

Future History Requires the Cooperation of Sovereign States

Igor Anatolyevich Khovaev, Russia's Ambassador to the Philippines for the past four years, spent two hours in a fascinating dialogue on November 17, 2019 with Antonio "Butch" Valdes, the leader of the Philippines LaRouche Society and the founder of the Katipunan ng Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP), a political party that fielded candidates in the 2019 Senatorial election.

The dialogue addressed many aspects of the current global strategic and economic crisis, including the global drug crisis, terrorism, nuclear energy, the Belt and Road, space exploration, and the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, as well as Russia's relationship with the Philippines and the United States.

Throughout, Ambassador Igor—as he asked to be addressed—insisted that the future of our civilization depends upon bringing about cooperation among sovereign states, and an end to the imperial division of the world into competing blocs. He clearly distinguished between President Trump and the rest of the leadership in the U.S., and strongly condemned President Barack Obama on many counts.

Valdes has since 2005 hosted a radio program on Sunday evenings on DZXL 558 Manila, broadcast throughout the Philippines and internationally on the internet. The full interview is available on Facebook, starting at minute fifteen, [here](#).

Valdes's associate Cathy Cruz in the KDP and the Philippines LaRouche Society participated in the dialogue. The following transcript has been slightly edited. Subheads have been added.

Ambassador Khovaev: Thank you for inviting me. Quite recently, on the 4th of November, a Filipina, Madame Armi Lopez Garcia, Honorary Consul of Russia to the Philippines, received the Russian Order of Friendship from Russian President Vladimir Putin, at a solemn ceremony in the Kremlin in Moscow. It is a great award of the Russian State, an award for outstanding contributions. She called Russians and Filipinos not only friends and partners, but long-time lost brothers and sisters. I think it is a very good description.



Igor A. Khovaev, Russian Ambassador to the Philippines (right) in dialogue with Antonio "Butch" Valdes.

I see my mission in your country as an attempt to find long lost brothers and sisters, because, as you said, I have already spent four and a half years in your country, and, of course, I have already made many conclusions, and one of the fundamental conclusions is very simple—I am convinced that Russia and the Philippines have much in common, and they really deserve to be close friends, reliable partners, and even brothers and sisters. There was a very successful visit made by his Excellency President Duterte to Russia at the begin-

ning of October, which clearly confirmed that we have a lot in common, and we need each other. There are many problems whose solutions require joint efforts. We need to combine our efforts to efficiently cope with the many threats and challenges. All of us need each other. I don't see any areas where our interests compete with each other. There are many areas where our economies can and should complement each other.

On Drugs and Terrorism

Butch Valdes: You mentioned that there are ongoing threats in the rest of the world, and that we have to be cooperative with each other to address these things. Would you mention what these threats might be?

Ambassador Khovaev: It's very easy. First of all, terrorism and pirates at sea. I think everyone understands that all these crimes are of trans-boundary character, so no country, big or small, is able to efficiently cope with these threats on its own. We need to combine our efforts.

Valdes: In Russia, do you also have a drug problem like we do in the Philippines?

Amb. Khovaev: Yes, unfortunately, we have a very serious problem in this too, and that's why we completely understand the legitimate concerns of our Philippine partners.

Valdes: And this is coming mainly from Afghanistan?

Amb. Khovaev: Yes, and especially after the foreign military intervention in Afghanistan, transfers of heroin from Afghanistan into Russia increased by, as I remember, 30 times. Can you imagine? Over a span of 15 years—from 2002.

Valdes: Afghanistan right now is producing the world's largest volume of heroin.

Amb. Khovaev: The most dangerous drug. They are producing in various regions. For your information, when the Soviet Army was in Afghanistan in the 1980s,



A poppy field in Afghanistan.

public domain

Afghanistan was not producing so much heroin. I don't want to criticize anyone, but these are just objective facts.

Valdes: Yes, and the areas of concern were supposed to be being guarded by other countries. This is an issue that has been brought up by President Putin in many fora with the United States and the British. We understand that. Now here, in the Philippines, we have what we call shabu [methamphetamine]. We're also importing cocaine, but we have been fighting this. I'm not sure if we are successful, but we're definitely waging a war against the drug traffickers and drug syndicates. In Russia, how is it being done to at least limit this kind of problem?

Amb. Khovaev: I hope you understand me correctly that as a foreign diplomat I'm not in a position to give any advice on what you should do. It's up to Filipinos to decide what the government should do in this respect.

