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"The U.S. Is Less and Less Inclined to Look for Compromise"

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What President Trump said, as he signed the bill into law, with regard to his rejection of the attempts by both houses of Congress to encroach on the president's constitutional powers speaks for itself.

However, as far as confrontation between our states is concerned, I would not go too far and make such sweeping generalizations. I hope that the situation will not get to the point of confrontation. We will seek to minimize damage if not overcome the destructive effect of the act.

As for foreign policy - or at least its "Russian component" - so far it can only cause disappointment. I must say that to a very large degree this is still the continuation of former U.S. president Barack Obama's worst legacy.

In an unprecedented development, the Democrats used Russia as a bogeyman and used the relations with Russia like a tool, like a sledgehammer that they wielded in an attempt to smash Trump's presidency, as a result destroying the possibility of building a reasonable relationship with us for years to come. Unfortunately, that is precisely the case. Whoever may be the president of the United States, whoever wins the next election, under the legislation passed by both houses of Congress, he or she would feel bound hand and foot and unable to follow a more reasonable policy toward Russia. This is a big, hitherto unknown problem. In a sense, this is a new reality. Russia does not yield to pressure and generally does nothing under coercion, nothing that its opponents want it to do.

It is important for us to put in place viable and efficient economic models that would be less dependent on the U.S. system of payments and credits. I am not an economist but as a Foreign Ministry official, I simply feel this. Otherwise we will always remain on their hook, which is precisely what they want.

My personal opinion is this: We should exercise restraint and patience-strategic patience if you will - and make no fuss. In my opinion, Russia needs a two-track approach toward relations with the United States. First, deterrence where we see U.S. aggressive actions, attacks, endless attempts to weaken us, something that U.S. officials simply like to flaunt, and striving to saturate countries neighboring us with NATO military facilities, military infrastructure and the massive deployment of well-equipped contingents of armed forces.

The second part of a two-track approach is engagement. Engaging the United States in dialogue but only in areas that we need and can benefit from. In the morning, we should start thinking

about what we need to do to become stronger and secure ourselves against the U.S. pressure and go to bed with the same thought. Match our actions and policy toward the U.S. only with these tasks and act strictly within the framework of this set of coordinates. Then we will see what happens. And we should use the matrix of this two-track approach as the groundwork for strategic patience. However, to reiterate, this is purely my personal opinion. Foreign policy is formulated by the Russian president.

Energy as a Field of Fierce Competition

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I believe that, against the backdrop of various other agencies, the U.S. Department of Energy makes credible and well-balanced forecasts. Short-term forecasts should not be used in analyzing the situation.

At present, the extraction of primary resources is well-developed but consumption has declined for various reasons. As a result, prices have fallen. In my opinion, during the decade, the maximum price will

be \$55. This is what is in store for us. At the same time, naturally, all global factors - politics, the economy and regional problems - will affect oil production levels and oil prices.

I have always believed that Russia should not join OPEC but as for cooperation - enriching each other with analysis and discussion, and that our cooperation should be regular.

China has replaced the U.S. as the largest consumer of available oil. The world has realized that there are more recoverable oil and gas resources than was previously assumed. Our oil producers have always said that there is oil but the question is how to extract it.

Of course, the role of OPEC has declined due to the changes that have occurred. OPEC will be unable to do anything without Russia. Over the past 10 to 15 years, the energy world has changed. I would like to draw attention to one important development that has not yet been appreciated by the Middle East, in particular Saudi Arabia. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia have turned from allies, who used to complement each other, into competitors. This also applies to us. Before 2010, energy cooperation between the United States, Saudi Arabia and Russia was the No. 1 item at any talks - from presidential meetings to working commissions. Today, energy has turned into a field of fierce competition. Not everyone understands this yet.

The need for oil has disappeared. U.S. priorities have changed. The ongoing processes are pragmatic and rough going. Both OPEC and we had to take efforts to stabilize the situation and establish a more favorable price for both producers and consumers.

A balance of energy and geography is very important. Renewable energy has taken a good step, especially in Europe. Now it is clear that costs per unit of wind power are not reducing as radically as in our case, in the oil sector. Shale gas in the U.S. has become less costly. Any form of energy should exist but in a state of competition. Nothing should be done artificially.

"We Did Not Have Tornadoes or Typhoons"

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I will say right away that we did not have tornadoes or typhoons. On May 29, there was a collision of two fronts and the temperature difference caused a strong wind - up to 30 meters per second, an all-time record. However, similar phenomena occurred in July 2016 and in July 1998. In terms of atmospheric physics, this phenomenon is entirely different than, for example, typhoon or tornado.

It is impossible to identify a specific cause. However, it is a fact that anomalous phenomena (stronger winds, gale-force winds) are becoming more frequent. Measurements made across the Russian territory show that this is a meridional intrusion of cold air masses. Therefore, this measurement of the meridional transfer is the result of certain fluctuations in the climate system as it receives a greater amount of energy. Such phenomena are brought about by a slight increase in the greenhouse effect, caused by the effects of human economic activity and transformed through complex oceanic-atmospheric interaction models. It is more correct to talk about climate change, because it involves primarily fluctuations and abrupt ups and downs. It may happen that, if we do not ratify the Paris Agreement before the fall of 2018, we will not be able to vote at Paris Agreement bodies, whereas the Americans will. So far, a greater threat to the oceans, especially to marine life, including calcium shells and hulls, is increasing ocean acidification. High CO₂ levels in the atmosphere lead to ocean acidification. This is a rather complex process and it is apparently responsible for coral bleaching. Research is under way and if it proves that this process poses a serious threat to the atmosphere and the climate, then this will become an additional argument in favor of reducing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions.

The main problem is garbage disposal. Granted, sometimes everything is reduced to incineration plants. Second, the clean air problem exists in many cities. Third, we need to prepare to adapt to climate change - initially in the health care sector, wildfires and forestry, and then down the entire chain in all areas. Some attempts are being made but as is often the case, that is mostly on paper, not in reality. There is tick-borne encephalitis in some areas and respiratory or cardiac diseases in others. I believe that there should be a federal program and a national plan for adaptation to climate change, but the responsibility for their implementation should be delegated to regions.

NATO: An Informal Summit or a New Format?

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THE MAY 25, 2017 MEETING of NATO heads of state and government was from the start seen as a key political event, being a venue of U.S. President Donald Trump's first European visit. During this meeting, the new conditions for the transatlantic treaty, both within the alliance itself and in the broader context of American-European relations, had to be determined. The Trump-NATO topic was a hot issue even during the new president's electoral campaign, once he had declared the alliance to be a useless and outdated organization. NATO members had wanted to meet with the new U.S. president earlier, but this turned out to be unrealistic in light of their uncoordinated positions and the need for preliminary political and diplomatic consensus.

DONALD TRUMP, the 45th U.S. president, was extremely critical in identifying points of contention in transatlantic relations, having virtually accused the Europeans of parasitism at the expense of the United States by demanding "fair compensation" for American guarantees of security.

