

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov: The Lessons of History. "No One has Yet Managed to Subjugate Russia"

XXII Assembly of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy, Moscow, 22 November 2014

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Global Research, December 11, 2014

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Region: [Europe](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

I'm happy to be at this annual Assembly of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy (Russian abbreviation SVOP). It is always a great pleasure for me to meet people and feel the intellectual potential, which enables the Council, its leaders and representatives to respond to global developments and analyse them. Their analysis is always free from any hysteria, and its members offer well-grounded and solid arguments, taking a step back, since those caught in the midst of events can hardly adopt an unbiased perspective. We are inevitably influenced by the developments, which makes your observations, analysis, discourse and suggestions even more valuable to us.

As far as I know, this year's Assembly will focus on prospects for accelerating domestic growth in Russia. There is no doubt that concerted efforts by our society as a whole to bring about comprehensive economic, social and spiritual development are a prerequisite for making Russia's future sustainable. That said, by virtue of my professional duties, I have to focus on foreign policy issues, which are still relevant for the Assembly's agenda, since in this interconnected, globalised world, isolating internal development from the outside world is impossible.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin provided a detailed analysis of the international developments at the Valdai Club meeting in Sochi, as well as in his interviews during his trip to Asia. For this reason, I won't offer any conceptual observations, as everything has already been said. Nevertheless, I would like to share with you some considerations based on our day-to-day foreign policy efforts. It is not my intention to deliver a comprehensive or clear outlook, since at this stage all forecasts are provisional, no matter who makes them. Moreover, diplomats seek to influence developments as they unfold, not contemplate them.

Naturally, I will start with Ukraine. Long before the country was plunged into the crisis, there was a feeling in the air that Russia's relations with the EU and with the West were about to reach their moment of truth. It was clear that we could no longer continue to put issues in our relations on the back burner and that a choice had to be made between a genuine partnership or, as the saying goes, "breaking pots." It goes without saying that Russia opted for the former alternative, while unfortunately our Western partners settled for the latter, whether consciously or not. In fact, they went all out in Ukraine and supported extremists, thereby giving up their own principles of democratic regime change. What came out of it

was an attempt to play chicken with Russia, to see who blinks first. As bullies say, they wanted to Russia to “chicken out” (I can’t find a better word for it), to force us to swallow the humiliation of Russians and native speakers of Russian in Ukraine.

Honourable Leslie Gelb, whom you know all too well, wrote that Ukraine’s Association Agreement with the EU had nothing to do with inviting Ukraine to join the EU and was aimed in the short term at preventing it from joining the Customs Union. This is what an impartial and unbiased person said. When they deliberately decided to go down the path of escalation in Ukraine, they forgot many things, and had a clear understanding of how such moves would be viewed in Russia. They forgot the advice of, say, Otto von Bismarck, who had said that disparaging the millions-strong great Russian people would be the biggest political mistake.

President Vladimir Putin said the other day that no one in history has yet managed to subjugate Russia to its influence. This is not an assessment, but a statement of fact. Yet such an attempt has been made to quench the thirst for expanding the geopolitical space under Western control, out of a mercantile fear to lose the spoils of what they across the Atlantic had persuaded themselves was the victory in the Cold War.

The plus of today’s situation is that everything has clicked into its place and the calculus behind the West’s actions has been revealed despite its professed readiness to build a security community, a common European home. To quote (singer/song-writer) Bulat Okudzhava, “The past is getting clearer and clearer.” The clarity is becoming more tangible. Today our task is not only to sort out the past (although that must be done), but most importantly, to think about the future.

Talks about Russia’s isolation do not merit serious discussion. I need hardly dwell on this before this audience. Of course, one can damage our economy, and damage is being done, but only by doing harm to those who are taking corresponding measures and, equally important, destroying the system of international economic relations, the principles on which it is based. Formerly, when sanctions were applied (I worked at the Russian mission to the UN at the time) our Western partners, when discussing the DPRK, Iran or other states, said that it was necessary to formulate the restrictions in such a way as to keep within humanitarian limits and not to cause damage to the social sphere and the economy, and to selectively target only the elite. Today everything is the other way around: Western leaders are publicly declaring that the sanctions should destroy the economy and trigger popular protests. So, as regards the conceptual approach to the use of coercive measures the West unequivocally demonstrates that it does not merely seek to change Russian policy (which in itself is illusory), but it seeks to change the regime — and practically nobody denies this.

