
III. Our Russian Partner

VALDAI DISCUSSION CLUB PLENARY

Vladimir Putin: ‘Global Problems Cannot Be Resolved Without Asia’

Oct. 19—The following is a slightly abridged version of the speech delivered by Russian President Vladimir Putin on Oct. 3, 2019, at the final plenary session of the 16th meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, in Sochi, Russia. The speech is followed by a few selected questions and answers. The session was attended by Ilham Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan; King Abdullah II, of Jordan; Kassym-Jomart Tokaev, President of Kazakhstan; Rodrigo Duterte, President of the Philippines; and many other international guests and dignitaries.

In this speech, President Putin has defined a necessary approach to international relations that should be heeded by all people of good will in the world. To put it in American terms, what Putin describes as the approach to be taken is a “Community of Principle among Perfectly Sovereign Nations.” This is a world without hegemonies, but also a world not simply reduced to individual competing interests; it is, rather, a new order of national sovereignty and cooperation beneficial to all.

As Putin emphasizes, it was the collaboration between Presidents Trump and Putin in Syria which was crucial to resolving that catastrophe. This demonstrates what is possible when nations work together. The new set of relations among nations that is emerging can potentially lead to an unprecedented era of peace and economic development.

Subheads have been added.

Your Majesty King Abdullah, Mr. Aliyev, Mr. Tokaev, Mr. Duterte, friends, ladies and gentlemen. . . .

This time, the hosts have come up with a truly inexhaustible and, I would say, fascinating topic which is



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Russian President Vladimir Putin addresses the final plenary of the 12th Annual Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club in Sochi, Russia on October 22, 2015.

“The East and the Role of Asia,” as the world’s largest and most populated region. Relations between Russia and the Asian states, which have always been of particular importance to us, I believe, are of interest to everyone. The nature of Russia’s relations with Asia is dictated not only by today’s realities, but by history as well.

India and China, Egypt and Iran, Turkey and Japan, the countries of Central and Southeast Asia are heirs to great ancient civilizations, which gave humankind unique knowledge and technology, as well as discoveries in medicine, mathematics, culture and the arts.

Asia has always aroused special feelings among intellectuals and creative people, it seemed a little mysterious and mystical, and was considered a source of spiritual strength and wisdom, perhaps not always fully understood, but invariably interesting.

In Russia, the bright colors of the East inspired many of our writers, poets, artists and musicians, spe-



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Vladimir Putin addresses the plenary of the 16th Annual Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club on October 3, 2019.

cifically Pushkin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Arsenyev, Vereshchagin, Kandinsky and Roerich. The Russian people, and not only Russians, know these names.

Today, Asia, throughout its vast reach from the Maghreb and the Middle East all the way to East and Southeast Asia, is regaining its natural place in international affairs, which is commensurate with its great heritage and today's undoubtedly vast and growing potential.

The positions of the Asian states are becoming stronger in all areas, but mainly in the economy. The region already accounts for over a third of the gross world product. Living standards are improving at a higher pace than the global average. The most advanced technology is being introduced. The unprecedented scale of integration processes and globalization are drawing both individual countries and entire adjacent sub-regions to Asia.

While demonstrating impressive examples of progress, the Asian nations still preserve their unique features and traditions. They remember their roots and prove in their forward progress that the principles of state sovereignty do not contradict openness and globalization, that sustainable development can be based on independence

and self-sufficiency rather than their mandatory renunciation, and that growing national economic and humanitarian potential requires political identity. ... [T]he Asian states are striving to play a bigger role in world politics. This is an absolutely natural process. They uphold their own opinions on key international issues, treasure their independence and hope that their objectively increasing influence will be recognized. We believe this is only fair and meets the realities of today and tomorrow.

Incidentally, at one time, Asia's awakening, as it is called, and the national and cultural revival of its states, played an enormous role in the democratization of international ties. Today, it is obvious that global problems cannot be resolved without Asia. Of course, it is possible to try to do this with momentum and based on past experience, but the legitimacy, and most importantly, the practical value of such approaches, which are presented as global and universal, will be questionable.

The world has become multipolar and, hence more complicated largely owing to the Asian countries. But, as I have said, multipolarity as such is not a cure-all. Nor does it mean that urgent problems will disappear by themselves.