Trump not only put the question "Why does America need Europe?" back on the agenda; he posed it to the Europeans in the form of an ultimatum.

Considering the fairly tense situation in American-European relations and the vague expectations of Trump's visit, NATO preferred not to advertise the obvious importance of the upcoming meeting. On the contrary, its informal character and thus lack of plans to make any kind of decisions were emphasized. The summit's agenda was in any case predetermined by Washington's position and reflected two central tenets of the American administration with respect to NATO. It is not only the extravagant manner of Trump's "diplomatic" behavior that is at issue here. The signals he sends must be taken seriously even when they are spontaneous, and he constantly confirms this. In his speech during the ceremony, Trump continued to lecture his European partners and remind them of their debt to the "taxpayers of the United States."

NATO was caught in Trump's trap from the beginning. The question of how NATO could do more to satisfy Washington had no clear answers or realistic options. The possibility of the alliance having a combat role after its greatest operation ever in Afghanistan was virtually eliminated. However, the Trump administration's political motives outweighed these practical arguments, and variants of the organization's contribution had to be developed in short order. This contribution was agreed upon at the May meeting in Brussels. So far, it seems fairly hollow, from the viewpoint of added value. It is no accident that, when speaking of decisions taken,

NATO prefers to emphasize their "symbolic value" and continues to cite antiterrorist efforts already made or now underway.

The prospect of establishing constructive collaboration between Russia and the United States/NATO is far from closed. The European countries and the European Union are also displaying interest, albeit very carefully, in gradually normalizing and restoring a political dialogue with Moscow. The lines, along which transatlantic relations will begin to develop, based on the agreements reached by Trump and his European partners - and which decisions might be ratified under NATO's new Strategic Concept to be approved at the alliance's next formal summit in 2018 - will be of great importance.

Key Characteristics of the International Trading System and Prospects for Trade Between Russia and the European Union

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OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, a fairly stable growth trend in trade between Russia and the European Union has come to an end. Since 2013, the volume of trade between Russia and the EU has undergone an unprecedented decline, although there has been some growth in 2017. For several reasons, the EU has not been very concerned about this decrease.

POLITICS is naturally one of the reasons why the EU is unfazed by its shrinking trade with Russia.

Another reason for the EU's attitude is the fact that the decrease in its trade with Russia is mainly the result of falling oil and natural gas prices rather than the outcome of any physical dynamics of this trade. The lower oil and gas prices have made imports cheaper for the EU. Finally, fears that Russia would cut its energy exports to the EU haven't come true. Russia has proven itself to be a reliable partner and hasn't let politics interfere with its trade commitments.

Today, nevertheless, trade between Russia and the EU still amounts to about 200 billion euros per year and topped an annual mark of 300 billion euros in the recent past. One can hardly ignore such amounts forever. Russia and the EU are bound to resume trade negotiations.

The policy of sanctions prevents the EU from seeing opportunities offered by Eurasian integration. The European Commission still hasn't formulated a position on contacts with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and takes a wait-and-see attitude.

TODAY, neither the EU nor Russia has much interest in new mutual large-scale trade negotiations. Besides the political factor, neither side feels any serious practical need for a new trade deal. With commercial contacts between Russia and the EU being loosened, the PCA and Russia's membership in the WTO provide a sufficient formal basis for their trade and economic relations.

At the same time, there are reasons to expect Russia-EU trade to stop declining. If it resumes growing, sentiments may change, and the existence of the EAEU is a factor that would be impossible to ignore in any talks.

Russia-EU economic relations are, besides, under various external influences. The WTO's prestige is being undermined. There is a threat of new American protectionism. Britain's future departure from the EU is fraught with controversies that are bound to poison the atmosphere in international trade and in the WTO.

All this means that Russia and its EAEU partners should pursue more flexible and proactive trade policies in order to be able to promptly react to new developments and not to miss opportunities for better relations with the EU.

Brexit: At the Beginning of Uneasy Talks

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IN JUNE 2016, Eurosceptics won the referendum on the UK's membership in the European Union. In March 2017, UK Prime Minister Theresa May notified Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, that Great Britain intended to leave the EU; this triggered Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty. The British government needed nine months to formulate its vision of the future relations with the EU and outline the parameters of withdrawal. British proposals, however, multiplied

questions rather than provided answers. The EU leaders, on the other hand, have their own ideas about the conditions, on which the UK will be allowed to quit. The sides' initial positions differ to the extent that the road toward a compromise looks difficult, not to say tortuous.

The EU leaders deemed it necessary to point out that there will be no exemptions from the rules of functioning of the EU Single Market; this means that the UK would not be allowed to limit the freedom of movement of workforce while enjoying the freedom of movement of goods, services and capitals.

European Council will monitor progress closely and determine when sufficient progress has been achieved to allow negotiations to proceed to the next phase" even before the first document was signed. At the second stage of the talks, Brussels will treat Britain as a third country, the way it treats Russia or the United States.

AS A RESULT of the snap election, the Tories lost the majority in the parliament, which forced Theresa May knock together a minority cabinet. In this context, the EU leaders repeatedly stated that the doors of the European Union remained open for Great Britain. Those who expected that the British government would somehow soften its positions at the talks were wrong, while the UK in fact accepted some of the Brussels offers.

It seems that in the course of negotiations, the British government will gradually retreat from its positions: it badly needs a free trade agreement and the maximum preferences in other areas of cooperation, while the Conservatives' positions in the parliament, where all other parties prefer a more or less "soft" Brexit, are fairly shaky. The talks will not be easy; the sides will exchange harsh remarks. It seems that "no deal is better than a bad deal" has lost its topicality: the sides will have to arrive at a compromise since they need cooperation in trade, economy and security.

Sino-American Relations Under Donald Trump: Time of Changes or Continued Struggle for Hegemony?

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ON THE EVE of the presidential election in the United States, Foreign Policy ran an extremely interesting article "Why Chinese Elites Endorse Hillary Clinton," in which the author argued that, despite the fairly harsh statements of Donald Trump as presidential candidate, as president he would demonstrate more lenience in his relations with China than President Hillary Clinton and that, on the other hand, as president he might contribute to global instability that, in the final analysis, would do no good to China.

On the whole, however, the Chinese political elite believed that the risks and uncertainty, two prominent traits of Trump's presidency, out-

weighed all possible favorable factors.

The Chinese political elite want predictability and stability which outweighs its satisfaction with America's declined interest in Asia. Common people (outside the political and intellectual elites) are actively monitoring the situation in the United States.

IN THE COURSE of his 2016 presidential campaign, Trump made frequently contradictory statements on foreign policy issues. Nevertheless, there was a certain trend in them, including future relations with China, among other things. The real foreign policy course of the new administration, however, turned out to be very different.

Some experts predict, however, that he will make a few strident anti-Beijing military moves in the area to prove a point and then back off to engage the Chinese economically. There was no shortage of forecasts since the Chinese policy of Donald Trump looked vague: it was not clear how he would treat China and what he would expect from it. So far, the prospects are as foggy as before.