President Vladimir Putin, speaking with journalists recently, said that today’s Western leaders have a limited planning horizon. Indeed, it is dangerous when decisions on key problems of the development of the world and humankind as a whole are taken on the basis of short electoral cycles: in the United States the cycle is two years and each time one has to think of or do something to win votes. This is the negative side of the democratic process, but we cannot afford to ignore it. We cannot accept the logic when we are told to resign, relax and take it as a given that everyone has to suffer because there are elections in the United States every two years. This is just not right. We will not resign ourselves to this because the stakes are too high in the fight against terror, the threats of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and many bloody conflicts whose negative impact goes far beyond the framework of the corresponding states and regions. The wish to do something to

gain unilateral advantages or to endear oneself to the electorate ahead of another election leads to chaos and confusion in international relations.

We hear the daily repeated mantra that Washington is aware of its own exclusiveness and its duty to bear this burden, to lead the rest of the world. Rudyard Kipling spoke about “the white man’s burden.” I hope that this is not what drives Americans. The world today is not white or black, but multi-coloured and heterogeneous. Leadership in this world can be assured not by persuading oneself of one’s exclusiveness and God-given duty to be responsible for everyone, but only by the ability and craft in forming a consensus. If the US partners committed their power to this goal, this would be priceless, and Russia would be actively helping them.

However, so far, US administrative resources still work only in the NATO framework, and then with substantial reservations, and its writ does not reach beyond the North Atlantic Alliance. One proof of this is the results of US attempts to make the world community follow its line in connection with the anti-Russian sanctions and principles. I have spoken about it more than once and we have ample proof of the fact that American ambassadors and envoys across the world seek meetings at the highest level to argue that the corresponding countries are obliged to punish Russia together with them or else face the consequences. This is done with regard to all countries, including our closest allies (this speaks volumes about the kind of analysts Washington has). An overwhelming majority of the states with which we have a continuing dialogue without any restrictions and isolation, as you see, value Russia’s independent role in the international arena. Not because they like it when somebody challenges the Americans, but because they realise that the world order will not be stable if nobody is allowed to speak his mind (although privately the overwhelming majority do express their opinion, but they do not want to do so publicly for fear of Washington’s reprisals).

Many reasonable analysts understand that there is a widening gap between the global ambitions of the US Administration and the country’s real potential. The world is changing and, as has always happened in history, at some point somebody’s influence and power reach their peak and then somebody begins to develop still faster and more effectively. One should study history and proceed from realities. The seven developing economies headed by BRICS already have a bigger GDP than the Western G7. One should proceed from the facts of life, and not from a misconceived sense of one’s own grandeur.

It has become fashionable to argue that Russia is waging a kind of “hybrid war” in Crimea and in Ukraine. It is an interesting term, but I would apply it above all to the United States and its war strategy – it is truly a hybrid war aimed not so much at defeating the enemy militarily as at changing the regimes in the states that pursue a policy Washington does not like. It is using financial and economic pressure, information attacks, using others on the perimeter of a corresponding state as proxies and of course information and ideological pressure through externally financed non-governmental organisations. Is it not a hybrid process and not what we call war? It would be interesting to discuss the concept of the hybrid war to see who is waging it and is it only about “little green men.”

Apparently the toolkit of our US partners, who have become adept at using it, is much larger.

In attempting to establish their pre-eminence at a time when new economic, financial and

political power centres are emerging, the Americans provoke counteraction in keeping with Newton's third law and contribute to the emergence of structures, mechanisms, and movements that seek alternatives to the American recipes for solving the pressing problems. I am not referring to anti-Americanism, still less about forming coalitions spearheaded against the United States, but only about the natural wish of a growing number of countries to secure their vital interests and do it the way they think right, and not what they are told "from across the pond." Nobody is going to play anti-US games just to spite the United States. We face attempts and facts of extra-territorial use of US legislation, the kidnapping of our citizens in spite of existing treaties with Washington whereby these issues are to be resolved through law enforcement and judicial bodies.

According to its doctrine of national security, the United States has the right to use force anywhere, anytime without necessarily asking the UN Security Council for approval. A coalition against the Islamic State was formed unbeknownst to the Security Council. I asked Secretary of State John Kerry why have not they gone to the UN Security Council for this.

