo Lo that Russian-Western relations have been so far from the state of normality for such a long time that the "norm" here is rather a state of if not open conflict, then constant mutual tension¹³. The effect of inertia in international politics manifests itself more than anywhere else: Russia and the leading European countries have centuries of experience in relations, and Russian-American relations cannot but be influenced by the long period of inter-bloc confrontation after World War II, when the United States finally became a global superpower. Balancing on the brink of open confrontation, constant diplomatic outbursts, support for opposing sides in regional conflicts, arms races, sanctions and trade wars, mutual propaganda and spying — all this is a very familiar and understandable pattern of behavior, where every move on both sides has been literally perfected since before the first Crimean War.

"Russia is weak, but war with it would be ruin," — these words attributed to Lord Palmerston two centuries ago best characterize the current view of the Russian challenge that dominates among Western politicians. Nor do the accusations of European figures of that time about the lack of strategy, cowardice and even venality that allow Mr. Putin to emerge victorious every time from a seemingly doomed game. "This beast is capable of anything," Marx wrote of the Russian Empire at the beginning of the Crimean War. — 'Especially when he knows that the other beasts he has to deal with are capable of nothing'¹⁴. Then the European coalition led by England managed to carry out a fairly successful

13 Lo B. *Russia and the New World Disorder*. London: Chatham House; Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015. P. 165.

14 New York Daily Tribune. July 14, 1853.

punitive operation, without a full-scale war, blockading the continental empire along the main maritime routes, defeating the Black Sea fleet, taking Sevastopol and achieving the withdrawal of the Russians from the Danube. Nikolayev's Russia, which serves almost as an ideal for today's Russian guards, ended in disaster, and the Great Reforms that followed opened up another opportunity to modernize the country.

Today's Russia, unlike a century or more ago, is almost completely free from the risk of direct military action. Possession of the world's second largest nuclear capability makes interventions similar to the first anti-Iraq coalition impossible. At least in the conditions of modern technical capabilities, until the Western allies solve the problem of retaliatory strike, such a prospect seems extremely unlikely. Meanwhile, the second half of the 20th century gave birth to another method of mutual deterrence and weakening, which was in demand with renewed vigor 35 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The policy of containment is once again, as it was in the days of George Kennan at the dawn of the Cold War, becoming the basis of the long-term strategy of the United States and its allies toward Russia. The main negative effect of the Cold War should not be overlooked: it is not only a constant walking on a razor's edge, but also the fact that the state bureaucracy and the military, acting in a state of emergency, acquire additional power and further suppress their own citizens. Thus, for Russia, the extremes of the new Cold War are fraught in the medium term with a partial or full restoration of the practices of war communism, the total denationalization of the economy and its subordination to militaristic objectives. For the West, mobilization in the face of the new Russian threat may not be the best experience, when democratic forces will be forced to yield to their own hawks and right-wing traditionalists.

Brzezinski's will for Russia

So, the nearest forecast promises nothing but outbreaks of existing and new regional conflicts. Ukraine and the Middle East have already become the scene of a new confrontation. It is not excluded that the Baltic States and the well-known part of the Asia-Pacific region may be added to them.

Still, Mr. Putin has taught Russia and the world one important lesson. If you are the ruler of a great power and if you are doing so well that you can do nothing, surrendering to the will of historical inertia, this inertia will lead you

back to your past, mercilessly eating up decades of historical time that has been practically wasted. How far the reverse progressive movement of the Russian structure will go, the coming years will show. But if we have agreed that the explanation of what is happening should hardly be reduced to the role of one person, only structural factors can prevent the existing structural inertia. The main one is that Russia must significantly lose the opportunity to enrich itself through its continued presence on world markets despite the war.

But to rely solely on economic determinism would be too superficial and dangerous, even though the failures of the Russian economy have obvious political causes. In recent years, Russia's political structure has not evolved, but degenerated, calling into question the fundamental foundations of the modern world: the inviolability of private property, personal freedoms and rights of citizens, and peaceful coexistence in the international arena. The transit that took place after the collapse of the USSR turned out to be the archaization of the political sphere, degradation of social life and human capital. This is the toxic soil on which the modern Russian challenge to the rest of the world is growing, that, in the words of Hans Morgenthau, "untamed barbarian force that builds its laws out of nothing, but believes in its own strength as the only justification for its expansion"¹⁵. I want to believe that our world will survive this too.