In case of Taiwan, the pendulum suddenly and drastically moved in the direction opposite to what had been said during the election campaign. "U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday spurned the Taiwanese president's suggestion that the two leaders hold another phone call, saying he did not want to create problems for Chinese President Xi Jinping" and would coordinate with the Chinese leaders all future phone calls between himself and the head of the Taiwan administration.

Chinese political scientist Yan Xuetung, dean of the Faculty of International Relations, Tsinghua University, dismissed all attempts to establish constructive relations between China and the United States as "fake friendship." In his interview, he deemed it necessary to remind that nothing had changed since 1995 when China announced that from that time on its American policy

would be based on the "neither friend, nor foe" principle. He described the relations between the two countries as "zero sum game" which means that one of the partners could grow stronger only at the expense of the other.²⁵ His stance that contradicts the "win-win" position typical of the Chinese establishment is based on the concept of great power relations Xi Jinping formulated in 2013 and looks closer to the ideas shared by the hawks in Trump's administration.

The future is dim yet, in view of China's eagerness to organize the first summit, there are grounds to say that, by the end of the first year of Trump's presidency, the situation will be clarified and the expert forecasts will prove its worth.

Strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention: A Need Obvious to the Naked Eye

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BIOLOGICAL (bacteriological) weapons were the first category of weapons of mass destruction to come under a universal international legal ban. The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) came into force back in 1975.

However, the BWC contains so many moot points that no one would call it an effective and comprehensive accord. Some countries insist on keeping the BWC in its current form. They conduct numerous tests of biological weapons in seeking to create their own guarantees of protection from this category of arms. The main problem is that these clumsy attempts pose a permanent threat to the life and health of people nearly all over the world.

Russia has proposed ways of carrying out comprehensive strengthening of the BWC. Moscow presses for a complete ban on the use of biological weapons and seeks to promote international cooperation in the civilian use of microbiology. Some countries have seen a hidden agenda behind this policy and tried to accuse Moscow of opportunism. However, no such attempts have cut any ice, and the Russian proposals have been receiving steadily increasing support.

Remarkably, the BWC, just as the Geneva Protocol, does not contain any direct definition of biological weapons.

The main problem is that the BWC does not impose a direct ban on biological weapons, although the convention's initial draft did propose such a ban.

THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS suggest themselves:

1. The BWC is a unique, breakthrough document that for many years has been a guarantee of non-use of biological weapons. It was made possible by meticulous work to find compromises and non-trivial solutions and political will to put them into practice.
2. The international community is nearly unanimous in believing that it still needs the BWC, but the convention needs updating.
3. There remain serious disagreements about ways of updating the BWC since different states have different views on the role of the convention for their own and global security.
4. Since the BWC came into force, nations have been changing their assessments of it and their views on how it should be strengthened. This means that attitudes may change again, and that they could move toward concurrence.

Joint well-considered action is essential to prevent biological wars. Russia has proposed concrete and carefully verified solutions. Maximum use should be made of political and diplomatic resources to rule out the use of biological weapons.

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SOFT POWER has been a familiar phrase in Russian political science discourse for more than ten years. In this period, the soft power notion has become one of the most popular themes in Russian political science, firmly established itself in Russian scholarly literature, and has been recorded in two versions of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation and in other fundamental statements on Russian foreign policy.

The practical application of soft power has been growing in scale at a pace much faster than progress in theoretical studies of the concept.

We believe that communicative approach represents a superficial, generalizing, descriptive point of view rather than an attempt to systematize the soft power concept and explain cause and effect relationships that it implies. Information and communication is a complex sphere that encompasses diverse types of activities, including analysis, criticism, and systematic counteraction of some kinds of information.¹⁶ This undoubtedly means that information and communication is one of the spheres of application of soft power, but it hardly explains its essence.

It was economic soft power that enabled the US to win its strategic nuclear confrontation with the former Soviet Union, something that can be described, without exaggeration, as the main global political accomplishment of the 20th century.

We don't believe we can find a good answer without examining the record of Germany, a country that has been making extensive use of soft power in its foreign policy.

From our point of view, soft power is typically used by a country in relations with a country that is behind it in terms of economic and political development. The basis of soft power evolves in the course of a nation's history and, in this sense, does represent its cultural heritage. However, soft power cannot be exercised without the deliberate and systematic organization of access to such heritage for foreign entities and individuals. This access should meet the foreign policy objectives of the country exercising soft power. Hence it is the main principle of soft power that the advanced political or economic experience of a country is borrowed by other countries or by some entities or individuals in such countries (provided soft power lays the basis for close cooperation between these two countries). The lower development level of a target country and consequent shortages of resources or experience in it make it potentially beneficial and sometimes unavoidable, and therefore politically useful, for this country to cooperate with the country that seeks to exert soft-power influence on it.

In our view, soft power can become a key instrument of Russian foreign policy, especially in dealing with strategic security problems, and Moscow should put serious effort into developing a soft power strategy.

The Korean Crisis: Is There a Solution?

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THE YEAR 2017 has brought an aggravation of the North Korean nuclear problem. Donald Trump's assumption of office as U.S. president coincided in time with a new stage of the North Korean nuclear missile program.

In his 2017 New Year's address, Kim announced that North Korea was soon going to test an ICBM that could reach the mainland United States. This suggests that serious progress might be made within the next few years, and that in the foreseeable future North Korea might become one of the United States' main potential adversaries along after Russia and China, possessing weapons that would be able to wipe out Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle, and possibly Washington and New York as well. Of course, Britain

and France would be able to do the same, but they are allies of the United States.

The governments of Japan and South Korea have for decades exploited the "North Korean aggression" theme to obtain military aid from the United States. However, today, in the face of a concrete threat of an armed conflict with a nuclear state, Tokyo and Seoul have adopted less militant rhetoric.

TRUMP'S PRAGMATIC POLICIES have brought it home to the South Koreans repeatedly and in unexpected ways that their interests are not too high on the Americans agenda. Seoul has rejected the U.S. president's demand that South Korea pay all the expenses for the upkeep of the American forces stationed on its territory.

Chinese tourism in South Korea has declined considerably - tourism has been a major source of income for small and midsize businesses in South Korea's large cities and popular tourist destinations. Some of the flights between the two countries have been canceled, and Chinese cruise ships bypass Pusan. China has put restrictions on imports from South Korea, whereas many South Korean companies have been exporting between 30% and 80% of their output to China. As a result, South Korea is likely to be in for mass bankruptcies and layoffs, and for an economic recession. This makes ordinary South Koreans wonder whether they need THAAD if it comes at such cost.