He told me that if they did, they would have to somehow designate the status of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad. Of course, they had to because Syria is a sovereign state and still a member of the UN (no one excluded it from UN membership). The secretary of state said it was wrong because the United States is combating terrorism and the al-Assad regime is the most important factor that galvanises terrorists from around the world and acts as a magnet attracting them to this region in an attempt to overthrow the Syrian regime.

I believe this is perverse logic. If we are talking about precedents (the United States adheres to case law), it is worth remembering the chemical disarmament in Syria when the Assad regime was a completely legitimate partner of the United States, Russia, the OPCW and others. The Americans maintain talks with the Taliban as well. Whenever the United States has an opportunity to benefit from something, it acts quite pragmatically. I'm not sure why the ideologically-driven position took the upper hand this time and the United States chose to believe that Assad cannot be a partner. Perhaps, this is not so much an operation against the Islamic State as paving the way for toppling al-Assad under the guise of a counter-terrorist operation.

Francis Fukuyama recently wrote the book, *Political Order and Political Decay*, in which he argues that the efficiency of public administration in the United States is declining and the traditions of democratic governance are gradually being replaced with feudal fiefdom ruling methods. This is part of the discussion about someone who lives in a glass house and throws stones.

All of this is happening amid the mounting challenges and problems of the modern world. We are seeing a continued "tug of war" in Ukraine. Trouble is brewing on the south border of the EU. I don't think the Middle Eastern and North African problems will go away all by themselves. The EU has formed a new commission. New foreign actors have emerged, who will face a serious fight for where to send their basic resources: either for the continuation of reckless schemes in Ukraine, Moldova, etc., within the Eastern Partnership (as advocated by an aggressive minority in the EU), or they will listen to the Southern European countries and focus on what's happening on the other side of the Mediterranean.

This is a major issue for the EU.

So far, those who are not guided by real problems, but rather by a desire to quickly grab

things from freshly turned up ground. It is deplorable. Exporting revolutions – be they democratic, communist or others – never brings any good.

State, public and civilisational structures are actually disintegrating in the MENA region. The destructive energy released in the process can scorch states that are located far beyond this region. Terrorists (including the Islamic State) are claiming a national status. Moreover, they are already beginning to create quasi-governmental bodies there that engage in the administrative work.

On this backdrop, minorities, including Christians, are banished. In Europe, these issues are deemed not politically correct. They are ashamed when we invite them to do something about it together at the OSCE. They wonder why would we focus specifically on Christians? How is that special? The OSCE has held a series of events dedicated to keeping memories about the Holocaust and its victims alive. A few years ago, the OSCE started holding events against Islamophobia. We will be offering an analysis of the processes leading to Christianophobia.

On 4-5 December, OSCE ministerial meetings will be held in Basel, where we will present this proposal. The majority of EU member states elude this topic, because they are ashamed to talk about it. Just as they were ashamed to include in what was then the EU constitution drafted by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing a phrase that Europe has Christian roots.

If you don't remember or respect your own roots and traditions, how would you respect the traditions and values of other people? This is straightforward logic. Comparing what's happening now in the Middle East to a period of religious wars in Europe, Israeli political scientist Avineri said that the current turmoil is unlikely to end with what the West means when it says "democratic reforms."

The Arab-Israeli conflict is dead in the water. It's hard to play on several boards at a time. The Americans are trying to accomplish this, but it doesn't work for them. In 2013, they took nine months to sort out the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I will not go into the reasons, they are known, but they failed at this as well. Now, they asked for more time to try to achieve some progress before the end of 2014, so that the Palestinians wouldn't go to the UN and sign the Statute of the International Criminal Court, etc. Suddenly, it transpired that negotiations on Iran are underway. The US State Department dumped Palestine to focus on Iran.