Our position is very clear—we completely support the legitimate struggle of the Philippine government and Philippine society against drug trafficking. We are on your side. We are open to share our experience with you, to exchange special information. Again, it is a cross-boundary crime. So it is time to combine efforts, and on the basis of our own experience, we strongly believe that no country is able to solve these problems

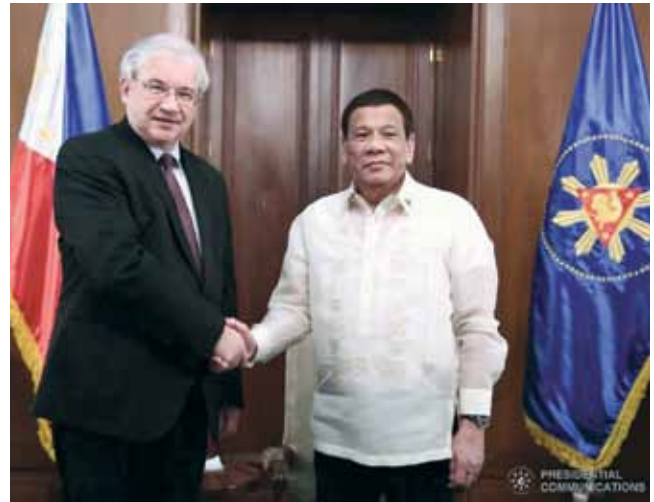
on its own; it's not possible at all. All of us depend on each other, and all of us need each other. There is only one way to eradicate this evil—we need to combine our efforts. Our special agencies should closely cooperate, not only sharing experience, but also conducting joint special operations. We are open for all kinds of cooperation.

Valdes: In our own group here, not the government but in our organization, we have suggested that, as you have mentioned, that this needs a lot of cooperation among nations. We say that since there is movement of the substance from one country to another, there is no way that this movement can be done without the participation of the banking industry.

These things are done in such volume and exported, it just cannot be hidden, but using the banks—and the documents are false, showing some other goods, not drugs. This apparently has been proposed as a possibility because the history of the drug problem showed that the Hong Kong-Shanghai bank was the principal bank being used from this part of the world into others, and the Boston bank in the U.S. was also known historically as the opium bank when these substances were not yet illegal. It is possible that the banking industry right now, because of its magnitude, might be using the banking institutions of all nations. Can I get your opinion on that?

Amb. Khovaev: To be frank, I'm not really familiar with that, but all trans-boundary crimes need a trans-boundary infrastructure. Not only the banking industry, but many other infrastructural facilities. It is relevant not only to drug trafficking, but also human trafficking, arms trafficking and many other trans-boundary crimes. For all of us it is another convincing signal of the necessity of all responsible governments to combine their efforts in their struggle against these evils.

And there is another problem—I would call the fundamental one—the fundamental approach of certain governments to the solution to their drug problem, because you know, some countries have already legalized so-called soft drugs. As for the position of my government, it is very strict. We cannot tolerate the legalization of drugs. Any step on the way to legalizing drugs is a movement in the wrong way, in our view. In this respect, we fully support, I say again, the legitimate struggle of your country against the threat of drug trafficking. There must be no compromise with evil.



Presidential Photo/Albert Alcain

Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte (right) and Russian Ambassador to the Philippines Igor Khovaev at the Malacañang Palace in Manila on January 31, 2019.

Valdes: We fully agree with you and your country's position on this matter of drug legalization. Here in the Philippines, we inform our listeners, that people whose principal advocacy is to move towards drug legalization are very influential in our country, in many different ways. One particular person is George Soros, whose principal advocacy is drug legalization, and who also has been participating in regime change here, together with the CIA. It is sad that it is through him and his funding, that many people who are against our President for pushing this war against drugs, are recipients of benefits coming from this person.

I hope our authorities and our politicians will understand that there are such characters whose purpose is for us *not to succeed* in our fight against drugs, but it needs the kind of leadership, and we are hoping that our own leader will remain steadfast, and will continue to be healthy, and will continue his fight, because 80-90% of our people have repeatedly voiced support.

Amb. Khovaev: About George Soros. I think it is quite logical that those who support the legalization of drugs, are the same people who attempt to change the government of sovereign, independent states. For us, both legalization of drugs, and any attempt to interfere in any domestic political affairs from abroad—all of these actions are absolutely unacceptable for us. And that is why Mr. George Soros usually calls the government of President Putin his enemy. [laughter] It is logical. For us, no legalization of drugs, and no interference

in our domestic political affairs. We'll never accept any change of legitimate governments. It's up to the people, it's up to the citizens of these countries to decide who will be running their country. That's our fundamental position, and we defend this position in all international venues.

In this respect we deeply respect the sovereign independence, against all subversion, of the administration of His Excellency, President Duterte. For us it is very important, because we Russians historically, genetically, we are very, very, sensitive to everything related to our sovereignty and independence. In our history we had to defend our country from foreign invaders so many times, and had to sacrifice a lot.

International Financial Crisis

Valdes: Aside from drugs, there is an ongoing international financial crisis, Ambassador, which has to do with the present financial system, which is imploding. This is why I think President Putin and President Xi Jinping have started to close ranks and convert their U.S. dollar dependency into something more stable, like the Chinese yuan. Is this recognized by many of the Russians as a possibility that the financial system is in the process of collapsing?

Amb. Khovaev: Regarding your question about a possible financial crisis, there are some governments that speak in favor of the use of national currencies. Why? Not because we dislike the U.S. dollar, but, unfortunately, the U.S. dollar, as an international currency, is often, and more often, used by the U.S. government as a tool of political pressure. We cannot accept this. So the U.S. dollar is not able to play a role of international currency. It should be only an economic instrument. It shouldn't be a tool to put political pressure on governments of sovereign independent states. It is unacceptable to us.