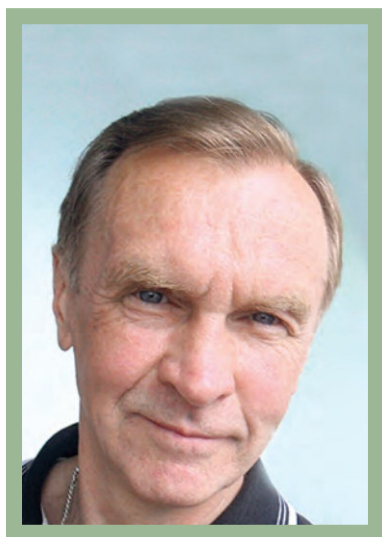
RUSSIA'S POSITION on the North Korea issue practically coincides with China's. Both base their policies on three principles. Firstly, both Russia and China strictly condemn North Korea's nuclear missile program. The latter poses a direct threat both to Russia and to China as North Korea tests its nuclear devices and missiles near our borders, at distances of between 150 and 200 kilometers from them.

The Trump administration is seeking to win Russia and China over to its side. It is cobbling to-

gether a pressure coalition presenting it as the reaction of the international community, and is drawing up various scenarios for regime change in Pyongyang. However, any of those measures can only have limited effect. On the one hand, Russia, China, and the non-Western community of nations as a whole wouldn't let U.S. sanctions cause a humanitarian catastrophe in North Korea. On the other, North Korea has developed skills of bypassing sanctions and accumulated some experience in this.

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LAST SPRING, an event in the Arab world shocked everyone. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) withdrew their ambassadors from Doha, the capital of Qatar, their ally. One of the smallest members of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) was accused of supporting "anyone threatening the security and stability of the GCC whether as groups or individuals - via direct security work or through political influence ... and hostile media."

Later, the three initiators handed Doha a list of 13 demands to end a major Gulf crisis, insisting that Qatar should shut down the Al Jazeera network, close a Turkish military base and scale down ties with Iran. They gave Qatar 10 days to comply with the demands and agree to annual audits in the following 10 years. Qatar rejected this ultimatum as interference in its sovereignty.

Possible repercussions notwithstanding, what happened to Qatar can be described as a manifestation of the deeply rooted social and political changes in the Arab East caused by the color revolutions unfolding amid globalization, informatization, democratization, gradual destruction of the traditional values of Eastern societies, and the frantic efforts to find adequate answers to these challenges.

Today, Islamism has become the dominant ideology in the Arab East even though it cannot be described as one doctrine and has not yet acquired a definition acceptable to all. It is much better characterized as a set of ideas that look at Islam not only as a religion but also as a political and social system and the way of life according to the Sharia. Today, Muslims should return to their religious roots and reunite politically. This explains the very different manifestations of Islamism and political trends of all sorts ranging from moderate to extremist and persistent attempts either to discover a unifying idea or make one of the trends dominant.

One thing has become perfectly clear - Islamism is a response of the Arab and, wider, Islamic world to alien ideological constructs imposed on it through external interference.

THE DEMANDS that the Arab countries have presented to Qatar are excessive and unreasonable. The state has the right to make friends and select partners yet realities are much more complicated. The Russian proverb "A man is known by the company he keeps" is applicable to the Middle East, as we know it today.

The Arab countries tied together by Saudi Arabia have their reasons. They defend their religious and historical specifics against external, including regional, influences to maintain their internal stability. In a conflict between the small and the big, the latter obviously predominates.

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THERE IS A RANGE OF FACTORS behind the foreign policies of Islamic countries, which include their geopolitical status, their international political and economic relations, their ideologies, and the interests of their ruling classes. Islam is one of these factors. Muslims typically have a black-and-white picture of the world, seeing it as a scene of struggles between powers of good and evil. The non-Muslim part of the globe is seen as a hostile world that is controlled by the great powers embroiled in economic rivalries with one another. Equal relations between great powers and Muslim nations are deemed impossible as the former are assumed to be fighting for control of the latter. Religious Muslims think that, in this situation, there is nothing but a miracle they can hope for.

Many Islamic theologians advocate pan-Arabism or pan-Turkism, movements that are among factors behind Muslim countries' foreign policies, although they have roller-coaster effects. NATO countries seek to exploit domestic conflicts in Arab states for their own ends, which explains their interference in the internal affairs of Arab nations. Gulf states pursue the same goal in intervening in the home affairs of other Arab countries. Early in 2002, the United States proclaimed a doctrine whereby it accorded itself the right to topple any government that it considers a threat to objectives it is trying to achieve.

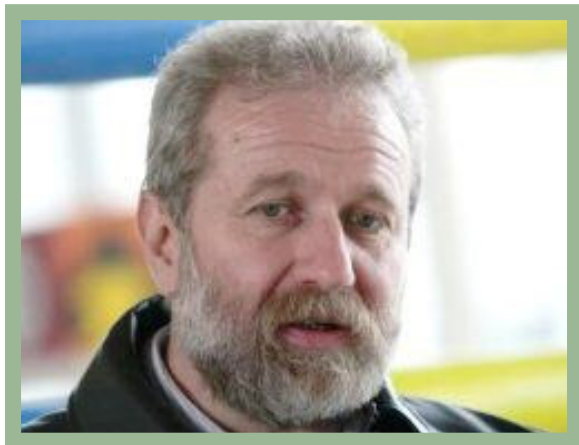
Moscow protests American attacks on Syrian government forces and progovernment militias. However, Russia is not against the coalition's action against the Salafis although it insists that any such action must be subject to approval from the Syrian government or the UN Security Council.

To sum up, Islam will definitely remain a factor in the policies of Muslim countries in the foreseeable future.

The Middle East: Urgent Problems

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Journalist



NEARLY 32 YEARS AGO, the International Affairs journal carried my article under the same title. These were different times; the international situation and the political priorities of the local peoples were likewise different. Certain problems are still on the agenda; they have not lost their urgency yet the approaches to their settlement and the conditions, in which they should be settled, radically differ from what we had 30 or even 15 years ago.

The majority of problems the peoples of the Middle East have been coping with in the last few decades are rooted

in the world problems created by the political principles of the West, globalization, domination of the United States and its allies in many countries of Western Europe, Africa and Latin America, and continued neo-colonialist policies of the West worldwide whenever it is possible.

The Middle Eastern countries are gradually losing their economies. American and West European bankers, political scientists and economic advisers, past masters of persuasion, re-orientated our economists to what they called the "promising" branches. This primitive method bound the most initiative industrialists of the Middle East hand and foot and removed the most important links from the chains of industrial production. The West spared no effort to reduce the developing countries, the Middle Eastern countries in the first place, to the status of raw material appendages that would never move beyond primary refinery; it never sought equal and honest trade relationships with the developing countries.

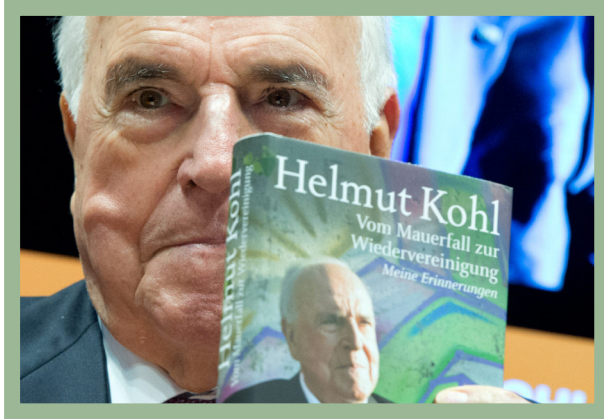
My reader might say that a big part of the American establishment wants to develop relations with Arab countries, that a considerable number of American liberals, including Jewish intellectuals, criticize Israel and its policies, that Western countries supply the Gulf countries with latest weapons and it is thanks to the West that the two Arab countries shook off their dictators Saddam Hussein and Muammar Qaddafi, the favor of dubious value. In fact, they pushed Libya and Iraq, as well as their neighbors, to the brink of an economic catastrophe; their trade with the West dropped to the level of the late 1940s.

