

RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY: A VIEW BY LAWMAKER AND EXPERT

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NIKONOV: Dear colleagues, dear friends, good morning. It is indeed a pleasure for me to be speaking to you today, to share my views with such high-ranking professionals. Russia is one of the two countries in the world that has 500 years of sovereign history to its credit. The other is Great Britain, the latter existing in a more propitious geopolitical environment. Today, Russia is as weak as it has never been over the past 500 years in geopolitical terms *vis-à-vis* various currently existing centers of power. Never before has Russia been surrounded on all sides by centers of power that are either bigger than Russia or are developing more dynamically. On the one hand there is the European Union, on the other – China; the growing Islamic world in the south, and numerous hotbeds of tension along the perimeter of Russia.

On the other hand, Russia remains, if not a superpower, then a great power, a center of power. In this respect, the positioning of Russia becomes a very important issue, and Moscow believes that Russia is virtually doomed to remain an independent and sovereign center of power. Does Russia possess the essential prerequisites to be equal to this task, in view of its current weakness? The prevailing view is considered to be directed towards a “yes” answer, while it is also being understood that Russia is much weaker than its predecessor the Soviet Union. Russia does remain a superpower in such matters as being a nuclear power, in matters of energy, in matters of resources, in space exploration, and Russia remains a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

Russia is strengthening its economic stance in the world. In terms of purchasing power parity, Russia ranks number six, and if such comparisons are based on the rate of exchange, Russia ranks number nine. Russia has no global foreign policy ambitions, and Russia is not implementing any global geopolitical project at this time. Russia’s current policies are being pursued in a very pragmatic way, concentrating on Russia’s development and security. The priorities of Russian foreign policy have been defined in the presidential decree dating to the 7th of May, and also in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept.

There are four such priorities. The first one is the maintenance of conditions that are favorable to the country’s economic development and external trade. The second priority is advancement of the prevalence of international law and the United Nations framework. The third priority is multilateral diplomacy, in which in the most recent edition BRICS is ahead of the G20 and the G8. And fourth priority is countering global challenges that are represented by weapons of mass destruction, by terrorism, by Islamic extremism, and by the entire range of non-traditional threats. The role of the self-sustained center of power presupposes an equidistant kind of relationship with all major centers of power existing today.

The geography of Russian priorities has seen certain changes over the past few years. As in the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, cooperation with CIS countries occupies the first place and to which second is relations with the European Union. In the 2008 concept, the number three and number four priorities were occupied respectively by the U.S. and NATO. However, in the 2012 Concept, third place is given firmly to countries of the Asia-Pacific region, followed by Latin American countries as in the past. The CIS countries are an obvious priority and we

have witnessed certain steps toward progress over the past few years. First of all, we're talking about the customs union, and the movement toward creating a single economic zone with Kazakhstan and Belarus. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are expressing an interest toward this format of cooperation. The CIS is an international entity whose members are going there at various speeds. There are various internal clubs based on specific interests, particularly to matters such as the single Eurasian economic space.

The future of CIS will depend on which way Ukraine will go. It is obvious today that the Ukrainian elites are predominantly looking toward the West, while on the other hand the population at large is going through a period of heightened interest toward Russia. For Ukraine, it would make a lot of economic sense to join the customs union and the single economic space. An associate of mine happened to be in Kiev recently during the unusual snowfalls experienced there, and he felt very patriotic afterward of Russian being a functional state. The Ukrainian GDP per capita is one third of Russia's and 2.5 times smaller than that in Belarus.

The European Union is a complicated partner, not easy to deal with. On the one hand, there is an agreement on strategic partnership and a joint effort toward modernization, but in strategic terms, very little positive is taking place. Yes we may say that the EU remains Russia's number one trading partner, and that Russia is the European Union's number three partner. Yet all those relations are based on the arrangements that were formalized in 1994, in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, and it is a standard non-preferential.

In view of the current situation in Cyprus, there are quite serious contradictions that are becoming obvious in relations with the EU. The EU has decided that deposits by Russian individuals and corporations in Cyprus can be confiscated, something that does not evoke any enthusiasm in Russia. The decision drives Moscow doubt the EU's ability to take meaningful and reasonable decisions in such situations. Understandably, Russia is not particularly willing to invest in Cyprus when Russia's money is being confiscated.

