

A Strong Diplomacy for a Strong Russia

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OUR LINE IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS is coming under strong pressure for several reasons at once. Number one reason is Russia's comeback to the world arena that Vladimir V. Putin declared in a most easy-to-understand way in Munich. Number two reason is that Russia, as seen by the West, is containing the creation of a new world order where international law will be subordinated to expedience (some countries can have nuclear programs, others not, etc.) and ideological criteria (countries acknowledged as democratic enjoy more extensive rights than the rest, including the right for violations of democracy itself), or, in effect, to the arbitrary division into "friends" and "foes." Russia clearly stands in the way, in the first place over Kosovo, but also Iran, Middle East, U.S. antimissile defenses in Europe, and much else.

That notwithstanding, it must be admitted that Russia's opposition to these plans springs from a source other than its supposed endemic "naughtiness." We have neither the rudimentary "anti-Westernism" of the Soviet epoch nor the "fresh" desire to lead the world's "insulted and humiliated" eager to take revenge on their oppressors after the successful anti-colonial model of the 1960s. My country objectively was not made part of the West, to wit, a beneficiary of the burgeoning new world order. This means it simply is left no choice and is forced to resist a world where there is no room for its interests.

There is no doubt either that Russia was left outside of the pan-Western structures on purpose rather than by virtue of some objective circumstances. Many in the West clearly based their calculations on the belief that my country was affected with a long-term irreversible weakness. The pragmatics like the former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder attempted to say something but their voices were not heard amid the hue and cry raised by the hard-liners who insisted that Russia was in principle unable to integrate into the Western democratic civilization.

Against this psychological background, Russia's new strength proved an unforeseen factor that caught unawares all those who had written it off as a world player. It looks like they don't know what to do with it to this day. Their dilemma is about serious things. They may opt for a "clampdown" (to bring the energy prices down like they did when the USSR disintegration agenda was being implemented; to encircle it with hostile regimes and NATO structures; to destabilize it internally; or, finally, to wait till its period of strength is over while using all available impediments). Or they may after all include the "inconvenient" Russia into the new world system, making appropriate adjustments in the system itself and concessions, material and political, to the new beneficiary.

Thus, the strategic planners are facing a cardinal choice. If we manage to hold out, without disruption, for a few years (more likely than not till the next election cycle) and convince the world that the new Russia is here in earnest and for long, the global political lineups will inevitably be adjusted with account taken of the Russian factor and with regard for the risks of this country making a rapprochement with China or joining an alliance of all those rejected by the "Greater West." The alliance, incidentally, may have as its members some resource-rich nations of the world. And they will do well to weigh all the advantages of having on their side the most resource-rich power in the world, the more so that they failed to get at those resources in circumvention of the national interests of Russia and its people.

But we must see the influence of the anti-Russia party nestling in the bosom of the West, an antagonistic party bent on containing Russia under all circumstances. Whatever they may say, few of the strong world players need a strong and stable Russia, no matter how much this might be contrary to common sense. We could recall in this connection the soothing blah-blah to the effect that the West has a stake in a robust Russia because it is introducing organization and stability into the endemically explosive post-Soviet space. In reality, however, many in the West decided they were quite capable of coping with that role on their own - somewhere the U.S., somewhere the EU, somewhere Turkey, somewhere Japan. Our own calculations, however, were in many respects based precisely on the assumption that everyone was pleased with Russia's stabilizing influence on the CIS. It was admittedly a mistake, and we will yet have to vie for influence with other parties concerned. Incidentally, President Vladimir Putin said way back in 2005 that we had no monopoly on the post-Soviet space. Evidently far from everyone in this country bothered to give thought to this idea or to convert it to an appropriate strategy.

It must be mentioned that a simultaneously strong and stable Russia is a useless asset where other world power centers (to wit, U.S.A.) are concerned. If it is strong, it should, desirably, be destabilized; if it is stable, a stably weak state is the ideal. The blah-blah that Russia's stabilization is all right with the West that sees it as a crucial value and will therefore be reconciled with the malfunctioning of its democracy or the proliferation of its influence in Eurasia "provided that the nuclear power be at peace" is a myth that must be forgotten as soon as possible. Quite indicative in this sense is the West's attitude to the current elections, the streamlining of Russia's machinery of state, and improvements in governance at the national level. Clearly their current plan is to destabilize the country, to set in motion the "orange" processes, to discredit the top authority, and so on. They hand out monies, draw up strategies, pass "protective" laws, and do whatever they think is effective in "containing" Russia. But! A "stable-in-weakness" Russia of the 1990s vintage would have been allowed a lot of things - up to the election rigging and even the shelling of Parliament.