The life on the West Bank and labor conditions are not easy at all. The everyday life in Gaza is even harder. The life of the majority of the young people who live there is joyless; they have to cope with everyday problems, they have no future and no very simple joys that young men of their age in Europe take for granted. Israel is not bothered with the future of occupied territories and the future of millions of Palestinians living in the milieu of apartheid. This means that millions of people living in other places of the world should pay attention to this problem. The war in Syria, and in other places for that matter, has temporarily screened the problem of the occupied Palestinian lands. Mankind, however, should not lose sight of this situation. This is the duty of us all.

Helmut Kohl: Pragmatist, Patriot, European

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THE DEATH of Helmut Kohl, the former German chancellor and an outstanding politician, reminded us of a role that can be played in history by an individual who is a strategic thinker and patient tactician, can listen to and hear partners and opponents alike, and is open to compromise if the latter is important for the survival of civilization. Alarming developments in Europe and other parts of the world show that some Western leaders' presumption of ideological superiority,

political arrogance, disdain for the interests of other countries, and neglect for human life may undermine the system of international law, and sow mistrust and estrangement between nations. Kohl is justly considered one of the most prominent figures of the German political elite of the 1970s to the 1990s. In the radically changing postwar Europe, he showed himself to be a world-scale politician, doing important work for the political stability of the continent and for bringing the Cold War to an end, and advocating various forms of cooperation with the former Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia.

Kohl's life was full of events that directly affected his development as a politician. Born in the family of a tax officer, Kohl realized at an early age that daily work, accumulation of knowledge, and objective assessment of what was happening around him could become a good basis for his future adult life, whether it was in business or in big politics.

He made brilliant use of a historic chance to establish close cooperation with key nations in "older" Europe, especially France, and gave strong support to the independent policies of former member countries of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. He spent a lot of effort helping develop common rules of conduct for all participants in the pan-European process and lay the foundations for a common European home.

As usual, one wonders what Russia's relations with Germany and the EU would be like today if Kohl were still at the helm. Very likely, Kohl's talent for a holistic view of the world with its collisions, risks, and threats would have led him to put together a team of like-minded people who believed that the future of Europe had to rest on a renewed security architecture with the necessary participation of Russia.

I believe that the paramount aspiration of the people of Crimea to be part of Russia is something that Kohl would have been able to understand better than anyone else.

Helmut Kohl, this great European German, attached great importance to the priceless capital of trust between Germany and Russia that had been built by many generations of German and Russian politicians and civil society figures.

Snap Election in Britain as Seen From the Celtic Regions

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THE SNAP GENERAL ELECTION of June 8, 2017, the third in the last two years, produced a "hung" parliament and can be described as a turning point in the country's political history. The Tories with 318 seats came closest to parliamentary majority of 326 seats; Labour trailed behind with 262 seats, followed by the Scottish National Party (35), Liberal-Democrats (12), the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) from Northern Ireland (10), Plaid Cymru (4), and the Green Party (1). The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) headed before the referendum by Nigel Farage was left in the cold. Prime Minister Theresa May, who preserved her post, announced that she would put together a minority government with the support of the Democratic Unionists, the only party that had

agreed to side with the Tories on the legislation and budget issues.

The snap election, Mrs. May's effort to consolidate the nation in the face of the "crucial Brexit talks," ended in a failure.

Theresa May reached an agreement with the DUP; the Unionists got no ministerial posts but agreed to side with the Conservatives on the confidence-and-supply basis on the laws related to Brexit and national defenses (meeting the NATO target of at least 2% of GDP). This left the DUP with a wider leeway and free to withdraw its support on these and other issues in future.

The Scottish National Party (SNP) used Brexit to revive the independence issue even though the 2014 referendum had shown that the majority in Scotland would prefer to remain together with the UK: 55% for and 45% against.

Brexit voting gave the SNP a chance to announce that it would be guided by the will of the Scots and build up a legal basis of a second independence referendum to be carried out before the UK's final withdrawal, that is, between fall 2018 and spring 2019.

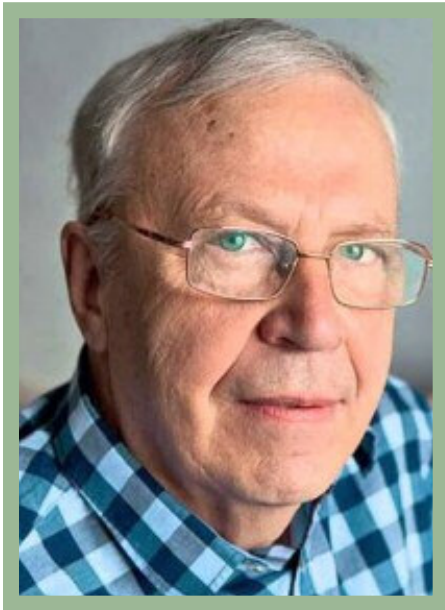
The Scottish nationalists and the British Labour ran with more or less similar slogans related to social reforms. Both proclaim that the interests of common people should prevail over the interests of the City, that budget cuts should be discontinued, that the minimal wage should be raised to £10 per hour, and that Brexit should be "soft."

The snap election of 2017 and the "hung" parliament that resulted from it revealed the deep-rooted crisis of confidence that affected the majority of political parties of Great Britain. The election results complicated the situation and the initial stages of a dialogue between the UK and the EU.

Transnistria in the Grip of the Ukraine Crisis: On the 25th Anniversary of the Transnistrian Conflict

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IN JUNE 2017, it was 25 years since the tragedy in Bendery, a Moldovan city whose population had rejected the plans of Chisinau nationalists to prohibit them from using Russian at work and in everyday life and from teaching Russian to their children. Attempts to reach a compromise on the "right to use one's own language" had failed. Moldova split apart and the conflict turned into an armed confrontation.

As of today, the peacekeeping mission established under that agreement and composed of contingents from Russia, the PMR and the Republic of Moldova has fulfilled its main task: that of ensuring peace in the region. But the conflict remains unresolved even today. The two parts of a once united country - the Republic of Moldova and the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic

- are living separately, having chosen their own paths of development.

THE PROLONGED domestic political instability in Moldova, caused by an intensified struggle between pro-Western parties, unbelievable corruption, and cultivation of the idea of Moldova's "reunification" with Romania, for a time pushed the Transnistria issue into the background.