Time for Outside-the-Box Steps

The authors of the annual Valdai Club report insist, and we have just heard this, that we have entered an era with no world order whatsoever. This has been practically voiced right now. Yes, such a scenario is indeed possible. But it is fraught with many threats; we are

all aware of that. I would like to hope that however complicated the relations between countries, however dangerous the legal lacunae might be, such as in nuclear and missile weapons areas, the world order, based on the key role of international law, will be transformed,



Portrait by Vasily Tropinin

Alexander Pushkin

but it will remain. We will all be working to protect it. A different way is obviously fraught with global calamities for practically all of humanity.

The world system is undoubtedly multi-faceted and complicated and unprecedentedly interconnected at that. Everyone has their own objective interests that do not always coincide with those of others; this is also evident. But there is a feeling of common responsibility. Ultimately, I hope, no, actually, I do not doubt that there is also common sense, a striving for security.

This is why we cannot do without a systemic world order. But we also need both flexibility and, let me add, non-linearity, which would not mean a rejection of the system but the capability to arrange a complex process rooted in realities, which presupposes the ability to consider various cultural and value systems, the need to act together, dismissing stereotypes and geopolitical clichés. This is the only way to effectively solve the challenges on the global, regional, and national levels.

We have such examples before our eyes. Those of you who attended the 2015 Valdai Club meeting may remember that at virtually the very same time the decision was taken on Russia's operation in Syria. Let me be straightforward: not everyone, including the experts in the audience back then, believed it could bring a positive result. On the contrary, they were very skeptical about it, and many of them asked questions about why it was necessary. They asked if we understood what sort of a hornets' nest we would get into, whereas some foreign partners, I do not mean those experts present here, I mean just foreign partners with whom we collaborate in the global arena, were also trying to interfere, to resist.

But I would like to draw your attention to the essence of what has been done, and above all, of course, I mean what has been done for our country, as I represent its interests. We defeated the terrorist international that was actually winning on Syrian territory, and we prevented the return, the infiltration of hundreds and later, perhaps, thousands of armed cut-throats into our country and neighboring countries with whom we have a visa-free regime, our borders are transparent.

Most of Syria was freed from terrorists within several years, and the level of violence has drastically decreased. In conjunction with our Astana format partners and with the support of the UN, we managed to launch an intra-Syrian political process and to establish close working contacts with Iran, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other countries of the Middle East,



White House

President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un shake hands across the Military Demarcation Line between the two Koreas on June 30, 2019.

as well as the United States. Colleagues, you will agree that it was difficult to even imagine such a complicated diplomatic alignment with the participation of very different states with very different emotions towards each other even a few years ago. But now this is a fait accompli, and we managed to do it.

The Syrian Settlement as a Model

We think the Syrian settlement can become a model for resolving regional crises where diplomatic mechanisms will be used in the vast majority of cases. The use of force is an extreme and forced exception. Indeed, in Syria, we were faced with an attempt to create a terrorist quasi-state with an actual—I am saying this without any exaggeration—an actual terrorist army.

Occasionally, many new and chronic problems and crises look too tangled and even approaching them is a problem. But, I repeat, now is the time for outside-the-box steps and actions. In Syria, Russia and its partners (of course, we could never have done this alone) managed to do a lot while adhering to and following norms of international law, respecting sovereignty and thinking primarily about the life, safety and interests of the people.

I am convinced that these approaches can be used to resolve other existing problems in the world, including in Asia, such as for example, the situation on the Korean Peninsula, which has long been in a clinch.

In this regard, notably, as soon as the United States

decided to have a direct conversation with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, without preliminary formalities and conventions, abandoning the usual, sometimes very rude, even insulting, rhetoric, the hope for a peaceful settlement immediately appeared.

Of course, we understand and see that there are still many unresolved problems and a long way to go. But there is movement in the right direction. We must give credit to President Trump's courage and ability

to take outside-the-box steps. Indeed, for many decades, U.S. presidents ignored the DPRK and saw it as an outcast. Mr. Trump was able to take a historic step, overcome the "demarcation line" of misunderstanding and alienation, meet with Kim Jong-un and begin the negotiating process.