Another point of contention is the visa issue, rather, the need for Russians to have a visa in order to enter the EU. My impression is that this situation will continue to be as it is, i.e. visas will still be required for Russians, and the situation is likely to persist up until members of the eastern partnership get visa-free access to the EU. EU membership for Russia is a non-issue – Russia is too big and too Russian. But at the same time, Russia is very willing to do business together with the EU to the extent the EU is willing to do the same with Russia. Still on the table are proposals for a security treaty in Europe that have been suggested by then-Russian president Dmitry Medvedev. By and large, the EU and the countries thereof are more concerned with internal issues today than with their relationship with Russia. The EU-Russia summits are becoming less interesting substantively, and even the media seems to be losing interest. All in all, however, Russia is willing to cooperate with the EU and wishes the EU every success in overcoming its current problems.

The Russian-American relations are small-scale, shallow you might say, because the agenda is very short. The basic framework, however, of Russian-American interaction, remains in place, and involves such subjects and nonproliferation, counterterrorism, the Afghan transit, and cooperation on regional issues. At the same time, Russia and the United States will have a priority in each others' relationships in that each country represents for the other what you might refer to as an existential threat. Security issues will continue to be at the top of Russian-American relations. The PIR Center and Vladimir Orlov are doing something which

is very useful. At the same time, prospects of progress in reducing strategic offensive weapons are very problematic. Of course, Russia is very concerned with the continued developments in ballistic missile defense by the United States, something that is definitely a negative factor for Russian forces to potentially restrain. At the same time the United States is far ahead of the rest of the world in terms of conventional weapons, therefore Russia will continue to rely heavily on nuclear weapons as a guarantee of security. The United States is what you might call an indispensable partner for every country.

However, the United States will remain in the shady segment of perception in Russia in terms of foreign policy. Russia is one of the four targets for a nuclear attack from the United States, the other three being Iran, China, and North Korea. And of late, the United States has been seen as creating many problems for Russia on its periphery. Russia's leaders were perplexed by the statement by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who said the United States would continue to act against any integration efforts in the post-soviet space. It looks like such integration is welcome elsewhere, but not within the former Soviet Union.

And to cut the US discussion a little shorter, let me say that the Magnitsky law is a serious step toward ranking Russia much closer to rogue countries. Such legislative efforts are made normally with respect to rogue countries. The Asia-Pacific region is gaining as a priority area for Russia. Russia is addressing a 3-in-one task there. Number one is modernization of Russia's Far East. Number two is integration of Russia into the Asia-Pacific economic structure so that Russia can become a part of it. Number three is for Russia to become integrated into the architecture of Asia-Pacific organizations. Modernization in Russia's Far East is slow, but still the rate of growth exceeds that in the rest of the country. Economic relations with the countries in the Asia-Pacific are also on the up and up, but at this point they still count for little more than 25% of the total.

Russia is becoming more visible in the Asia-Pacific energy market. While three years ago its profile there counted to 0.1%, currently it stands at 3% and the task for the next 10 years is to assume a 15% share of the Asia-Pacific market. Russia is also becoming a growing player in the East Asian market for nuclear power stations, space launches, and defense products. The countries of East Asia in recent years have become more important as investors in Russia compared to countries of the EU. At any rate, the most important Japanese companies, South Korean companies, and many Chinese companies are investing in Russia. The architecture of public institutions is developing in the Asia-Pacific area, and it is becoming a more clearly delineated hierarchy enabling observers to understand what they actually do. Clearly, the key element in that architecture will be summit meetings in the format of ASEAN+8 which has been joined by Russia and the United States as of 2011 (East Asian summits). Economic cooperation will proceed under the umbrella of the Asia-Pacific Economic Council, security cooperation in the ASEAN+8 format of ministry of defense meetings, and the ARF, which is an ASEAN regional forum.

China is becoming Russia's key partner in the region, and relations between the two countries have reached their highest ever point. China is the largest trade partner and for the first time in thousands of years, its northern border is such that China does not have to build another Great Wall to protect itself. In view of the current state of US-China relations, Russia is gaining in terms of priority in the Chinese foreign policy, and it is no accident that Xi Jinping has made his first foreign visit to the Russian Federation. The issues in Russia-China relations are still there, but they do not in any way preclude bilateral or multilateral interaction under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation and BRICS.