However, the first thing that will have to be done then, when the imminent catastrophe of the postmodern empire does happen, is to radically and inexorably change its "eternal" political structure, based on autocracy, hypercentralization, regulation and the absence of any control by civil society. The way to peace on the foreign policy front lies through radical transformations from within, aimed at real democratization and federalization, implying an uncompromising dismantling of the dominant archaic military-imperial structure.

To get out of the vicious spiral, it is necessary to internalize almost the most important European value of treating the state "not as a shrine, but as a more or less workable organization of officials and elected persons employed to serve society and every citizen"¹⁶. And what is more — to stop or at least contain the ongoing and seemingly perpetual negative scenario in foreign policy, it may take a big shock or a series of shocks related, for example, to the extraordinary circumstances on the Russian-Chinese border or to an even bigger outbreak of

15 Morgenthau H. *Politics Among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace*. NY: McGraw-Hill, 1993. P. 104.

16 Arbatov A. *Russia's Special Imperial Way // 20 years without the Berlin Wall: a breakthrough to freedom* / Edited by N. Bubnova. Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center; ROSPEN, 2011. P. 49.

violence in the Middle East covering the whole region¹⁷.

Brzezinski called the task of paramount importance for Russia and its relations with “transatlantic Europe” in alliance with the United States the modernization of its own society instead of vain attempts to regain its former status as a world power. The path to this lies through persistent internal development and rethinking by the Russian intellectual class of its country’s place on the world map based on the values and ideas of modernity, rather than the heroics of the past. “The national redefinition of Russia is not an act of capitulation, but an act of liberation”¹⁸, — these words of the founding father of all the latest Russian geopolitics can perhaps serve as his best testament for all of us.

Perhaps the most difficult task for Russia of the future is to free itself from its imperial status. Speaking at the opening of the Russian Academy of Public Service in 1994, President Yeltsin said: “Russia is doomed to be a great power.” The Russian Federation has land borders with 14 internationally recognized states from Norway to North Korea and two more — the United States and Japan — through sea straits. Only China has such a number of land border countries. However, while China borders countries of the same continent in South and Southeast Asia, Russia’s border stretches from Northern Europe along virtually all of Asia and across the Arctic to North America. The sparsely populated and lightly colonized Russia lies exactly in the middle between the three most populous parts of the world.

Such a unique geographical location could have made our country a major center and the most important corridor of international communication. Instead, the international terminals of Moscow’s airports are virtually empty for the third year in a row. A country capable of providing peaceful economic and political communication between leading countries has turned into an international pariah and threatens the world with nuclear apocalypse.

Indeed, getting rid of the imperial burden is the main task of Russia’s reset in the 21st century. Only a decolonized country that has become a full-fledged federation is able to return as a full-fledged participant in international communication, no longer perceived by its neighbors as a constant threat and

17 Lo B. Op. cit. P. 200.

18 Brzezinski Z. op. cit. P. 145.

acting as a reliable partner of advanced democratic nations. Otherwise, we will face a senseless and harmful confrontation with world leaders with constant balancing on the brink of a general war of extermination.

Tasks of Russia's foreign policy of the future

Any peace declarations by the new Russian leadership will not inspire confidence, especially in the West, long after the change of Putin's regime and possible democratization. The Gorbachev phenomenon is unlikely to be repeated in the 21st century, and no one will take Russia at its word. Rather, Washington and Brussels will be guided tenfold by the old adage "trust but verify," which was recommended to Ronald Reagan by his Russian advisor Suzanne Massey.

To regain the trust and favor of world leaders, it will not be enough to announce democratization and federalization. It will be necessary to follow through and prove to the world the sustainable and irreversible results of the reforms. Initially, Russian democracy, even if it emerges, will be perceived as weak and susceptible to the revenge of imperialism and authoritarianism. This suspicion will not disappear for at least the one or two terms that the new Russian president will serve in office — until he hands over his post in free and competitive elections, preferably to a representative of another political force. And a real consolidated democracy in Russia will emerge only after a second change of power through elections, which will take at least 16 years in the case of a return to four-year presidential terms.

That is, it may take at least two decades to regain trust in Russia. **If Putin's fall from power happens during the next vote in 2030, Russia's final socialization in the international society of democratic countries can be expected only around 2050. It is** virtually impossible to accelerate this process; it depends on a major structural change in Russian politics. One thing is certain: the earlier we start doing it, the earlier and more successfully it will be completed. Russia has a very long way to go and a lot of work to do to regain the trust and favor of its European and North American partners.