Let me repeat: the most complicated conflicts, such as the Palestinian-Israeli and Afghani or the situation around the Iran nuclear deal, can and must be resolved on the principles of mutual cooperation, respect, recognition of all the parties' interests and rejection of any kind of blinkers or philosophy of blocs.

In this context, let me remind you that this was Russia's logic this July, when it presented the concept of providing collective security in the Persian Gulf area. I believe the idea is still important, considering the tense and unpredictable situation there.

We suggest that the accumulated prejudices and mutual pretenses must be pushed aside, and a security and cooperation organization be created in the region almost from scratch. In addition to Western countries, Russia, China, the U.S., the EU, India and other interested countries could join as observers.

A New Global Concert of Development

Ladies and gentlemen, of course, economic cooperation, which opens real prospects for sustainable long-term development for everyone, is the basis of equal political relations aimed at the future, including between Asian countries.

Let me use transport interconnection as an example.



CC/Tuomas Romu

The Russian nuclear-powered icebreaker Vaygach (left) escorting the bulk cargo carrier Pavel Vavilov from the port of Sabetta on the Yamal Peninsula on April 3, 2015.

It is impossible to develop trade and industrial cooperation and establish mutual exchanges in any other sphere without an up-to-date road, sea and railway infrastructure. We should think together how to speed up the establishment of such a Eurasian transportation framework, a real network of latitudinal and longitudinal trading routes.

Of course, Russia is open to this joint work and is already implementing several joint projects, such as the North-South trading route from Europe via Russia to the Caspian Region, Central Asia, Iran and India. Another route, Europe-West China, will connect Russian Baltic ports with Yellow Sea ports.

There is one more prospective route, the Arctic-Siberia-Asia. The idea is to connect ports along the Northern Sea Route with ports of the Pacific and Indian oceans via roads in East Siberia and central Eurasia. In order to implement this and add the missing links, we intend to speed up the construction of railways around the port in Sabetta (it is located in the north of Russia, on the Yamal Peninsula), to accelerate and complete the construction of the entire Northern Latitudinal Railway project complex as well as the construction of the Kuragino-Kyzyl railway (Kyzyl is located in the Republic of Tyva in eastern Russia) to later connect it to the railway network of Mongolia, China and other countries in the region. We are ready to work with all interested parties on this initiative, which is significant for the whole of Eurasia.

It is obvious to us that diversity within a nation is normal. It teaches both patience and tolerance in the



CC/Pierre André Leclercq

The Trans-Mongolian Railway negotiates a curve in the Gobi Desert, September 2011.

true meaning of these words, and the ability to understand and accept different opinions, traditions and ways of life rather than impose our model as an axiom. We believe our experience can be useful for many of our partners.

With regard to the world in general, since all nations are obviously different, uniformity and universalization are impossible by default. A system is required whereby different values, ideas and traditions can co-exist, interact and mutually enrich one another while retaining and highlighting their peculiarities and differences. . . .

So, in the 19th century they used to refer to a “Concert of Powers.” The time has come to talk in terms of a global “concert” of development models, interests, cultures and traditions where the sound of each instrument is crucial, inextricable and valuable, and for the music to be played harmoniously

rather than performed with discordant notes, a cacophony. It is crucial to consider the opinions and interests of all the participants in international life. Let me reiterate. Truly mutually respectful, pragmatic and consequently solid relations can only be built between independent and sovereign states.

Russia is sincerely committed to this approach and pursues a positive agenda. We stand for strict compliance with international law and enhancing mutual confidence and respect. We are building interstate relations and communication on fair and democratic foundations with an emphasis on the UN Charter.

Our country is focused on stepping up security and stability, on fighting international terrorism and other threats and challenges. We act for the sake of establishing—including in Asia—a system of equal and indivisible security resting on far-ranging and collective work.

Incidentally, the Russia-Africa Summit will be held here, in Sochi, in three weeks. We are prepared to propose to our African colleagues and friends a broad agenda of equal interaction covering many different areas—the economy, energy, transport, education and the environment.