BRICS is currently having a meeting in South Africa, and a short time ago with Vladimir Orlov we attended the academic forum that normally precedes the BRICS summit. There are two issues facing this summit. Whether or not the development bank will be set up and whether BRICS will be institutionalized. As far as I know, yesterday the agreement on creating the development bank was not reached. It's a serious issue, because the bank is seen as an alternative to the International Monetary Fund. But the decision has been made. The setting out of the anti-crisis fund with as much as 100 billion dollars to be invested into by the countries from the current central reserves. As far as institutionalization of BRICS is concerned, there may be a secretariat set up, but it's a far cry from the fuller-fledged bureaucracy most similar organizations already have. All five members of BRICS have a vested interest in dealing with each other, and it is probably a more serious organization than is thought of at this point. This is a serious organization in that it pursues economic development targets very efficiently, it has created over the past 10 years half of the world's GDP growth, and the combined economies of BRICS have grown 420% over the same period. And these 5 countries are underrepresented in global government agencies, and they have ambitions to be adequately represented there.

Since my time is up, let me finish by saying that Russia today is looking ahead with quite a bit of certitude. It knows its stronger points, its weaknesses. It certainly knows that it needs to be in peace with its neighbors and the rest of the world.

Thank you.

Q: Thank you very much, professor. You are known as an international analyst, now you are head of the Russian Duma Committee on Education, and you have referred to Russia's expansion into the nuclear power construction area, nuclear power technologies in general, and a new situation is coming up. The Russian Federation has 20 agreements in the area of nuclear energy facilities, etc. But we in the area of education are currently training new contingents of students from countries that are new to us, such as Bangladesh, and they need to be taught something about nuclear energy and nuclear equipment. Other countries such as France and the United States are also setting up international universities for the same purpose. But the question arises – since you are teaching subjects related to nuclear energy to your undergraduates, isn't that proliferation? Or isn't it proliferation? What people should teach such students, each professor at this point decides for him or herself, but something should be done at the legislative level. It's a good ____ that those undergraduates have two years to learn Russian prior to acquiring any nuclear energy knowledge. Please help.

Our professors still have two years while the undergraduates learn Russian. On the other hand, Mr. El Baradei, who has experience leading the IAEA, used to say that there's no such thing as dual-use nuclear issues. They are all dual by definition. Once something appears in the civilian uses, it rolls into military and the other way around.

NIKONOV: First, I should say that I became the head of the education committee only on Friday, and I haven't had time yet to ponder over this subject. The problem is definitely quite fascinating. It isn't a trivial problem, it is very much a real one. I'm not expecting to set any law to the effect that students should learn certain formulas but not others. It should be something one would expect to hear from experts in the field, and should be something that should be formalized in applicable executive documents in the relative industries. Lawmakers should be responsible for developing laws that would definitely define responsibility and,

indeed, liability ministries and relevant institutions for teaching what they should and knowing very well what they shouldn't. The current situation puts into focus nonproliferation issues, how to really ensure implementation of the NPT, how to prevent proliferation. All these things need to be looked at in a fresh manner.

Q: Thank you, and thank you very much for your fascinating talk, professor. I wonder if I could ask two questions, one to your previous role and one to your new role. The first, perhaps a more traditional question, is what your perception is of the prospects for strategic dialogue between the US and Russia after the announcement last week on the ballistic missile defense European Phased Adaptive Approach, Phase IV. Secondly, congratulations on your new role. I wonder if, in your new role in education, you have any perspectives on how Russia's interests can be better served by cooperation in the educational sphere? Thank you.

NIKONOV: (1.29.45) I don't think that the new configuration of the ABM arrangements drastically changes anything. Anyway, Alaska is no further away from Russia than Romania. So if the components relating to Phase IV of the planned arrangements should be located not in Romania, but in Alaska, this will not change anything drastically for Russia. The preceding Phase III was threatening enough for Russia, Phase IV even more so. But Phase III as it exists is but enough. I think that strategic dialogue would be much better served by the current financial problems the United States and some other countries are facing. Plus, the defense cuts that are being experienced in the United States will most certainly affect funding. It's against that backdrop that strategic dialogue may proceed.

As far as the second question is concerned, I am a great enthusiast of international cooperation in education. I studied and taught in the United States. I'm particularly inspired by the prospects of close cooperation with Russian diasporas of researchers who reside outside Russia, and their number is going to the extent of equaling that in Russia. Of course, CERN in Geneva and Silicon Valley in California are quite Russian-speaking entities, but to draw those Russian speakers back to involvement with Russian research is a very great task. And inviting or indeed involving scientists and other researchers from outside Russia is a problematic issue in that is not only money, but the availability of the appropriate environment. Environment again is not only money, but also traffic and availability of equipment, etc. We have noticed that many western professors, be they of Russian origin or otherwise, do want to come to Russia essentially to teach, to engage in research projects that have appropriate grounds, and are temporary in that sense, or to cooperate from a distance, remote cooperation.