That is why we have to look for alternatives, because we don't want to be pressed by anyone from abroad. As far as I understand, our Chinese partners have the same view in this respect. That's why we try to use, as far as possible, other national currencies, like the Chinese yuan, the Russian ruble, the Indian rupee, and in this respect we are also ready to use as far as possible the Philippine peso in our bilateral trade. I think it is time for some people in Washington to make available conclusions, based on common sense.

On Russian Education

Cathy Cruz: Does the Russian Embassy have any programs to benefit the Filipino people?

Amb Khovaev: I would like to draw to the attention of all Filipino people, that they don't need to get visas to visit St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region. It is the first step on the way of easing the regime of people-to-people between our two countries. We are going to take more steps. Every year the Russian government grants more scholarships to people who want to be educated in Russia. By the way, the quality of the Russian education is very high, it's a very positive Soviet legacy.

Please believe me, not everything in the former Soviet Union was bad. Not at all, not at all. The education and public health, science and technology, were at a very high level. Look at me—I am a product of a Soviet education. I was born in a very remote, small town in the Ural region, about 2000 km from Moscow. From the Russian perspective that is not very far, only 2000 km. It takes only two days to get to my hometown by train from Moscow—only two days.

Despite that, I graduated from secondary school, became a student in the most prestigious Soviet institute, the International Institute of International Relations. I became a career diplomat, and—can you imagine?—even an Ambassador. And believe me, please, I have never paid even a penny for my education. Not only me, all other people in my country, because education was absolutely free of charge, 100%, from elementary school to post-graduate. That's the Soviet system, and now the Russian system of education. To be frank, now it is more complicated, so sometimes some people have to pay for their education. It depends. Any smart guy or girl has the possibility to get educated free. The quality of education is very high, so Russian education is very competitive.

On Nuclear Energy

Valdes: On nuclear energy, can you describe what Rosatom has done in studying the situation here in the Philippines, and in particular in regard to the Bata'an Nuclear Power Plant?

Amb. Khovaev: In the first place, let me remind you that Russia not only has huge energy resources, but Russia also has the most advanced energy technologies.

Only very stupid people can call my country a “gas station.” [laughter] [U.S. Sen. John McCain once called Russia a “gas station masquerading as a country.”—ed.] Exploration of oil and gas in Russia is not an easy matter, because we have to explore under very harsh conditions in the Arctic region of Siberia. It requires very sophisticated technologies. Russia is a super-energy power, with sophisticated technologies in all energy industries. Nuclear technology, of course, gas and oil, renewables and so on.

The production of electricity per capita in Russia is about eight times more than in the Philippines. In this respect we see a great objective need for your country to increase your energy production, because the growing economy of your country suffers from the shortage of electricity. In this respect, we are ready to extend the hand of help to our Philippine partners, we’re ready to share our energy technologies, we’re ready to share our energy resources, we’re ready to help build the new energy facilities in your country, including the production of oil and gas products. I’m talking about the supply of crude oil, but also natural gas.

As for your question about nuclear technologies, Russia has the safest and most economically feasible nuclear technologies. As of today, the Russian state-run company Rosatom is building nuclear plants in more than 30 countries around the world, with no reported incidents. All nuclear facilities by Rosatom are functioning well, all of them are safe and economically feasible.

We are ready to help your country as well. But at the same time, it is my professional duty to emphasize that it is up to you Filipinos to decide. The final decision remains up to you, the Philippine government and Philippine public opinion. We have a rich experience of cooperation with different countries in this field, and that’s why we know very well that the use of nuclear technology for electricity generation should be approved by public opinion. There should be a consensus between the government and public opinion. We are ready to help your country in any way. It’s up to you.



Right to left: Philippines LaRouche Society (PLS) leader Ver Archivado, head of the PLS Butch Valdes, and Cathy Cruz at an IAEA conference in Manila in 2016.

Valdes: The power generation facilities, particularly the nuclear plants in Russia, are they privately owned or government owned?

Amb. Khovaev: In my country, all government owned. I’m sorry, no private sector. The Russian government is responsible for everything happening in the nuclear field. Only the government. The Russian state is responsible for that.

Valdes: I wanted to point that out, because it is an important public utility that is affecting the lives of all of the citizens of Russia. In the case of the Philippines, all energy generation, all the way to distribution and transmission, belongs to the private sector. This was done in the 1990s and fully implemented in the early 2000s.

Because of this, energy costs here have soared. Internationally, energy costs in the last 20 years rose by 46%, but in the Philippines it has risen 460%! The Filipinos who are not earning very much have had to suffer, with up to 25-30% of their income to pay electricity rates.

That’s why this is very critical for us. Our group is

suggesting to our government that it suspend that law which had privatized energy, and get it back in order to save the people and also to encourage investment to come in, because the high cost of energy is one of the things that discourages foreign investors to put up factories here. I wanted to point out that in Russia, and in many other countries, energy production and distribution is principally government owned, sometimes allowing participation of the private sector to a certain extent. The rest—the policies, the pricing and so forth—is done by government. Here, it is not done like that. This is the kind of problem that we are facing.

Amb. Khovaev: Yes, I understand you very well. We are quite familiar with your economic system.