The foregoing is an objective analysis of attitudes to and the currently prevalent Western line in respect of my country. But what should Russia do? We certainly have no right to be only confined to analyzing the goings-on. With the Russian foreign policy exposed to a strong, "all-round" pressure, we must evidently implement a number of meaningful steps, possibly even adjustments, that might assist our emergence from this permanent-pressure environment. We must help those in the world who are putting a stake on a strong and friendly Russia, and simultaneously we must seal off its incorrigible, genetic opponents. We must go over from the "resist-thy-enemy" tactics to a "rely-on-thy-ally" strategy.

In this connection, I would like to offer some considerations concerning how, in my view, we might make our foreign policy more efficient precisely with account taken of the specific international situation that exists today. My proposals could be reduced to the following five key points.

WE MUST PAY considerably more attention to the formulation of a positive agenda. It is necessary to expand the range of themes that we not simply say "no" to or react to, but where we suggest a constructive program. Some lucky cases in point are the Russian offer to establish international uranium-enrichment centers and the idea of a joint use of the Russian radar at Gabala, Azerbaijan. If there is a will (and it must be conceived!), similar ideas and solutions could be found for practically any theme. What I mean is that a "Gabala" ought to be looked for in each particular case.

Let me use as an example (by far not the only one!) our differences over history with the Europeans and some post-Soviet nations (the Baltic states, Ukraine, Georgia and some others). We tend to brush aside the grievances they are airing internationally, grievances that are meant to be provocative (the "occupation," the "induced famine," etc.) and derive from their current

political needs. We think it below ourselves to engage in any dialogue whatsoever, an approach that, in principle, has the right to exist. But we can see that it in no way prevents our opponents from doing - rather efficiently - what they do, complicating our long-term prospects and creating a generally unfavorable background for Russian foreign policy.

It is not the whole people but the ruling political force in power at the time that should be held responsible for our historical past. Formulating our own modern position - constructive, well-argued, not based on the Soviet ideological heritage, nor accepting the biased conclusions of the opposing "adjusters of history" from within the former USSR (and elsewhere) - would be of great help in scientific debates and beyond. When all is said and done, isn't it obvious that there is a political order for adjusting history to things present and things forthcoming?

A positive agenda is clearly something to be handled not only and not so much by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that is heaped over with current work and enjoys only a limited freehand due to its function to implement the official foreign policy line. But it is an absolutely manageable - and ambitious - task for our think-tanks, the scientific and expert community in general, that could generate new approaches to current problems of international politics and later "put them through their paces" with the help of the Security Council of the Russian Federation that has become a bureaucracy that clearly tends to mark time.

WE MUST HAVE as few situations as possible where we stand alone in international politics. Of course, occasionally standing alone is inevitable and even necessary. This is not fatal; on the contrary, it may serve as a confirmation of loyalty to principles and allies' interests. But situations of this sort must not become a rule or a norm. In the CFE affair, for one, our debate with our opponents might have followed a somewhat different scenario had we, in due time, coordinated the suspension with our potential allies in this matter - Belarus, Kazakhstan and possibly even certain EU countries.

Or take the Kosovo issue where our position is often palmed off as a blocking one. If we could have coordinated a common point of view with all countries possessing a similar problem (China, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Cyprus, Canada, and others), this matter would have looked somewhat differently (at least from how it is being dished up to the Western man-in-the-street). True enough, we claim, on the one hand, that Kosovo is a precedent and will inevitably affect all similar latent conflicts in the world. On the other, Russia appears to be the only one concerned. Of course, this is not so, but so far the world only hears our solitary voice, and that is not adding to a favorable crisis settlement.