KPIs of the foreign policy of a democratic state

The concept of national interests must be fundamentally revised in the Russia of the future. Until now, this widely used concept has been understood as something extremely vague and dependent on the will of the bosses.

The concept of *raison d'état* first appeared in absolutist France in the 17th century thanks to Maximilien Sully and his successors at the court of French kings. Translated as “national interest,” it implied defense against external enemies in the international arena, which was served by the nobility of the sword. The word “national” would appear in France only at the end of the next century, but in relation to foreign policy, national interest would be understood as state interest for a long time to come. The situation will begin to change only after the First World War, when the masses of many millions of people involved in the fighting will demand a rethinking of the old concept taking into account their own needs. It was only after World War II, with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that UN member states formally recognized the priority of the interests of the citizen over the state. Of course, authoritarian regimes recognized this only on paper.

But if we look at national interests through the prism of the rights and needs of citizens, a simple objective of any foreign policy becomes obvious: it should contribute to peaceful existence, economic prosperity and mental well-being of citizens. The effectiveness of such a course must be judged by the concrete results manifested in people's lives.

Key performance indicators (the proverbial KPI) are what civil society has the right to demand from its government in a democratic country. In the case of foreign policy, this KPI can be measured by several quite specific and understandable indicators.

The prosperity of citizens of any country depends on foreign exchange earnings from foreign trade and international investors. Therefore, **one of the key KPIs of the country's foreign policy course should be the indicators of foreign trade revenues and the volume of attracted foreign investments. If the corresponding indicators are growing, it means that the foreign policy is effective.**

Not only the economic development of a country, but also its security is promoted by foreign policy alliances. The more allies a country has among

developed and strong countries, the more guarantees of its military security and economic sustainability. Over the past 30 years, Russia has missed a historic chance to become a full-fledged member of the G8, the most developed countries in the world. If the current trends are not stopped, our membership in the G20 of medium-developed countries may soon become a question. Russia of the future needs allied relations with the most successful and wealthy nations of the world. Building relations with them will take decades, but it is the only way to national success in the modern world. The **long-term KPI of Russia's foreign policy until the middle of this century should be the establishment of allied relations with the United States, its NATO partners and allies outside the North Atlantic Alliance.** Today, Russia maintains more or less tolerable relations only with Turkey and Israel, not the strongest allies of the United States. Moreover, these relations are far from allied and are rather on the constant verge of descending into confrontation. In the future, Russia will have to do the long and difficult work of restoring good-neighborly relations and reaching possible alliance agreements with all the world's leading democracies, from the United States and Britain to Japan.

Finally, another foreign policy KPI important from the point of view of citizens' needs may be Russia's position in the international passport ranking. According to the rating of passport strength in 2024, our country ranks 36th together with Turkey and Montenegro. Russian citizens have visa-free entry to 84 countries, 43 countries require a visa upon arrival, and to enter 71 countries it must be obtained in advance at the consulate. It is known that the US and most EU countries have actually stopped issuing visas to Russians since 2022.

In terms of passport strength, Russia is 16 points behind Ukraine (20th place) and the same number ahead of Belarus (52nd place). The ideal prospect for Russia in 2050 would be Argentina, which today ranks 12th in the passport ranking.

Russia's performance in the international passport index is not so bad, but the **foreign policy objective of the future should be to lift visa restrictions for Russian citizens primarily to neighboring countries of the European Union and Japan.** To begin with, it is worth at least pushing for the return of the former practice of issuing tourist visas (this will take years), but the strategic goal should be set clearly as an indicator of the effectiveness of Russia's foreign policy course for decades to come.

All of the above KPIs are quite easy to calculate and can serve as goals for the long-term foreign policy course of the new democratic Russia. Specific packages of measures should be developed for their realization. Below we will

focus on the most important ones.

Basic Measures of Foreign Policy Reset

After the end of the current crisis, Russia will have to overcome at least two decades of distrust and alienation on the part of its foreign policy partners. First of all, this will concern relations with the most developed, rich and strong countries of the world, led by the United States and its allies.