HOW SHOULD RUSSIA BEHAVE under these conditions? Clearly, its activities in matters relating to Moldova should be directed to achieve realistic, pragmatic goals. Although against the background of the conflict with Ukraine and EU sanctions Transnistria requires additional financial efforts, its security continues to be a focus of attention for the Russian authorities.

Russia would be ready to help reintegrate Transnistria into a unified Moldovan state if the following basic conditions are met: Moldova's continued neutrality, non-aligned status, and independence from Romania, as well as guarantees for the authority and businesses of the current Transnistrian elite, including in matters of general foreign policy. But in the present conditions such an approach is unrealistic, because the Moldovan elite categorically refuses to consider the possibilities for transition to a federation, while for Transnistria the suggested "wide autonomy" is an extremely low starting point even for a theoretical discussion.

As for the long-term prospects of a Transnistrian settlement, they will directly depend, in my opinion, on who wins the war in Ukraine, because the current regime is unlikely to abandon its anti-Russian, Russophobic policy, which implies, among other things, the liquidation of Transnistria.

Edi Rama: Does He Represent a New Albanian Reality?

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ALBANIA played a significant role in the Balkans hundreds of years ago, and is increasingly influential in Balkan politics today.

Russia cannot ignore the fact that Albanian-Slav relations in the Balkans are unlikely to even amount to a "cold peace" stable enough to guarantee any acceptable level of security.

One may suggest the following ways of "resetting" relations between Russia and Albania:

1. The president of Russia should pay a proper official visit to Albania.
2. Edi Rama might also pay an official visit to Moscow and might have some of his interesting paintings exhibited in the Russian capital.
3. Since agriculture and cultural affairs are the main potential fields of cooperation between the two countries, the Russian co-chair could be either the agriculture or the culture minister.
4. To encourage more Russians to go to Albania, the two countries should organize direct flights between Moscow and Tirana. If demand goes up, charter flights might be added on.
5. In general, the two countries need an agreement on the complete abolition of visas.
6. Russia could help expand and modernize the railroad networks of Albania and its neighbors in order to facilitate cargo transportation to the Albanian port of Durres from Macedonia, Serbia, and inland Albania. Russia could use Durres, which also needs modernizing, for unbrokered imports of excellent and inexpensive Balkan fruit, vegetables, and meat and milk products.
7. There are oil and gas fields in Albania, and Russia could help develop them and help build a pipeline network to connect Albania to its Slav neighbors.
8. Russia could help set up a center for Albanian-Slav cooperation, a facility that could be located, for example, in Ohrid, Macedonia, which is an ancient Slav cultural and spiritual center.
9. The film industries of Russia and Albania could well make another joint movie, for instance one on our peoples' brotherhood in arms during World War II.
10. It would be a good project for Russia to publish a complete collection of works by Albanian literary classic Ismail Kadare. This great writer also deserves a Russian state decoration for his unparalleled humanism and his contribution to international peace.

Of course, these suggestions can't purport to make up an exhaustive program. But Albania is an important factor of stability in the Balkans and a country that has close historical ties to Russia, and Moscow should move it a good way up its foreign policy agenda, though not letting its policy toward Albania overshadow our relations with our Slav brothers, who will remain such.

Russian Presence in Nicaragua: The Role and Main Characteristics of Soft Power in Russian-Nicaraguan Relations

Author: A. Budayev

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AFTER the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) took power for a second time in 2007 and its leader, Daniel Ortega, again became president of Nicaragua, Russia's relations with that country have become closer and, moreover, acquired a new quality, developing into full-scale strategic partnership. Today, Nicaragua is Russia's main partner and ally in Central America. Our countries have built up rich positive experience of mutual relations. The historic traditions of friendship between them and the fraternal assistance given by our country to the people of Nicaragua when the first FSLN government was in office between 1979 and 1990 are of special significance. It is not only to ties between their governments that the two nations owe their close relationship but also to diverse informal personal contacts

between Russians and Nicaraguans. All of this forms a solid basis for soft power policies in Russian-Nicaraguan relations.

Globally recognized Soviet and Russian scientific, scholarly, cultural, educational, and sporting achievements have always played a special role in our country's relations with Nicaragua. They have underlain Russia's soft power policy toward the Central American country and have always influenced Nicaraguan society, setting examples and guidelines for Nicaraguans to follow.

Russian aid provided free of charge is yet another soft power vehicle. Between 2009 and 2013, 485 medium-sized transit buses manufactured by Russian company KAVZ were handed over to Nicaragua. In 2010, the Rusia Automotriz company presented the Latin American country with 550 Lada cars. Between 2011 and 2013, Russia supplied Nicaragua with 200,000 tons of wheat. Cultural affairs, scientific and scholarly research, and education are one more channel for the exercise of soft power by Russia.

Personal contacts between Russians and Nicaraguans are no less important. Today, not too many Russians visit Nicaragua as tourists or businesspeople, but their numbers are growing steadily. By and large, diversified Russian presence in Nicaragua is a significant form of soft power. It transcends the boundaries of bilateral relations and has serious impacts on Central America as a whole.

Upgrading History: Launch of the EU Project for the Preservation of European Identity

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ON MAY 6, 2017, the House of European History (HEH) opened in the Belgian capital to much fanfare. It is nothing less than a landmark project of the European Union for promoting the history of Eurointegration ideas and EU European values.

The museum was at the same time conceived as a state-of-the-art exhibition that would employ multimedia technologies and the latest achievements in the field of museology; a documentary informational center; and a forum for dialogue between scholars, political scientists, and journalists on topical issues of postwar European history. In the mind of founding father Hans-Gert Pöttering, the museum would be the product of joint efforts between EU institutions and the national museums of EU member countries.

The House of European History resembles, in the opinion of many experts still capable of thinking clearly, a European Narcissus, "isolated, vain, and arrogant," that could be of interest only to the internal market of the EU bureaucracy.

GRADUAL IMMERSION into the museum's exposition leaves a bitter aftertaste. It is hard not to agree with those opponents of the project who complain about the uneven attention given to entire layers of history, and to the exposition's clear biases and shallowness for the sake of promoting the sleek EU concept of European identity. This is especially true of the number of topics that are either inflated out of proportion or are deliberately papered over or consciously swept under the rug.

This "Palace of Propaganda," as some have already succeeded in christening this child of Euro-parliamentarians, accepts that Europe sprang from the womb of the great French Revolution, that the Napoleonic Code and the works of Karl Marx are much more important than the shameful "volume" of European history dealing with slavery and colonialism, and that the World War II is nothing more than a "European civil war."

The media in the West and the countries neighboring the European Union have now been cleansed of the "scourge of Russia." We can hardly expect from them honest publications on the most contentious period of world history in an era of post-truth. The EU elite continues to tear apart the bloodstained fabric of the history of the Second World War, woven from the millions of lives of the great martyr heroes brought up in the crowning era of the "abominable totalitarian past" who vanquished the envy for such a successful centuries-long geopolitical project as Russia.