What I can say is that each country is unique. There



Rosenergoatom

The Akademik Lomonosov, Russia's first floating nuclear power plant, produces 70 MW of electricity. Here it is passing through the Sannikov Strait into the East Siberian Sea on its way to a port town in the Arctic.

is no common recipe for all countries. Each independent country has its own economic system, which should be adapted in the best possible way to local realities.

In my country, yes, the energy industry may to some extent be part of the Soviet legacy. The energy industry is under strict control of the government, because for us it is not only an indispensable condition for our economic and social development, but also it's extremely important for our security and defense. So it is an exclusive prerogative and exclusive right of the government. At the same time, the production and distribution of electricity,— all these fields are separated from each other, but I'm saying again, the pri-

ivate sector has access to the energy industry, but only to a certain extent. There are limits, reasonable limits. But the whole energy industry in my country is controlled by the government in the interest of the whole society.

But many different state-run companies are operating in this field, [electricity generation and distribution—ed.] because that kind of competition is required. There was no competition in the former Soviet Union. That was a big problem and a big fault, and that's why the Soviet economy was not competitive. Now, it is different. Companies compete with each other, and it is up to the Russian people to choose.

So, as for your country, as to the prospects for energy cooperation between our two countries, Rosatom is a state-run corporation, 100%. The use of nuclear technologies in any way is the responsibility of the Russian state. Russian companies have a rich experience in cooperating with foreign companies in many different countries, with both state-run companies and private sector companies.

Valdes: I mentioned the possibility of Russia helping us with floating nuclear power plants that are much smaller. Has Russia produced these? I see pictures of large plants on barges, 1000 MW, but what about smaller ones on barges—200-300 MW?

Amb. Khovaev: Of course, it is possible. The large nuclear power plant you mentioned, on a barge, was produced for a remote Arctic area in Russia, a very big area. But we can build the same facilities of different sizes, even micro floating barges, for a couple of barangays, [villages—ed.] and we are sure that all these facilities will become economically feasible. It's very convenient to use such nuclear plant facilities, because they can come, sail to anywhere and at any moment can go to another place.

Valdes: Has our government officially made a request, in the last visit of our President? Have they officially made a request of what to do with the Bata'an Nuclear Power Plant or other types of nuclear energy projects?



EIRNS

The Bata'an Nuclear Power Plant, near Manila, in 2008. The plant was completed, but was mothballed in the hysteria following the 1986 accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine.

Amb. Khovaev: President Putin confirmed the willingness and readiness of the Russian side to consider any type of cooperation in the energy field, including the use of nuclear technologies for peaceful purposes, including even the updating of the Bata'an Nuclear Power Plant. But I say again, it's up to you Filipinos to decide. So all of our proposals are on the table. All are under consideration in Manila. We are cautious, we are patient, we understand that our Philippine partners need time to think, to assess all the positive and not very positive aspects. It takes time—a very serious matter. That's why we are willing to wait as long as is required.

The Belt and Road Initiative

Valdes: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an international infrastructure project that now has 130 countries signed up to cooperate. What is Russia's view?

Amb. Khovaev: We supported this project, because we believe that it should be well connected to the similar initiative being realized now in the post-Soviet space. Russia, Kazakh-

stan, Belarus, Kirgizstan, Armenia—all are part of the Eurasian Economic Union. We see a great possibility in the Chinese initiative of the BRI in the long-term integration program with the Eurasian Economic Union in the post-Soviet space. We believe it will be in the interest of China, of the post-Soviet republics, and of all other Asian and European countries.

What is important for us is to see that each and every project realized as part of these initiatives will be in compliance with the interests of all countries involved. It should be mutually beneficial. If it is not, it won't work. Of course, these great economic integration projects should contribute to establishing,—to strengthening peace, stability, in the Eurasian space, the huge Eurasian space, not only in Asia, but in Europe as well. It should connect different nations, not separate them.

Valdes: The whole world!

Amb. Khovaev: Definitely. And serve the interests of all the countries, not a selective few.

Valdes: You mentioned promoting peace. I cannot think of any other project that is intended to be participated in by so many countries, that is going to have a greater impact in promoting world peace than the BRI.

On the other hand, there is another force that seems to be trying to prevent that, because of different ideologies, maybe, or ideas. The so-called traditionalists that we talk about who have internationally been practicing their he-

gemony over the whole world, are now shaky, in the sense that their economies are not doing so well, their people are not eating well, and so on. Every time there is a situation like this there is always the risk of conflict. That is why we are so happy that this kind of project is being participated in, committed to, by Putin and Xi Jinping and other leaders.

The other leader committed to this is Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, which means you have Russia, China and India. The only big country,



Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, addressing a reception for the Indian community in Philippines, in Manila on November 13, 2017.

powerful country that is left is the USA. If the U.S. commits to a project like this, to be part of it, then you've practically negated this tendency toward military conflict. I'd like your views on that.

Amb. Khovaev: Thank you so much. It's a global question, related to the fundamentals of the current system of international relations. You see, after the so-called Cold War, now all of us are experiencing a lot of uncertainties—the international economic system, the international political system, they are to a considerable extent a legacy of the Cold War.