We often proceed from Generalissimo Alexander Suvorov's behest that the enemy should be defeated, "Not with number, but with skill." In certain situations it's axiomatic. But our artless opponents are guided by a different principle - might makes right - and after enlisting the backing of as many parties concerned as they possibly can (with promises of a largess if they must), they just ram through their viewpoint simply on the grounds that it is supported by the majority. "There are more of us, which means we are right" is their logic that infects those who might be willing to say something or who harbor doubts. Faced with such seemingly overwhelming odds, they would rather keep silent.

RUSSIAN POLICY in international affairs must be clear and predictable. This implies we must have an efficient mechanism for preemptive support of foreign policy decisions. Its components are a timely information and propaganda support, scientific and expert analysis, and calculation of potential consequences and repercussions.

There are many themes that the specialists know well: the official positions regarding them are not products of behind-the-scenes efforts, for roundtables and scientific-practical forums are a widespread practice. But scientific and expert estimates, however united, are by far

not identical to an unequivocal perception of some or other theme by the public, particularly the public outside of this country.

One can name several such burning issues: the transition to market energy prices (primarily gas) for certain "symbolic" consumers, CFE, restrictions on the number of foreign observers at Russian elections... The politicians and experts are clear about the motives of and objective reasons for these steps. But the public reaction both inside this country and elsewhere is by far unequivocal. We often first do and come with explanations after, which explanations, given the skilful propaganda of our opponents, are more like excuses. And, as is common knowledge, he who excuses, accuses himself. In an information epoch, underestimating this factor considerably impairs the efficiency of even the most winning foreign policy moves, and it is a nuisance at a time when our foreign policy really shows all signs of being a well-conceived, offensive and system affair.

WHAT IS CLEARLY UNDERESTIMATED is a problem that I would term as "talking heads abroad." Currently there are several major discussion forums in the world that specialize in international affairs and world security. Their importance, like that of Davos in the economic field, far exceeds the framework of discussions for the specialists. We all remember the repercussions of the famous address the Russia President delivered at the Munich conference on security policy in February 2007. The Munich conference, incidentally, is an annual foreign policy "Davos" that draws politicians and specialists in international security and foreign policy from all over the world. And it is by far not the only forum of this kind, though, of course, one of the most prestigious.

Conscious of how important it is to win political points on such occasions, many countries participate systematically, missing not a single chance to show the flag or air their views on topical issues of international politics. Often the level - professional and quantitative - of national delegations fielded by certain countries is clearly incommensurate with either a forum's scale or this or that country's importance for international politics. And yet they consciously do that because they know how essential it is to be constantly present in the dense fabric of actual international politics and how direct intercourse and skilful self-presentation can help in promoting national interests.

For example, almost all outstanding undertakings of this sort, primarily in Europe, are attended by numerous Georgian delegations that with persistence worthy of respect seek to bring across to the political public their views on problems of the Caucasus, including their notorious interpretations of Russia's role. I cannot say they are unsuccessful, and the reason why is not only that the Western public opinion is favorably predisposed to hearing precisely this version of events.

In this country the mission of attending important (and not very much so) international forums is to some extent a haphazard thing. Occasionally this work demonstrates no logic, concept or system. We do it from time to time, often preferring to react to particularly insistent or, it must be owned, attractive (in tourist terms) invitations. Important political figures of Russian politics often give preference to home affairs (one would like them very much to estimate Vladimir Putin's Munich example in the practical sense), while those prepared for frequent travels can far from always represent this country at the due level.

As a result, it often happens that the organizers of potentially useful repercussion-prone undertakings that, in a larger scheme of things, formulate the public and political order for agendas in international politics would choose representatives from Russia at their own, often highly biased, discretion. Thus, the public, the experts and the media in the West are briefed on Russia's home problems and its positions in international affairs by politicians and theorists that, far from enjoying any real influence on decision-making in their own country, often plainly represent certain radical opposition forces or even banally marginal groups. This, however,

creates a highly distorted view on both their own significance in Russian politics and the actual state of affairs in this country.

We should at last give serious thought to a conceptual approach to participation in the international forums that among other things afford considerable opportunities for realizing the objectives I mentioned earlier (formulating a positive agenda, looking for real allies in international affairs, offering preemptive explanation of national foreign policy moves). There is a need for a certain impetus at the top level that would impel our significant figures to do representative work at international forums and stimulate a division of labor of sorts meant to achieve a maximum payback from the participation. It would be unreasonable and wasteful to lose the real chance to declare our interests and offer our views on important international themes in a situation where our foreign policy line is exposed to perceptible pressure from many sides and where Moscow is faced with numerous influential opponents possessing considerable information and propaganda capabilities.