The International Association of Oil Transporters: A Territory of Professionalism and Trust

Author: M. Margelov

Vice President, PAO Transneft



The main prerequisite for the IAOT's creation was the need for it within the industrial community. Oil transportation is a narrowly specialized sector. It performs the important function of transporting oil from sparsely populated production areas to large agglomerations where oil refining and consumption as fuel and other petrochemical products are concentrated.

The Russian system of trunk oil pipelines is connected to the national oil pipeline systems of our foreign partners, and the tasks before the sector are

also common to all transporters.

The Caspian Pipeline Consortium, which brings together companies from Russia and Kazakhstan, as well as major international oil companies (Chevron, Shell, Exxon Mobil, ENI), has observer status in the association and is considering the possibility of upgrading it to full membership.

The association has created three permanent expert groups: for energy efficiency, supplies and legal issues. Their performance is reviewed at board meetings.

The association is quite young but we can already talk about certain achievements. The success of industrial associations hinges on membership benefits for its participants. In this context, I would like to talk in more detail about the association's expert groups. The permanent experts group for energy efficiency was created on our initiative at a board meeting in Moscow in September 2015.

The U.S. Senate's legislative initiative seeks to impose sanctions on companies that invest in or contribute to increasing Russia's capacity in the construction of pipeline infrastructure ensuring energy export. However, these sanctions do not affect our company. PAO Transneft operates only in the ruble area and receives payments for the transportation of liquid hydrocarbons in line with the tariffs established by the Russian Federal Antimonopoly Service (FAS).

Due to its nonprofit nature, the association is not involved in exchanging goods or services and therefore cannot be a target of sanctions. At the same time, being an independent discussion platform, it offers an opportunity for jointly addressing issues that may arise in the context of sanctions.

The Munich Tragedy: Pondering the Fate of Czechoslovakia

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NATIONAL INTERESTS as a subject that had gone out of fashion in the age of triumphant globalization suddenly reappeared in the center of public discourse stirred up by the prolonged crisis of the Western liberal megaproject. It turned out that the "end of history" that Francis Fukuyama naively presented as a triumph of the America-centrist world was nothing more than another set of worldwide contradictions and a painful transfer to a new, polycentric world order. Back in 2013, one of the authors of *The National Interest*, an influential American journal, put the meaning of the approaching epoch into a nutshell as "The Age of Nationalism."

HISTORY has repeatedly demonstrated that national interests neglected under pressure of external circumstances or by the selfish elites of any country are fraught with national tragedies that echo far and wide across

the world. The Munich Agreement of 1938 (that went down in history as the criminal Munich Deal) signed by the United Kingdom and France with Nazi Germany and fascist Italy to "peacefully" transfer Czechoslovakia to Hitler was one of the links in the long chain of events that led the world into World War II (1939-1945).

In fact, the Munich Agreement, from which the Soviet Union resolutely dissociated itself, marked the highest point of the so-called appeasement policy of the Western powers and the point of no-return on the road to war. The bilateral agreements signed by the UK, France and, much later, the Soviet Union with Hitler Germany to avoid German aggression were its logical continuation.

ON MARCH 9, 1937, the newly appointed ambassador informed Press Secretary of the White House Stephen Early: It is impossible to ignore that fact that the forces to be taken into account in future are ripening here. In peacetime, they will score big economic successes. Today, however, peace is nothing but a dream: Germany and Japan present constant threat.

I will not comment on the enthusiastic crowds that gathered in front of 10 Downing Street to greet "good old Neville" who had acquired Hitler's signature on the Anglo-German declaration of "perpetual peace" that barely survived the next twelve months. The same fully applies to the similar obligations to the French given two months later. People across the ocean were completely satisfied: the president who acted as a peacekeeper never marred himself with an open involvement in a doubtful deal.

The curtain dropped on the Munich tragedy. Barely half a year later, Hitler denounced the agreement and occupied what had remained of Czechoslovakia. Its elite finally, yet too late, realized that it had committed national suicide. Amid the steadily unfolding political crisis in Europe, Moscow had to find its place in the new international context. Deeply wounded by the failure in Czechoslovakia and convinced that he had been fooled, Stalin developed a deep mistrust of Western partners, one of his most typical traits since then.

The Death Toll in the Kuropaty Massacre

Author: A. Dyukov

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THE MASS REPRISALS of 1937-1938 are among the most painful pages of the domestic history of the 20th century. Although 80 years have passed since the tragic events of the Great Terror, the memory of them is still alive. This fall, a monument to victims of political repression, the Wall of Grief, will be erected in Moscow. A memorial will also appear in the Kuropaty forest in Belarus.

It is impossible to disagree with this approach, especially considering that the graves of victims of Soviet executions in Kuropaty are shrouded in a veil of myths and speculation that the Belarussian "opposition" uses for unseemly political purposes. This concerns primarily the number of people buried in the forest on the northeastern outskirts of Minsk. The Belarussian "opposition" claims that as many as 250,000 people executed by the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Af-

fairs) were buried in Kuropaty. However, is that really so?

Information about mass graves in Kuropaty first came to light on June 3, 1988, when an article entitled "Kuropaty: doroga smerti [Kuropaty, the road of death]," written by engineer E. Shmygalev and archeologist Z. Poznyak, was published in the Belarussian newspaper *Litaratura i mastatsva*. The authors said that mass graves of victims of Stalin's political repression had been discovered north of Minsk's Zeleny Lug neighborhood. On the basis of the testimony by local residents, the authors asserted that the executions in Kuropaty were carried out by NKVD almost every day from 1937 through 1941. The article had a bombshell effect.

Unfortunately, the exact number of those buried in unmarked graves in Kuropaty is still shrouded in the mist of assertions and outright lies.

The real number of people executed by firing squad in the republic during the time when that "special zone" was in operation is 28,500. And they were buried not in one place but in 11 different "special zones." However, how many bodies were in fact buried in the forest near Minsk? We will not have an accurate answer until access to the Belarussian KGB's Central Archive is opened. Nevertheless, a well-substantiated assumption may still be made.

No matter how badly the persons seeking to politicize the Kuropaty tragedy would like to exaggerate its scale, not hundreds of thousands and not even tens of thousands of people executed by firing squad were buried in the forest near Minsk. That, however, does not mean that the memory of victims of Stalin's repression should not be honored. The recent statement by Belarussian President A.G. Lukashenko regarding the planned erection of a memorial in Kuropaty is an eloquent testimony that Belarus remembers the 1937-1938 tragedy and its numerous victims. They are also remembered in Russia.

The Situation in the Middle East and the U.S. Perspective on Global Trends

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WE ARE PLEASED to present to the readers of International Affairs the reviews of two analytical reports by the Institute of International Studies (IIS) of the Russian Foreign Ministry's Moscow State Institute (University) of International Relations (MGIMO). The authors of the first report, "A Mid-Term Forecast for the Development of the Situation in the Middle East and North Africa," are A.V. Fedorchenko, director of the IIS Center for Middle East Studies, and A.V. Krylov, its leading research associate. The second report, "The Future Through the Eyes of U.S. Intelligence: An Analytical Review of the National Intelligence Council Report 'Global Trends: The Paradox of Progress'," is written by N.P. Gribin, director of the IIS Center for Northern European and Baltic Studies.