So, many elements of those systems, or even the system as a whole, should be adapted well to new realities, to new emerging centers of economic and political power. It's an objective requirement. But of course, those who are accustomed to enjoying their monopoly, their dominance, they don't want to lose their privileges. They're not ready to do that, to seek for a mutual acceptable compromise. It's quite natural.

That's why we believe that huge integration, huge economic projects, can help those who are reluctant to adapt themselves to new realities. To accept new realities, to digest new realities, to understand there is no way back. All of us should look at our future.

That's why we should listen to each other. We should be able to take into account the interests of each other. We can disagree with each other, but, in any case, we must understand each other. If we understand each other, we'll be able, sooner or later, to find a common denominator, to overcome our differences.

In this respect, such huge economic projects, like One Belt One Road [OBOR, the Belt and Road], can be a most useful instrument, because these projects are open to any country, any country can join, can declare its own interest, its own terms and conditions.

You mentioned India. India is historically a long-standing friend of Russia, our strategic partner. India has a very cautious—diplomatically speaking—, cautious position regarding the Chinese initiative OBOR. Is it a tragedy? Not at all. It should be considered as a signal for a special dialogue with our Indian partners. It reminds us that it is necessary to sit down together and to talk, to collaborate, to find terms and conditions that will be mutually acceptable.

That's the only way to overcome differences and

contradictions. Any dominance, any kind of political pressure, any kind of dictatorship, I'm sorry, any monopoly, it can only inflict damage to the regional peace and stability, and sustainable development.

So, it is time for a new mentality. It's time to be unbiased, to get rid of outdated clichés. It's time to stop dividing nations for friends and enemies. In this respect we like very much, we fully support, the fundamental principle of your government—friend to everyone, ...

Valdes: ... enemy of none.

Amb. Khovaev: ... enemy of none. It's very good, a very reasonable and timely approach. It's a good example for all other nations, including your traditional allies.

Valdes: Of course you have very eloquently explained the new paradigm. It's inevitable—they just have to admit that it is there. The alternative cannot be considered. The alternative is war. Because countries will never surrender their sovereignty to any one power. So this is the new reality, the new paradigm that we should accept.

Moon-Mars Mission

Valdes: Let me point out, since we are talking not just about the present, but also the future, that there is a scientific project, initiated by the United States, called the Moon-Mars project. Because of this initiative that President Trump has taken to get the countries to participate in the Moon-Mars project—meaning countries like Russia, and then China, France, Japan, the U.S. of course— scientists are participating right now in the planning for a Moon landing, to establish a space station on the Moon that will eventually plan out a launching from the Moon to Mars, by man, with participation by these countries.

If this is going to go to fruition, maybe within the next decade or two we are looking at the possibility that the effort in man working together, puts man together for greater heights, and not just focused on territories here, and wars and advantages for this one or that one. This has never been done before. Recently there has been cooperation between the Russians and the United States, and eventually of China, and so on. This is precisely an example of what you are saying about the new paradigm.

Amb. Khovaev: To be frank, I'm deeply impressed by this project, but frankly speaking it looks like a dream. I'm saying that with deep regret. As far as I know, Russia has never been invited to participate in these large-scale strategic projects, but it looks very interesting.

I fully agree with you. Such projects are required so much now, especially now, because they can connect nations. They never separate them. Because we are all humankind—all of us should have common aims to achieve. If we have common aims we'll be able to put aside all the childish contradictions, differences, stupid—I'm sorry for my undiplomatic language—stupid squabbles and disputes, and so on. Because we should have strategic aims, which will require our combined efforts, our combined resources, our combined intelligence, and financial resources of course.

I am absolutely sure that if Russia is invited to participate in this project, of course we'll accept the invitation with gratitude. We'll be happy to be engaged in such a strategic global project, like the creation of a station on the Moon, or sending a mission to Mars, of course it will be a great breakthrough in the history of Mankind, and all of us will sooner or later in the future benefit a lot. It's obvious. But I'm afraid the kind of political leadership in the United States, is not ready to do anything to realize any project with Russia. I can only regret.

Valdes: I can see that, considering the situation in the United States, the political situation, and economic situation.

Amb. Khovaev: I'm sorry, I'm talking about the U.S. political leadership, not the administration of President Trump, because leadership is different, it's a notion much, much larger, much bigger than just the executive branch of power.

Valdes: Thank you for making that distinction.

Strategic Defense of Earth, a Common Effort

Valdes: I wanted to mention that President Putin has brought up this idea that the Earth is being threatened by the possibility of meteors hitting it. There was a time only recently that a meteor hit in Russia, but the area was uninhabited. A meteor as big as a school bus that hit and devastated the whole area.

Amb. Khovaev: That was Tunguska at the beginning of the last century, in the Yeniseysk area of the Russian Empire.

Valdes: In one of President Putin's statements he said, this is a real threat, and we should prepare for it. But it cannot be done by one country, it needs a collaboration. Other people are talking about other kinds of threats, like global warming, or climate change, but this one is the real threat. When I heard about this Moon-Mars project, I was happy, because if it is true that there will be collaboration, and coming up with a station on Mars, that station on Mars will be in a position to divert the trajectory of these meteors that are on the way in our direction. It sounds like science fiction, but sometimes science fiction today, is very quickly reality tomorrow. Like when President Kennedy said we would land a man on the Moon, the Americans did it. Of course, the country that started in space was Russia.