Russia’s Resurrection

In conclusion, I would like to divert from the main topic and tell you something, which, just the same, is related to it. I would like to say that it was almost 20 years ago—just before the year 2000—that my article, “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium,” was published. The analysis of global affairs and development prospects it then offered seems to me to have generally matched reality.



EIRNS/Connor Soules

Street vendors in St. Petersburg, Russia in November 1999.

Indeed, in the 1990s, Russia lived through one of the hardest periods in its history. In addition to the deep political, economic and social crisis in the country, we found ourselves exposed to aggression by international terrorism. At the time, Russia drew close to a very dangerous line and if it had crossed it, it would have faced the worst thing for any nation and country, which is the break-up and disintegration of the state. The threat was in the air and the majority of people were aware of it.

Of course, back then we could—the threat was absolutely real—plunge into the abyss of a large-scale civil war and be stripped of national unity and sovereignty, ending up on the periphery of global politics. It was only thanks to patriotism, bravery, and the rare ability of the Russian and other peoples living in the country to bear the hardships and work hard so that Russia could move back from this dangerous line.

Of course, there are things that could have been done differently and better during these 20 years. But we have gained unique experience, and I believe there is demand for it around the world. Before we came into this room, my colleagues and I discussed one of the most important issues today—terrorism.

Indeed, we in Russia still have to address plenty of issues. At the same time, due to political stability and the efforts of the whole nation, Russia has not only recovered and continues to grow stronger economically and socially, it confidently ranks among the leading, authoritative and responsible countries. Our country complies in full with its obligations as one of the guardians of the existing world order. I am sure this will continue in the future. This will be even more effective if we work together.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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President Putin's speech was followed by a lengthy discussion period. We present here a few selected questions and answers.

Mikhail Pogrebinsky: I am from Ukraine, and our country is going through troubled times. I have a question for President Putin.

This year was marked by a big electoral cycle, we have had a “reset” of both legislative and executive powers. The elections and polls reveal that public opin-



The Presidential Admin. of Ukraine/Mykola Lazarenko
Volodymyr Zelensky walking to the presidential office in Kiev, following his inauguration as President of Ukraine on May 20, 2019.

ion favors stability and a peaceful settlement in the east of the country.

The new authorities are trying to take the first steps, somewhat cautiously, towards a search for peace. But they are so timid that they raise doubts about their resolve and ability to arrive at the logical completion of the process.

Do you see any political forces in Ukraine—perhaps you can name them—that can act as drivers of this process of political settlement?

Vladimir Putin: . . . [R]egarding the new leader's efforts for a settlement in the southeast of the country. I do not know how strong are those who are against a settlement, especially based on the Minsk agreements. Thus the public's interest in a settlement is obvious.

I think Mr. Zelensky won the [Presidential] election so convincingly primarily because of that interest. People in Ukraine are waiting for this issue to be resolved. And if he has enough political courage and strength to complete it, I think he will assert himself as an honest politician, brave and capable of pursuing the decisions made.

I think he is sincerely willing to do that, it is his sincere conviction, at least his striving. It is hard for me to say if he is able to stand up to those who oppose the process, but we do see some hesitation.

It seems inevitable that he will need to look for compromise, come to terms with the whole nation, with all members of society regardless of their point of view. However, he still has to follow up on election promises he gave to the majority of the Ukrainian people.

Tatiana Kastoueva-Jean: Good afternoon, my name is Tatiana Kastoueva-Jean. I am an analyst at the French Institute of International Relations in Paris.

Mr. President, I have a question for you. At the beginning of your speech, you proposed outlining the shape of the future and talking about it. One serious subject, of course, is global warming, climate change. . . .

As for Russia, it seems to me that there has always been such a duality in relations, even in the doctrines, because Russian Environmental Security Doctrine says the right things, while the Economic Security Doctrine through 2025 says that green economic development is a threat and has risks for the Russian economy, and it is clear why: because oil and gas represent a very high percent of exports.

It's the same thing, the same duality in the reasons for explaining climate change. Is it the result of human activity, or is it part of the Earth's global cycles?

. . . Do you think that Russia put an end to these doubts, hesitations and questions by ratifying this agreement? Will a new socioeconomic development paradigm emerge now at the domestic and external global levels? Will this topic be a unifying measure, or the cause of further division?