IT IS NECESSARY to employ some non-standard, non-stereotyped mechanisms and approaches to key foreign policy problems and do it in a system way. Among other things, we mustn't feel shy to borrow someone else's experience or to offer our own foreign policy techniques. A case in point is the institution of special representatives of the President of Russia.

Take, for example, the Caucasian affairs: not a single day can pass without some news about the activities of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza who seems to have much influence on the regional politicians. The United States makes an active use of its special representatives in every theme it deems of importance: Iraqi debt, Kosovo, and even Ukrainian elections.

We also have this institution, though it is of recent origin. Thus far, our special representatives attend to so-called standard situations, coordinating the work in permanent vectors like the interaction with EU and G-8 or the fight against international terrorism. It is high time we thought about using authoritative politicians and experts with a special presidential mandate, or ad hoc special representatives, in non-standard situations.

For example, one of our Balkans experts is currently involved in the well-known multilateral mechanism for Kosovo, and he does a good job within his scope. But we keep emphasizing in every way that the Kosovo problem has much wider-than-regional implications. It is about non-recognized territories in other regions and is likely to bring much influence to bear on further development of international law as a whole, and on Russia's relations with the West, the Moslems, and the Orthodox world. It has as many aspects as to fully warrant a multilateral political approach to the theme that might be expressed in the appointment of a high-format, "extra-agency" special representative of the President of Russia for Kosovo.

Of course, Kosovo is only one of many applications: any urgent theme on the international agenda, be it CFE, U.S. antimissile defenses in Europe, Iran's nuclear program, territorial conflicts in the post-Soviet space, North European pipeline settlement, and much else, gives all grounds for employing the institution of special representatives. We may recall the well-known "Kozak plan" of Transdnistrian settlement that nearly became a breakthrough in a years-long search for solutions. It failed at the last moment because of Western interference. Whenever we get down to drawing up such plans in each particular case, we as it were fall upon a problem, creating a brain-storm situation that later becomes personified in a special representative and his coordinating mission. In the final analysis, we suggest our own solutions to problems of importance for Russia. There is no doubt that we have suitable candidates for every contingency: both active politicians and veterans of politics and diplomacy can be invited.

And lastly, the situation within the foreign policy service itself needs to be discussed in the context of suggestions on how to make our foreign policy more efficient. A professional and highly-skilled Foreign Ministry staff is the key to the attainment of our objectives in the

international arena. Very many things depend on its state and quality. In this case, it is quite appropriate, by analogy, to recall the saying that a nation that doesn't want to feed its own army will feed another nation's one. It's the same in the diplomatic world: if you don't want to have a foreign policy tool adapted to your international pretensions, you will be perpetually scurrying behind others.

In recent years, particularly under the present Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei V. Lavrov, much has been done both to boost the professional motivation of and to organize decent working conditions for our diplomats. But apart from purely social and other obvious stimulating expedients that help develop the cadre of our diplomatic service, it would not be out of place to use further efforts towards restoring the authority and prestige of Russian diplomacy among the public, a prestige that it deservedly enjoyed in the 1960s and the 1970s.

In this connection, let me suggest an idea in addition to what our Foreign Ministry already does with much success. Since recently, February 10 is this country's Day of Diplomatic Worker, an event of importance in itself as a tribute to the diplomats' undoubted achievements and far from simple work. But in calendar terms, it is also an exceptionally convenient pretext for making this day coincide with the annual presidential meeting with the Foreign Ministry's staff. The meeting might estimate the ministry's work, achievements and failures, if any, over a previous year, and assign foreign policy tasks to the staff - and the whole country - for next year. As I see it, that would be the most convenient format for the President's annual foreign policy report of sorts, which would set the tone and put the emphases for the entire international work to be done by the Russian State during the new year. This would be a fine pretext for making an evaluation of the work done by the Russian diplomatic service, work that is not always conspicuous but that is highly important for the country.

A strong Russia needs a strong and efficient diplomacy, and, I am certain, it deserves some particular attention from the national authorities, the more so considering the President's special foreign policy mission as defined by the Constitution of Russia.