THE AUTHORS of the report "A Mid-Term Forecast for the Development of the Situation in the Middle East and North Africa" note that, during the decades of the productive, substantive and multidimensional dialogue with the majority of countries in the Middle and Near East, Russia has established with them warm, friendly and mutually respectful relations and with some countries, even trust-based relations. Importantly, this applies to countries that not only have no sympathy for each other but are historically divided by deep disagreements and even hatred. Under these circumstances, Moscow was a desirable interlocutor for many countries in the Middle East, capable of making an objective assessment and proposing a constructive solution to the most complicated problems.

Nevertheless, Russia's special role in the Middle East is not to everybody's liking, and there are influential forces - both regional and extraregional - that are interested in significantly weakening Moscow's military-political and economic positions in this extremely complex and volatile part of the world that is rich in natural resources.

Even before the "Arab Spring," the Middle East was a zone of various conflicts while the people living in the region experienced firsthand the consequences of acute socioeconomic, political, environmental and other problems.

To prevent the negative impact of instability in the Middle East on other parts of the world, it is expedient to revisit the "three baskets" format (security, economy and humanitarian cooperation), which served as a foundation of the Helsinki process in Europe. This format, adapted to MENA specifics, could serve as a basis for a new collective security system in the region.

The authors have identified the most likely areas of new wars and conflicts. It seems that in the foreseeable future, Syria and Iraq will remain areas with high potential for conflict, generating new wars and regional security challenges. The Kurdish issue, which has escalated recently, can lead to a new hybrid war in the region, the division of Iraq and Syria, which is predicted by many experts, and the subsequent revision of the existing borders of both states.

The authors pay special attention to evaluating the prospect for the Palestinian issue and problems related to its settlement. This issue should not be allowed to recede to the background.

The situation in the MENA region is of strategic importance to Russia with regard to ensuring its national security, advancing its foreign policy interests and developing economic cooperation with countries in this region.

LET US MOVE to the IIS's second analytical report "The Future through the Eyes of U.S. Intelligence: An Analytical Review of the Report by the National Intelligence Council 'Global Trends: The Paradox of Progress'."

The methodology of long-term strategic forecasting is very much in demand among leading political analysts in the West. This method has gained ground especially in the United States, where in the past decade various research centers have published some noteworthy papers on current global problems. Alvin Toffler, an outstanding American philosopher, sociologist and ideologist of predictive analytics, emphasized the practical significance of such research, believing that futurist research institutions should become part of the governmental structure of "technological societies." It should be noted that this approach is widely and successfully applied in modern American society.

The analytical review of this extensive (226 pages) and informative document, done at a highly professional level by N.P. Gribin, director of the IIS Center for Northern European and Baltic Studies, is of unquestionable interest in terms of the critical evaluation of the U.S. establishment's approaches toward the main global problems, especially in the context of new foreign policy guidelines that are being formulated by the team of the 45th U.S. president.

In his review, N. P. Gribin notes that in many parts of the report its authors refer to it as a "version" and this definition is quite justified because, unlike previous documents of this kind, Global Trends is more tentative, low-key and hypothetical. Essentially, the leitmotif of the entire text of the National Intelligence Council's report is thinking about the future.

For the first time in such studies, NIC analysts sought to make a brief analysis of global development processes in the context of the paradox of this development. This paradox is as follows. The achievements of the industrial and information ages are shaping the world to come that is both more dangerous and richer with opportunity than ever before.

N.P. Gribin notes that, according to NIC analysts, the threat from terrorism will expand in the coming decades as the small groups and individuals affiliated with it will use new technologies, ideas, and relationships to their advantage.

The reviewer believes that the prediction made in the report to the effect that the threat posed by nuclear and other forms of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) will probably increase is well-substantiated. Specific nuclear weapon states will almost certainly continue to maintain, if not modernize, their nuclear forces out to 2035. Nuclear sabre-rattling by North Korea and uncertainty over Iran's intentions could drive others to pursue nuclear capabilities.

N.P. Gribin shares the NIC experts' concern about the fact that a changing climate, increasing stress on environmental and natural resources, and deepening connection between human and animal health reflect complex systemic risks that will outpace existing approaches.

The reviewer draws a number of well-substantiated conclusions. In particular, N.P. Gribin notes that the NIC experts failed to - or most likely did not set themselves the task of preserving objectivity and impartiality in exploring a number of problems that are relevant today, as well as in the short term and the long term, especially those that include a political dimension. And this despite the fact that, as National Intelligence Council Chairman Gregory Treverton noted in his letter, as always, the NIC has used the experience of numerous independent experts in various fields.

Latvia: Different Faces of Independence

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TODAY, Latvia (officially Latvijas Republika or the Republic of Latvia) is at the second stage of its state independence that began in 1991 even if Latvian politicians prefer different dates.

Latvia, that had been part of the Russian Empire and, before that, part of other states, became independent for the first time in its history on December 22, 1918 on the strength of the Decree of the Council of People's Deputies of the RSFSR. It was several years later, on January 26, 1921, that

Western Europe (the UK and France) recognized the independent Latvian state. The first stage of Latvia's independence lasted from 1918 to 1940 when Latvia joined the Soviet Union.

Today, Latvian officials insist that in 1991 Latvia did not acquire independence: its independence was restored, which makes Latvia, as we know it today, the successor of the country that existed in 1918-1940. From the legal point of view, in both cases Latvia became independent thanks to Russia's goodwill.

The anti-Russian agenda of the Baltic states has been based on four points. First, Russia's foreign policy in the Baltics is allegedly geared at reconquering the Baltic states; second, the Baltic countries are the barrier that protects Europe from Russia; third, disdainful criticism of Russia's internal and external policies is nothing more than a repetition of the Western traditional and newly invented claims to Russia; fourth, demands that Russia should pay for what is called "occupation," by which the Baltic states mean the period between 1940 and 1991 when they were part of the Soviet Union.

This explains why certain Western, Baltic and Russian analysts and even common people are inclined to think about the confrontationist feelings against Russia in the Baltic countries as genetic. This opinion is in high demand with the Baltic rulers as an argument (albeit, a false one) that explains the anti-Russian politics to their population and the international community.

The relations between the Baltic countries and Germany are no less interesting. Latvian diplomats pointed out that Germany regularly spread disinformation about a rapprochement between the Soviet Union and the Baltic counties trying to fan disagreements between them, to cool down their relations with London and Paris and to draw them closer to Berlin.

On the whole, the interwar period of independence of the Baltic states that is almost as long as the post-Soviet period shows that Russophobia and rejection of sovereignty in favor of a military bloc have a reasonable and advantageous alternative in the form of decent neighborly relations, neutrality and cooperation.

Any attentive reader of the Latvian diplomatic documents will inevitably arrive at a conclusion that a comprehensive comparative study of Latvia as we know it today and of the same country in 1918-1940 is advisable or even necessary. This analysis will also produce an answer to the question: To what extent are the statements of historical continuity of the Latvian statehood justified?

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