Amb. Khovaev: Believe me, I like your dreams on science fiction. I'm convinced that all of us should be able to dream. And I also believe that sometimes dreams must come true. But it cannot be done automatically. Everything requires effort.

Valdes: Putin called it Strategic Defense of Earth.

Amb. Khovaev: In this respect I'd like to remind you of a very wise phrase said by U.S. President Ronald Reagan when he visited Moscow in 1987. President Reagan said, and I almost quote this: "If we, Americans and Soviet people, Russians, have one common goal, and a few common enemies, we would be able to forget all our contradictions, all our differences, and combine our efforts, to survive together."

Valdes: That's it!

Amb. Khovaev: For me, it's a very good example of a high intellectual caliber of the then U.S. President, of the then political leadership of the United States of America. Because, 30 years ago, those who were running the United States, they were much smarter, much more responsible and more intelligent people. But now, unfortunately, many people in Washington forgot that the bigger the country is, the more responsible for global peace and stability it should be. So big powers

have no right to be selfish. They should think not only for their national interest, but also of the global interest.

So it is for the Strategic Defense of Earth—if we have a common enemy, we should defend ourselves, together. Because nobody would be able to survive on their own. But to be frank, I would prefer more peaceful projects to combine the efforts of all responsible nations.

Valdes: The BRI is that kind of project as well.

Amb. Khovaev: I'll say again, the BRI has the big



Red Army troops fighting amidst the ruins of Stalingrad during World War II.

advantage, it is open to everyone. Do you remember the projects promoted by the previous U.S. administration—the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Trans-Atlantic Partnership? Both were not open for everyone. It was only for a selected few countries. For example, neither Russia nor China was invited to join their Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Valdes: I think it is really stupid, because it is either “you are with us, or against us.”

Amb. Khovaev: It's not the right way to promote peace and stability and sustainable development for our small world.

Valdes: That's why it did not prosper, Ambassador. Something like that will not prosper. We are just glad that it was President Trump who won the election, and not Hillary Clinton, because Hillary Clinton was part of

that administration that was going to push this kind of division.

Amb. Khovaev: It was a clear intention to draw a new economic dividing line, instead of connecting and cooperation, finding a common denominator. So again, I like your dreams. I am a diplomat, and diplomacy, believe me, it's a very pragmatic job, a very pragmatic matter—we have no right to dream! [laughter]

Valdes: That is part of the job. But if we didn't dream, we would not be here today.

Amb. Khovaev: As a private person, I like dreaming. And I strongly believe that dreams must come true.

The Russian National Character

Cruz: Ambassador Khovaev, our many viewers are telling us they are enjoying this discussion. Can you give us a short history of the old USSR and the new Russian Federation? What was the key to your fast progress in development, and what is Vladimir Putin doing to make your country

great as it is now, especially in regard to the development of science and agriculture.

Amb. Khovaev: I would like to ask you to call me just Ambassador Igor. OK, it's a very popular name in my country, it is the name of many Russian noblemen [laughter], it's easy to pronounce, short, and even tasteful.

You put me in a most awkward position to ask for a speech on Russian history. Russian history is more than 1,000 years. Even the Bolshoi Theater in Russia is older than the history of the United States!

I have already mentioned that we Russians are extremely sensitive to everything related to our sovereignty and independence. We love our country, our previous generations. Our ancestors had to defend our land many, many times from foreign invaders, and we remember very well all our heroes, especially the huge sacrifices in the Second World War.

I'd like to remind you that the Red Army defeated Nazi Germany in Europe and liberated most of the European countries. At least three of every four of the divisions of Nazi Germany and its satellites were destroyed by the Red Army. It's a crucial contribution of the defeat of Nazi Germany. We gave a lot to liberate Europe, to save Europe from fascism.

But at the same time, it is still a bleeding wound in the hearts of our people, because, in our country, there is no family which did not lose at least one or two relatives in the Second World War. Can you imagine? Every family, including my family, lost at least one of its members. Many families lost more. [pause] That's why it's very painful for us. Of course, it is a moment of glory for us, for our national pride, but a very painful issue for us.

That's why, there is no need to explain to us what peace, stability and security mean. That's why we are willing to sacrifice anything for our security, for the defense of our country. And that's why we don't tolerate any attempt to lecture us, to teach us how we should live, or something like that. We don't need teachers and lecturers, and we don't teach other countries. This is for your better understanding of the Russian psychology and mentality.

We are always ready to defend our sovereignty and independence, and we respect the sovereignty and independence of other nations. And we deeply respect those nations who defend and are able to defend their own interests, not the interests of any third country. We respect those governments who speak with their own voice, who defend their own national interests.

Why is President Putin still so popular in Russia? Many politicians, especially in western countries, usually criticize President Putin for being in his office for too long a time. Yes, President Putin was reelected four times as Russian President, with full compliance with the Russian Constitution. By the way, the Federal Chancellor of Germany, Madame Angela Merkel, she was also reelected four times, but nobody criticizes her. A typical double standard approach.