US Secretary of State John Kerry and I agreed to talk on this subject some time soon. It's important to understand that you can't keep the problem of the Palestinian state deeply frozen forever. Failure to resolve it for nearly 70 years has been a major argument of those who recruit extremists in their ranks, "there's no justice: it was promised to create two states; the Jewish one was created, but they will never create an Arab state." Used on a hungry Arab street, these arguments sound quite plausible, and they start calling for a fight for justice using other methods.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the Valdai Club meeting in Sochi that we need a new version of interdependence. This was a very topical statement. The leading powers must return to the negotiating table and agree on a new framework that takes into account the basic legitimate interests of all the key parties (I can't tell you what it should be called, but it should be based on the UN Charter), to agree on reasonable self-imposed restrictions and collective risk management in a system of international relations underpinned by democratic values. Our Western partners promote respect for the rule of law, democracy

and minority opinion within countries, while failing to stand up for the same values in international affairs. This leaves Russia as a pioneer in promoting democracy, justice and rule of international law. A new world order can only be polycentric and should reflect the diversity of cultures and civilisations in today's world.

You are aware of Russia's commitment to ensuring indivisibility of security in international affairs and holding it in international law. I won't elaborate on this.

I would like to support the point the SVOP has been making that Russia won't succeed in becoming a major, successful and confident power of the 21st century without developing its eastern regions. Sergei Karaganov was among the first to conceptualise this idea, and I fully agree. Taking Russia's relations with the Asia Pacific countries to a new level is an absolute priority. Russia worked along these lines at the Beijing APEC meeting and the G20 forum. We will continue moving in this direction in the new environment created by the upcoming launch of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) on 1 January 2015.

We have been treated as "subhumans." For over a decade, Russia has been trying to establish partnership ties with NATO through CSTO. These efforts were not just about putting NATO and CSTO "in the same league." As a matter of fact, CSTO is focused on catching drug dealers and illegal migrants around the Afghan border, and the North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation is the backbone of the international security forces, which, among other things, were tasked with fighting the terrorist threat and eliminating its financing schemes, which involve drug trafficking. We tried everything: we pleaded and then demanded real-time contact, so that once NATO detects a caravan transporting drugs and is unable to stop it, it alerts us across the border, so that this caravan could be intercepted by CSTO forces. They simply refused to talk to us. In private conversations, our NATO well-wishers (and I actually mean this in the positive way) told us that the alliance can't view CSTO as an equal partner for ideological reasons. Until recently, we saw the same condescending and arrogant attitude with respect to the Eurasian economic integration. And that despite the fact that countries intending to join the EAEU have much more in common in terms of their economies, history and culture than many EU members. This union is not about creating barriers with anyone. We always stress how open this union is expected to be. I strongly believe that it will make a significant contribution to building a bridge between Europe and Asia Pacific.

I can't fail to mention Russia's comprehensive partnership with China. Important bilateral decisions have been taken, paving the way to an energy alliance between Russia and China. But there's more to it. We can now even talk about the emerging technology alliance between the two countries. Russia's tandem with Beijing is a crucial factor for ensuring international stability and at least some balance in international affairs, as well as ensuring the rule of international law. We will make full use of our relations with India and Vietnam, Russia's strategic partners, as well as the ASEAN countries. We are also open to expanding cooperation with Japan, if our Japanese neighbours can look at their national interests and stop looking back at some overseas powers.

There is no doubt that the European Union is our largest collective partner. No one intends to "shoot himself in the foot" by renouncing cooperation with Europe, although it is now clear that business as usual is no longer an option. This is what our European partners are telling us, but neither do we want to operate the old way. They believed that Russia owed them something, while we want to be on an equal footing. For this reason, things will never

be the same again. That said, I'm confident that we will be able to overcome this period, lessons will be learned and a new foundation for our relations will emerge.

The idea of creating a single economic and humanitarian space from Lisbon to Vladivostok can now be heard here and there and is gaining traction. Germany's Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, has said publicly (while we have been saying it for a long time) that the EU and the EAEU should engage in dialogue. The statement President Vladimir Putin made in Brussels in January 2014, when he proposed the first step by launching negotiations on a free-trade zone between the EU and the Customs Union with an eye on 2020, is no longer viewed as something exotic. All of this has already become part of diplomacy and real politics. Although this is so far only a matter of discussion, I strongly believe that we will one day achieve what is called "the integration of integrations." This is one of the key topics we want to promote within the OSCE at the Ministerial Council in Basel.

Russia is about to assume BRICS and SCO presidency. The two organisations will hold their summits in Ufa. These are very promising organisations for the new age. They are not blocks (especially BRICS), but groups where members share the same interests, representing countries from all continents that share common approaches regarding the future of the global economy, finance and politics.

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