Vladimir Putin: As for the uniformity of approaches and evaluations, we will probably never reach this. Indeed, experts in various fields who somehow try to answer the question about the causes of climate change do not give unambiguous answers to the causes of climate change.

There are different opinions, I have heard them. Some say there is some global change in space that



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Vladimir Putin at the plenary session of the 16th Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club on October 3, 2019.

affects the Earth, so from time to time huge changes like this take place on our planet. I sailed along the Lena River in our country and saw high banks with deposits containing the remains of obviously ancient tropical mammals, which lived in tropical seas. I am talking about the Lena River, its stretch north of the Arctic Circle. It means back then the climate there was like this. Well, were there any anthropogenic emissions at the time? Of course, not. You see, there is no answer.

Just the same, my position is that if the human race is responsible for climate change, even in the slightest degree, and this climate change has grave implications, and if we can do something to, at least, slow down this process and avoid its negative consequences, we must spare no effort. This is our position. Despite all disagreements, we will support the international efforts to combat climate change. . . .

Fyodor Lukyanov: Angela Stent and Jill Dougherty [British-born director of Georgetown University's Center for Eurasian, Russian, and East European Studies, and CNN's Moscow Bureau Chief, respectively—ed.] would like to ask the President about this, and actually this question can be addressed to all participants as well. The situation in the United States is rather complicated at the moment and has become particularly so in the past week.

It is hard to understand what is happening there,

with domestic policy issues clearly dominating. Is it possible to build relations in such condition at all? Or maybe we should wait?

Vladimir Putin: As regards the developments in the United States—how can we cooperate with them when they are so engaged in their domestic political affairs? Obviously, this is always the case during an election campaign, and the United States is no exception. But this domestic political race has got a little over the top. I do not think this has ever occurred in the history of the United States before.

But life goes on, and we should factor in the current domestic situation there. But it is simply not possible to steer clear of such a global power as the United States. We intend to do as much as the U.S. itself is ready for.

Vitaly Naumkin: In conclusion, I would like to ask the last one.

During these four days, we have discussed various issues related to the current state of the world order and

made a firm conclusion that it is undergoing a crisis and the future global order will be established with an increasing role of Asian countries.

How do you see this future global order?

Vladimir Putin: The existing system of international relations, international institutions and structures took shape following World War II as its result. The situation around the globe is changing drastically, both in Europe and on the American continent, with new rapidly growing and developing players, as well as in Africa, and, of course, Asia.

For the existing system and its institutions to last, it has to correspond to the realities of the ever-changing world. I believe that we must not destroy what has been created in the past decades, but should gradually transform it and adapt it to these realities, with due consideration of the growing power and prospects of Asia's development in general and certain Asian countries in particular. They certainly have the right to and must take the place they deserve in global politics and international affairs.

Russia Rules Against Carbon Emission Penalties

As reported in an October 17 [article](#) in *The Moscow Times*, “Russia Rejects Climate Change Plan After Business Uproar,” the Russian government has reversed policy and acted to block proposed “climate change” legislation which would have imposed on Russia the same type of anti-industrial “green” insanity that is now prevalent throughout most of the European Union membership. The climate change legislation would have imposed mandatory quotas on carbon emissions for Russia’s largest companies, penalties for the biggest “polluters,” and established a new national carbon trading system. This has now all been scrapped.

Originally, the Russian government proposed introducing climate legislation in two phases. The first was to have been a five-year stock-taking exercise to measure company-level emissions and determine appropriate quotas for reducing emissions. After that,

the mandatory penalties cited above would have been imposed, together with the carbon trading scheme. This second, punitive stage has now been killed. *The Moscow Times* reported,

Plans for quotas on carbon emissions at Russia’s largest companies, a new national carbon trading system and penalties for the biggest [greenhouse gas] polluters have now been scrapped.

Instead, Russia will only go ahead with proposals to measure and collect data on emissions as part of a five-year green audit.

The campaign against a stricter package of measures was led by the influential Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPP)—an organization that acts as the voice for many of Russia’s large industries and manufacturing concerns. The new laws were set to be introduced as part of Russia’s ratification of the 2016 Paris Climate Agreement. Now, that will not happen.