No one appointed Putin as President, and he didn't appoint himself. President Putin was elected four times by the Russian people. It's an undoubtable fact that most of the Russian people still support President Putin, simply because President Putin defends the national interest of the Russian people, of our country, and he is doing his utmost best to provide security to our country

and to provide the necessary conditions for successful economic and social development.

During the period of his ruling, of course, I think Russia managed to strengthen substantially its position in the international arena. Now Russia is a much more respected country than it used to be after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, because the then president of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, he followed—diplomatically speaking—he listened too much to people in Washington. It was not beneficial for the interests of my country.

It doesn't mean that we consider any country as our enemy. President Putin does not call any country an enemy. He still calls the United States and all NATO states, partners. What we hear from western capitals, they openly declare Russia their enemy. You remember former President Obama, he declared in public, openly, that the United States has three enemies—first Russia, secondly international terrorism, and third the Ebola fever. Can you imagine? It is about the intellectual caliber of that man.

Valdes: Yes, yes.

Amb. Khovaev: The leader of the most powerful nation, of the most powerful country, is so narrow-minded a politician, to be frank. Of course, President Putin, if it comes to the Russian national interest, President Putin is a tough guy, because he is responsible to those who elected him. But he is predictable. He doesn't call anybody an enemy, he is always open to dialogue, and he's always willing to find compromise.

But everything should be done on the basis of mutual respect, that's his fundamental approach. Mutual respect is a two-way street. If respect is unilateral, it is not respect at all. It is something different. But President Putin is a son of Russia, of the Russian painful—to some extent, tragic—history, and that's why he is so tough when it comes to sovereignty, national dignity, the national pride of our nation.

That's why President Putin and President Duterte understand each other very well. There is a special chemistry between them. I am assuring that you and all your listeners that President Putin deeply respects the Philippines, all Filipinos. He's committed to strengthening friendship and partnership between our two nations. Please consider us in general, all Russian people



kremlin.ru

Russian President Vladimir Putin (center) and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (on Putin's right) meeting with senior Russian military officials in Russia on November 20, 2017.

and President Putin in particular, your close friends and reliable partners as your long-lost brothers and sisters.

Syria

Cruz: We have a call-in. “Ukraine is divided, one side is supported by the U.S., the other by Russia. In Syria, the United States cannot drive President Assad from power. Could you tell us, sir, why Russia is standing behind President Assad?”

Amb. Khovaev: Thank you for the very relevant question. I’ll start with Syria and then pass to Ukraine.

Our interest in Syria is very simple. Syria is a target of international terrorist gangs, the so-called Islamic State. The leaders of the Islamic State declared many times in public that after the elimination of the government of President Bashar Assad, after the occupation of Syria, the next target will be Russia. So, what shall a responsible government do in this case? Sit and wait for terrorists coming to our

home?

We have, fortunately, a negative example of that kind. Look at Libya. A completely destroyed state, the government of Muammar Gaddafi—of course, he was not a democrat—but Libya under Muammar Gaddafi was not a terrorist territory. Now Libya is a hotbed of terrorism.

It was not in our interest to see Syria turning into a second Libya. That’s why it was a very difficult decision for the Russian government to intervene in the Syrian conflict, but we had no choice, because it’s the responsibility of a responsible government to defend the security of its nation. Helping President Assad, we are defending our own country, our home. For us, it’s not something heretical, it’s not a far-away conflict like for the United States, it’s not a

ground for political games, for dirty political games, like regime change, or something like that. For us, it’s a matter of our own national security, and there is nothing more important for any responsible government.

At the moment when the Russian government decided to send our aerospace forces to Syria, President Assad controlled only 10% of the Syrian territory. Can you imagine? Only 10%.

At that time, the so-called international coalition led by the United States, consisting of more than 40 countries—they were doing nothing. They claimed Bashar Assad should leave. Let’s imagine there is no Bashar Assad as President of Syria. Who will replace him? The so-called Syrian Democratic Forces were extremely weak. Damascus would be captured by the so-called Islamic State. We’d have to deal with another Libya.

I’m saying again—we don’t defend the government of Bashar Assad, we defend our national interest and security, in Syria.

I’m proud to say that



SANA

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made a rare public appearance as he visited elated troops on the front line in newly captured areas near the capital Damascus in eastern Ghouta, March 19, 2018.

now the government of Bashar Assad has under its control 90% of the Syrian territory. Do you see a difference? 10% to 90%, achieved thanks to the military help and assistance of the Russian armed forces.

I would like to add that we defended not only our national security, but the security of all other nations. Security against ISIS, definitely. Now, I see that Libya was demolished. It's not totally eliminated, but demolished, destroyed.

In this respect I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Philippine partners for their very responsible position regarding Syria, because the Philippine government has always taken the government of Bashar Assad as the only legitimate government of Syria. The Philippines and Syria have always maintained diplomatic relations. Despite a very dangerous situation, the Philippine Embassy in Damascus has never been closed. It's a very responsible position and we deeply respect it.

As for the political future of Syria, it's up to the Syrian people to decide who will run their country in the future. It's not the business of Washington or Brussels or Moscow. It's an exclusive right of the Syrian people. And please, to tell you, frankly, don't overestimate the influence of the so-called Syrian democratic opposition. They are quite noisy on international radios, but they are often absolutely invisible on the battlefield. The Syrian army, the Syrian people, defend their own country against terrorists. Russia only helps them. The victory over ISIS, first of all, is the result of big sacrifices of the Syrian army and Syrian people.