This part proposes a package of basic measures that will gradually restore trust in Russia and make it a full-fledged participant in the international community of countries with stable democratic regimes. The first requirement here has to do with constant work to improve Russia's position in the Freedom House freedom rating. If one day our country's territory on the famous freedom map first turns yellow and then green, it will be the best news for its foreign policy. More than half of the success lies in this rating.

Specific foreign policy packages should include:

- Making peace and establishing borders with neighboring countries;
- Return to the rule of law and respect for human rights;
- Demilitarization of the country;
- A return to dialog;
- Open Door Policy.

The first package of measures involves, first and foremost, ending the war with Ukraine and fully restoring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of that country in accordance with previously concluded international treaties. As far as the issue of borders is concerned, it seems reasonable to follow the spirit and letter of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between the Russian Federation and Ukraine of May 31, 1997, ratified in 1999.

In addition to this foundational treaty with Ukraine, the Russian leadership's decisions to violate the territorial integrity of Georgia and Moldova must be reversed. The Russian Federation should return to recognizing the territorial integrity of both neighboring states within their internationally established borders. The unrecognized states of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria should stop receiving military and financial aid from Russia, which will undertake not to prevent the reintegration of these territories into the independent states

of Georgia and Moldova.

It is equally important to conclude a peace treaty with Japan, settling the territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands. The peace treaty should build on the norms laid down by the Moscow Declaration of 1956 on the formal cessation of hostilities between the USSR and Japan after World War II. In fact, that great war cannot be considered completely over until this peace treaty is signed. Despite the fact that since the early 1990s the analytical services of the Russian Foreign Ministry knew perfectly well the only possible solution to this issue, President Yeltsin was forced to give in to the militaristic and chauvinistic sentiments of his own military-bureaucratic apparatus and didn't muster the courage to seek the much-needed agreement.

The second package of measures to restore the rule of law and respect for human rights means not only repealing all the unlawful laws of the last decade, but also bringing Russia back under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights. These measures should be taken without delay in the first months after regime change.

In the future, Russia's legislation should be brought into maximum compliance with the standards of the most advanced democratic countries within a few years. This should also touch upon such a painful topic in today's Russia as the protection of the rights of the LGBT community. It would be very right if a law on the legalization of same-sex marriage were adopted in democratic Russia. Similar laws have already been adopted in many countries that have taken the path of democratization after the fall of their authoritarian regimes. Such a measure could improve trust and bring Russia closer to those advanced countries of the world that share a policy of tolerance towards sexual minorities.

The fourth package of measures concerns the demilitarization of the country. First of all, it implies Russia's refusal to use its armed forces abroad¹⁹ and

19 The experience of the USSR and the Russian Federation for decades shows that the use of armed forces abroad results in an excessively high degree of militarization of Russian society. Numerous generations of «veterans of local conflicts» form the base of support for «tightening the screws» inside the country and its aggressive actions in the international arena. At the same time, the human losses in these conflicts — from Afghanistan to Ukraine — cause significant damage to Russian demographics. Leo Tolstoy wrote that the Russian man should not become a bargaining chip in the games of foreign policy ambitions of great powers, he wants to work in his own land and live in peace with his neighbors. If we want Russia to stop being an empire and stop being perceived as a permanent threat, we must once and for all prohibit the participation of Russian soldiers in any military actions outside their country. Such a norm should be enshrined at the level of the new Constitution, and its violation by the head of state should lead to his automatic impeachment. Russian military boots should not cross the borders of the country — this rule should be written in the tablets

recognizes war as a categorically unacceptable form of resolving international contradictions. Russia must once and for all refuse to wage wars of aggression and conquest. The new military doctrine should declare purely defensive goals for the formation of the Russian armed forces.

Since the stable and consolidated democracies of the developed world, with which Russia borders, as all the experience of the recent history of international relations since 1945 shows, do not unleash wars with each other, a republican Russia would have no need to keep troops on the borders of democratic states. As a gesture of goodwill, our country could relieve much of its territory of heavy weapons and offensive military forces. The borders with the European Union and NATO do not need any special protection other than border guards and anti-terrorist response teams in case of infiltration and action by international gangs like the IS and Taliban.

The Arctic zone bordering the United States and Canada, as well as most of the country's western regions, may well be subject to demilitarization. At the same time, Russia needs to increase its defense forces on its borders with authoritarian states in South Asia and the Far East. Without claiming the territories of Northern Kazakhstan, the Russian-Kazakh border should be clearly demarcated and protected to prevent the threat of invasion by aggressive Islamist regimes that might emerge in the region.

