

# Vladimir Putin's Vision of a Multipolar World

An end to US hegemony?

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*In history books as well as in politics every story is shaped by where one chooses to begin the tale. The current fighting in Ukraine, which many observers believe to already be what might be considered the opening phase of World War 3, is just such a development. Did the seeds of conflict arise subsequent to Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev's consent to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 after having received a commitment from the United States and its allies not to advance the West's military alliance NATO into Eastern Europe? That was a pledge that was quickly ignored by President Bill Clinton, who intervened militarily in the former Yugoslavia before adding new NATO members from amidst the ruins of the Warsaw Pact.*

Since that time NATO has continued its expansion at the expense of Russian national security interests. Ukraine, as one of the largest of the former Soviet republics, soon became the focal point for potential conflict. The US interfered openly in Ukrainian politics, featuring frequent visits by relentlessly hawkish Senator John McCain and State Department monster Victoria Nuland as well as the investment of a reported \$5 billion to destabilize the situation, bringing about regime change to remove the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich and replace it with a regime friendly to America and its European allies. When this occurred it inevitably led to a proposed invitation to Ukraine to join NATO, a move which Moscow repeatedly warned would constitute an existential threat to Russia itself.

Finally, Moscow tried assiduously to negotiate a solution to the developing Ukraine crisis in 2020-2021 but the US and its allies were not interested, allowing the corrupt Ukrainian government of Volodymyr Zelensky to refuse any accommodation. So Russia itself has perceived that it has been misled or even lied to repeatedly by the US and its allies. It has been particularly vexed by the looting of its natural resources by mostly Western oligarchs operating under protection afforded by the feckless President Boris Yeltsin between 1991 and 1999, a puppet installed and sustained through US and European interference in the Russian elections. Just when Russia was on its knees, perhaps intentionally, there arrived on the scene in 1999 former KGB officer Vladimir Putin who, as Prime Minister and later president, proceeded to clean house. Ever since that time, Putin has very carefully

explained himself and what he has been doing, making clear that he is no enemy of the West but rather a partner in a relationship that respects the interests and cultures of all players in a global economy that maximizes freedom and individuality.

Given the danger of dramatic escalation of the current situation in Ukraine, with talk coming from both sides about the conditions for the use of nuclear weapons, an October 27th speech made by President Vladimir Putin at the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, held near Moscow, should be required reading for the Joe Bidens and Jens Stoltenbergs of this world. The [theme of the meeting](#) was *A Post-Hegemonic World: Justice and Security for Everyone*. The four day-long session included 111 academics, politicians, diplomats and economists from Russia and 40 foreign countries, including Afghanistan, Brazil, China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, South Africa, Turkey, Uzbekistan and the United States. In his speech, Putin laid out his vision of a multipolar world in which there is no concept of a politically hegemonic “rules based world order” which substitutes “rules for international law.” And, he observed, the rules have themselves been regularly dictated by one country or group of countries. Putin instead urged a transition into a willingness to accept that all countries have interests and rights that should be respected.

Interestingly enough, Putin, since assuming leadership of his country, has been unwavering in his demand that all countries in the world be granted respect, by which he means that local interests and cultures must be considered legitimate and worthy of acceptance by all as long as they permit individual freedom and are similarly respectful of the interests and national traits of others.

A relaxed and jocular Putin spoke for over an hour in his opening remarks and then fielded questions for another two and a half hours from the audience. In response to a question, he assessed the sanity of White House advisers who would *“spoil relations with China at the same time they are supplying billions-worth of weapons to Ukraine in a fight against Russia... Frankly, I do not know why they are doing this...Are they sane? It seems that this runs completely counter to common sense and logic... This is simply crazy!”*

The Russian president emphasized [several points](#) which elaborated his views. First, he observed that US/Western hegemony *“denies the sovereignty of countries and peoples, their identity and uniqueness, and disregards any interests of other states... [The] rules-based world order”* only empowers those making the “rules.” Everyone else must obey or face the consequences.

Putin also decried the West’s tendency to make rules and then ignore them when circumstances change. He noted how economic sanctions and “cancel culture” are being used cynically to weaken local economies while also demeaning the cultures and national traits of foreign adversaries. He observed, for example, how Russian writers and composers are being banned purely to send a political message and punish Moscow for its foreign policy.

Putin explained that Russia is an *“independent, original civilization”* which *“has never considered itself an enemy of the West.”* Moscow *“simply defends its right to exist and develop freely. At the same time, we ourselves are not seeking to become some kind of new hegemon.”* He then provided his analysis of what is developing, saying that the world is confronting a global storm which no one can ignore.

“We are standing at a historic milestone, ahead of what is probably the most dangerous, unpredictable and at the same time important decade since the end of World War II. The West is not able to single-handedly manage humanity, but is desperately trying to do it, and most of the peoples of the world no longer want to put up with it.” We can decide “either to continue to accumulate a burden of problems that will inevitably crush us all, or to try together to find solutions, albeit imperfect, but working, capable of making our world safer and more stable.”

So, Vladimir Putin is issuing a call to arms for a transition to a multipolar world, which will inevitably change the playing field both in international relations and in the global economy. No longer will the United States and its allies be able to claim “rule of law” when using coercive force to punish competitors. The drift away from using dollars as the world’s reserve currency, mostly for energy transactions, is already taking place as major trading partners like India, China and NATO member Turkey have ignored restrictions while continuing to buy up Russian energy exports, negating to a certain extent the sanctions put in place by Washington and Europe. The death of dollars as the reserve currency will make it more difficult for the US Treasury to print money without any backing as many nations will no longer be willing to accept what will be increasingly seen as a fiat currency produced by a government that is actually drowning in debt.

Putin might, of course, be proven wrong and the current global system might well be able to limp along for the foreseeable future. But if he is right, those developments transitioning into a multipolar world would mean a *de facto* decline and fall of the United States as the world hegemon while anything even remotely like a dollar collapse would have catastrophic effect on the US import driven economy as well as on ordinary Americans. Some kind of partial default on US Treasury debt is not unimaginable. And Putin might well be right in his prediction that the change is coming and there is nothing that the United States and its friends can do to stop it.

In any event, the political and economic adjustments that are certainly coming in one way or another will certainly play out as the Ukraine conflict continues to simmer. The tragedy is that what is developing is self-inflicted, completely avoidable and unresponsive to any actual United States interest, but that is another story. If Ukraine turns to open warfare with more direct US involvement and economic dislocation, international pressure to dismantle the post-World War 2 status quo will inevitably increase. No matter how it develops, what is occurring right now will force the perennially tone-deaf politicians in and around the White House to begin to rethink America’s place in the world and its options as a major power. No one can predict how that will go and the process will make compelling theater as America’s two major political parties take up positions to make the case that the other party is solely at fault. It is impossible to foresee how far that bloodletting will go.

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