There is a program, however, that involves large grounds to be used to invite professors from the west to Russia. Quite a big number of Russian undergraduates are attending universities outside of Russia. On the other hand, quite a few non-Russian students are attending Russian universities, though not quite as many as during Soviet times. It is also important that we have introduced in our country the system that has been around for many years in Europe – the two-level Bachelors-Masters system. This makes life easier for us. A revolutionary event last year – we began to recognize the validity of non-Russian educational credentials, diplomas, etc. Up until last year, Harvard graduates for instance, were not regarded as persons who have completed university studies. To recognize a non-Russian PhD, it had to be translated into Russian and sent to the higher attestation committee. And persons who officially did not hold any officially-recognized higher education credentials or PhD credentials had no right to teach at Russian universities. At this point, there is a list of 228

non-Russian universities whose graduates are recognized as legitimate holders of university credentials. As regards multitudes of others, the matter still needs to be addressed.

Q: In the first part of your presentation, when you described the foreign policy concept, you said that Russia today should be equidistant from other centers of power. But as you progressed in your presentation, you said something that was so contrary to what you said earlier.

NIKONOV: If one speaks very briefly, it takes two to tango. When you have the freshly-nominated leader of a country making his first state visit to Russia, I guess the backdrop of a Magnitsky Act being adopted in another country – that ensures a kind of a symmetry, doesn't it? And there's a lot of history going back with relations with other countries. With some they have been more problematic than with others. For example, our relations with India – there's never been a conflict between us. On the other hand, with the United States, we had decades of relations that were based on confrontation. In many ways, the confrontation still persists. Therefore, it is indeed to be really equidistant in terms of the other centers of power, to be equally equidistant. However, it is indisputable that Russia does want to have good relations with other countries.

Q: Thank you very much for your survey of what you think about Russia's foreign policy. I am dying to ask a few questions about education, but I will move that to the next meeting. I would like to ask you about Iran. Iran is part of the picture of original preferences, somehow or other. There is the nuclear program in Iran, controversial admittedly, but it's a part of the story, not the whole story. How do we go about building relations with Iran these days, in your view? Is Iran a factor that may help, or is that an impediment?

NIKONOV: Iran is no enemy of Russia. In contrast to Iran's relations with many countries, including most western countries, Iran is no enemy of Russia. The relations have traditionally been far from bright and sunny, but there is quite a lot of common agenda between Iran and Russia. We by and large are of the same view as Iran, we concur with Iran on radical Sunni Islamism. We have some similar views with respect to the situation in Syria, with respect to the problem of the Caspian Sea, and a few other regional issues. As far as Iran's nuclear program is concerned, Russia does not need a nuclear Iran. On the other hand, bets still continue within Russia as to whether or not Iran does intend to have nuclear weapons or only wants to come close to the threshold to be able to do so. I have a feeling that Iran has the capacity of stopping right on the brink of creating a bomb but not creating it, in order to prevent any animosity and what have you. There are proposals on the table for Russia independently or Russia plus France to help Iran with creating a safe fuel cycle and to have nuclear waste exported, etc. Those proposals are on the table, and whatever Russia is offering by way of proposals to Iran is realistic and doable. As far as any potential strike against Iran is concerned, this is a sure way towards Iran's creation of a nuclear bomb.

The brief answer would be that this other organization [SCO] is not being equal to its declared tasks. The military-political cooperation and interaction amongst CIS countries takes a backseat to what is being done in economic areas, such as a customs union or single economic space. I think the major problem is that all those countries have a problem trying to realize a common external enemy. Naturally, the problems facing Tajikistan are different from those facing Belarus. Naturally, our partners are fearful of Russia's military domination, and Russia's military terms are obviously much stronger than the rest of them. What should be done to strengthen the organization? I have always held a lot of belief in bureaucracy.

Where would the European Union be without the bureaucracy in Brussels? For the security organization, there's the money and personnel that are really decisive. There's not enough bureaucracy there, there's no meaningful military staff or anything. And if more funding were provided, more personnel assigned for military-political analysis and such, it would go a long way toward strengthening the organization. Of course, the organization would "benefit" from a war somewhere, within the CIS, and it would seriously promote the military-technical and military-political cooperation, but this is an option that one should best avoid. Let us place our hopes with peaceful prospects, with a peaceful course of development. However, the events in Afghanistan and what might happen there in the post-2014 period raises serious concerns and makes it imperative that we do something about strengthening the security organization within the CIS.