Having embarked on a democratic path of development, Russia will have to break friendly ties with authoritarian regimes at its borders and switch to a policy of containment in order to facilitate their gradual democratization. In this regard, the CIS, which has become a club of Eurasian dictators, will have to be dissolved. The CIS, which has become a club of Eurasian dictators, and the CSTO, which serves the military and police purpose of protecting authoritarian regimes in Belarus and Central Asia, should be dissolved. Russia should also give up all military bases outside its territory.

The fourth package of measures is related to a return to dialog with the European Union and NATO. First of all, it is necessary to restore Russia's full membership in the Council of Europe. Then we can move on to the gradual restoration of the Russia-NATO Council and the re-establishment of negotiating platforms with the EU. Special attention should be paid to the European countries directly bordering the Russian Federation. Symbolic gestures of

of the future democratic Russia. At the same time, the military should be maintained in exactly the size and composition necessary to protect the inviolability of the borders and citizens of Russia.

reconciliation, open and honest discussion of painful moments of historical memory, combined with a complete refusal to interfere in the internal affairs of these countries should open up the possibility of overcoming the current wall of mistrust and establishing good-neighborly relations.

We need to be realistic: the huge Russian Federation can never become a member of the European Union. This should not cause resentment and rejection: the United States and Canada do not aspire to EU membership either, remaining part of a larger transatlantic Europe. In the perspective of two decades after the fall of Putin's regime, an Association between Russia and a unified Europe is possible, similar to that of Canada and a number of other countries outside the European continent.

An important step towards the normalization of relations could be the adoption of a new fundamental document on security and cooperation in Europe in confirmation and development of the norms and rules laid down by the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and the Charter of Paris of 1990. **Russia's main task in the format of the new European partnership is to contribute to the maintenance of the rule of law, democratic freedoms and human rights on its sovereign territory.**

Finally, the fifth package of measures envisions an open-door policy. Since Russia will arouse suspicion and wariness among its Western partners for a long time after the end of the war, the Russians will initially have to unilaterally show miracles of friendliness and hospitality, and work doubly hard to organize a long-term and sustainable hospitality industry in our country. Russian border guards must become the most welcoming to well-to-do visitors from developed countries and the toughest to potential terrorists trying to enter our territory from failed states or rigid autocracies.

An open-door policy could include the practice of providing electronic visas and unilateral abolition of the visa regime for certain categories of citizens of the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, European Union countries, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. For representatives of business circles, academics, journalists, cultural figures and digital nomads from these countries, it is also necessary to create streamlined procedures for obtaining residence permits and opening a business in Russia. The Russian market should open up to large international banks, construction and automobile companies, the IT industry and other businesses that can bring new jobs, modern technology and norms of customer and employee relations to the country. Notoriously Russian businesses are too loyal to Putin's dictatorship, so they do not deserve excessive protectionist measures in the future. The Russian worker and the middle-class

citizen will find themselves in modern companies with more opportunities to protect and respect their labor and consumer rights.

These are the main packages of measures that are of paramount importance in terms of the realization of the main task — the gradual return of Russia from the position of a pariah country first to dialogue and then to the restoration and expansion of partnership with the leading democratic nations of the modern world. The foreign policy of the democratic Russia of the future should serve this task.

Afterword. Foreign policy as a subject of public debate

Foreign policy issues in Russia have traditionally remained the business of a narrow circle of high-ranking diplomats and military officers. Professionals know better how to rearrange the pieces on the great chessboard. Before the First World War, this was also the case in democratic countries: political parties did not debate international relations, leaving it to their notional MGIMO graduates to decide. However, when these “professionals” brought about a monstrous war that took millions of lives across Europe, politicians and public figures in Britain and the United States of necessity became concerned about international relations and made them the subject of their active involvement. People with war-scarred faces discovered a new field of knowledge. International relations became the subject of independent academic research and public political debate.

In Russia, this practice has not yet taken root; graduates of MGIMO and intelligence schools still retain a monopoly on “professionalism” in international relations. **One of the tasks of genuine democratization of our country is to make foreign policy a subject of public debate and put it at the service of citizens, not a privileged group of bureaucrats and powerbrokers.** This text represents the first attempt to talk about Russian foreign policy from the perspective of civil society and humanitarian knowledge rather than state interest.