Syria is a very good example of putting aside childish contradictions, and to combine efforts to help the Syrian people. Not president Bashar Assad, but millions of Syrians, to establish peace and stability on their land. It shouldn't be grounds for dirty political games. That's our fundamental position. We have only one interest in Syria—to defend our national security by helping Syrian people, nothing else.

Valdes: Wasn't Russia there also by the invitation of the Syrian government?

Amb. Khovaev: Of course. Russia intervened into Syrian affairs upon the official invitation of the Syrian President Bashar Assad. That's why the Russian military presence upon the Syrian soil is legal, in full com-

pliance with international law. The military presence of all other countries is illegal, a violation of the sovereignty of the Syrian independent state. That's a big difference. The Russian armed forces have never been involved in commercial activities—like oil exploration for example. [laughter] They only helped the Syrian people in fighting terrorist gangs and establishing peaceful life. But no business activities. They didn't steal oil, for example.

Valdes: President Putin made the whole world aware of the idea of being invited by the government of Syria to intervene, that made it legal. All the other countries that were there supposedly to help Syria, were not there to help Syria.

Amb. Khovaev: Yes, they allegedly arrived to change the political regime in Damascus. It's outrageous. Absolutely unacceptable.

Ukraine

Valdes: I have two minutes for you to ...

Amb. Khovaev: So, I have no time to respond on Ukraine?

Valdes: No, go ahead. Please respond on Ukraine.

Amb. Khovaev: It's so difficult to give a short and concise response because it's a very painful matter for us, for Russians, simply because Russians and Ukrainians are like one people.

The situation of Ukraine is also related to a certain extent to the interference of other powers, other nations. Ukraine shouldn't be another ground for dirty political games. The Ukrainian society is divided, one part is looking to the West, but another, bigger, much bigger part of Ukrainian society highly values historical, traditional close links with Russia. There should be a mutually acceptable compromise between these two parts. There must be no dominance of one side of Ukrainian society over the other one.

Unfortunately, our western partners don't understand that. For them, they aim to have Ukraine as a tool for political pressure against Russia, that's all. That's the point.

Valdes: We remember very well the activities of

Victoria Nuland from the United States.

Amb. Khovaev: Yes, we remember that lady very well.

Valdes: She openly bragged that they spent more than five billion dollars to get rid of the president of Ukraine, openly bragging that they were able to overthrow him. Under Obama, of course—and the other things they have been doing on regime change.

The Russian Orthodox Church in Manila

Cruz: We have many text messages. One of them is a Russian Orthodox person living in Manila. “We want a Russian Orthodox Church here in our country. The one true apostolic church of Christ. Please send a missionary here to help us.”

Amb. Khovaev: Thanks so much for this question. It’s very important for me privately—if we talk about religion, it’s a private matter. It’s not relative to my official slate.

But I am a child of the Russian Orthodox Church, and by the way, it is another very common thing connecting Filipinos and Russians, because most Russians and most Filipinos are Christians. At the same time, we have many Muslims in Russia, and you have many Muslims in the Philippines. Believe me, Orthodox Christians and Catholics share the same fundamental values, absolutely the same.

As for a Russian church in Manila—I think only a few people know that a church of the Russian Orthodox Church existed in Manila. It was destroyed in the Second World War. Now it is a matter of talk on how to build a new beautiful Russian Orthodox Church in full compliance with the Russian Orthodox design. The Russian Orthodox churches are very beautiful, and I’m sure this church will grace Manila. It will attract not only orthodox people, but many tourists. It is under consideration.



Philippine Mission of the Russian Orthodox Church
A new church of St. Helena of the Philippine Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate, in Little Baguio, Arakan, 2017.

I would like to express my gratitude to his Excellency President Duterte, who during his recent official visit to Russia last October, spoke in favor of the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church on Philippine soil.

Just for your information, the Russian Orthodox Church has already 27 parishes in Mindanao, in different provinces, including provinces mostly populated by Muslims. Believe me, the Russian Orthodox Church has a very rich experience of peaceful co-existence with people of other religions. I’m proud to say that Christians and Muslims have been living in Russia side by side for many centuries. There was no conflict on religious basis—no conflict at all. It was peaceful. The Russian Orthodox Churches are actively helping the victims of the earthquake in Mindanao.

So, the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church will contribute to the peace and stability in Mindanao. It’s a very peaceful Church—no conflicts, no disputes.

So thank you very much for these questions. We will of course support the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church, but of course it is up to the people of the Philippines.

Valdes: We’ve had the good Ambassador for over two hours with us. We’d like to thank you, Ambassador Igor, and hopefully this will not be the last time we will be able to chat with you about many important matters. We will make the many text messages we have received available to you in case you want to respond.

Amb. Khovaev: I’d be happy to send written replies.

Thanks a lot for inviting me. Believe me please, it’s not always easy to respond to your questions. But it is a very useful and a helpful challenge, to mobilize all my intellectual qualities, to give adequate answers. I’m very grateful to you for that, and all your watchers and listeners.