

NATO Threatens Russia, “We are Rolling into A New Cold War”. Speech by Russia’s Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev

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Emphasis added by Global Research

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished colleague Mr Valls, distinguished Mr Ischinger, my speech will be of a more general nature, but I hope it will be useful.

The first cold war ended 25 years ago. This is not long in terms of history, but it is a considerable period for individual people and even for generations. And it is certainly sufficient for assessing our common victories and losses, setting new goals and, of course, avoiding a repetition of past mistakes.

The Munich Security Conference has been known as a venue for heated and frank discussion. This is my first time here. Today I’d like to tell you about Russia’s assessment of the current European security situation and possible solutions to our common problems, which have been aggravated by the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West.

Before coming to this conference, I met with President Putin. We talked about his speech at the Munich conference in 2007. He said then that ideological stereotypes, double standards and unilateral actions do not ease but only fan tensions in international relations, reducing the international community’s opportunities for adopting meaningful political decisions.

Did we overstate this? Were our assessments of the situation too pessimistic? Unfortunately, I have to say that the situation is now even worse than we feared. Developments have taken a much more dramatic turn since 2007. The concept of Greater Europe has not materialised. Economic growth has been very weak. Conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa have increased in scale. The migration crisis is pushing Europe towards collapse. Relations between Europe and Russia have soured. A civil war is raging in Ukraine.

In this context, we need to launch an intensive dialogue on the future architecture of Euro-Atlantic security, global stability and regional threats more than ever before. I consider it unacceptable that this dialogue has almost ceased in many spheres. The problem of miscommunication has been widely recognised both in Western Europe and in Russia. The mechanisms that allowed us to promptly settle mutual concerns have been cut off. Moreover, we’ve lost our grasp of the culture of mutual arms control, which we used for a long time as the basis for strengthening mutual trust. Partnership initiatives, which took much time and effort to launch, are expiring one by one. The proposed European security

treaty has been put on hold. The idea of a Russia-EU Committee on Foreign Policy and Security, which I discussed with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Meseberg, has not materialised. We believe that NATO's policy towards Russia remains unfriendly and generally obdurate.

Speaking bluntly, we are rapidly rolling into a period of a new cold war. Russia has been presented as well-nigh the biggest threat to NATO, or to Europe, America and other countries (and Mr Stoltenberg has just demonstrated that). They show frightening films about Russians starting a nuclear war. I am sometimes confused: is this 2016 or 1962?

But the real threats to this small world are of an absolutely different nature, as I hope you will admit. The term "European security" is now more embracing than it used to be. Forty years ago it concerned above all military and political relations in Europe. But new issues have come to the fore since then, such as sustainable economic development, inequality and poverty, unprecedented migration, new forms of terrorism and regional conflicts, including in Europe. I am referring to Ukraine, the volatile Balkans, and Moldova that is teetering on the brink of a national collapse.

The cross-border threats and challenges, which we for a while believed to have been overcome, have returned with a new strength. The new threats, primarily terrorism and extremism, have lost their abstract form for the majority of people. They have become reality for millions in many countries. As Mr Valls has just mentioned, they have become a daily threat. We can expect an airplane to be blown up or people in a café to be shot every day. These used to be everyday events in the Middle East, but now it's the same the world over.

We see that economic, social and military challenges have become mutually complementary. But we continue to act randomly, inconsistently, and in many cases exclusively in our own national interests. Or a scapegoat is appointed in an arbitrary manner.

I am offering you five theses on security as such.

First, the economy.

We have approached a change in paradigm in international economic relations. The traditional schemes are no longer effective. Political expediency is taking priority over simple and clear economic reason. The code of conduct is revised ad hoc to suit a specific problem or task or is bluntly ignored. I'll just point out how the International Monetary Fund adjusted its fundamental rules on lending to countries with overdue sovereign debt when the issue concerned Ukraine's sovereign debt to Russia.

Talks on creating economic mega-blocs could result in the erosion of the system of global economic rules.

Globalisation, which was a desired objective, has to a certain extent played a cruel joke on us. I personally talked about this with my colleagues at the G8 meetings when everyone needed them. But times change rapidly. Even a minor economic shift in one country now hits whole markets and countries almost immediately. And global regulation mechanisms cannot effectively balance national interests.

The energy market remains extremely unstable. Its volatility has affected both importers

and exporters.

We regret that the practice of unilateral economic pressure in the form of sanctions is gaining momentum. Decisions are taken arbitrarily and at times in violation of international law. This is undermining the operating foundations of international economic organisations, including the World Trade Organisation. We have always said, I have always said that sanctions hit not only those against whom they are imposed but also those who use them as an instrument of pressure. How many joint initiatives have been suspended because of sanctions! I have just met with German businessmen and we discussed this issue. Have we properly calculated not only the direct but also the indirect costs for European and Russian business? Are our differences really so deep, or are they not worth it? All of you here in this audience – do you really need this?

This is a road to nowhere. Everyone will suffer, mark my words. It is vitally important that we join forces to strengthen a new global system that can combine the principles of effectiveness and fairness, market openness and social protection.

Second, the crisis of the global economic development model is creating conditions for a variety of conflicts, including regional conflicts.

European politicians thought that the creation of the so-called belt of friendly countries on the outer border of the EU would reliably guarantee security. But what are the results of this policy? What you have is not a belt of friendly countries, but an exclusion zone with local conflicts and economic trouble both on the eastern borders (Ukraine and Moldova) and on the southern borders (the Middle East and North Africa, Libya and Syria).

The result is that these regions have become a common headache for all of us.

The Normandy format has helped us launch negotiations on Ukraine. We believe that there are no better instruments for a peaceful settlement than the Minsk Agreements.

We welcome France's balanced and constructive stance on Ukraine and on all other acute international issues. I fully agree with Mr Valls that the Russian-French dialogue never stopped, and that it has produced concrete results.

It is true that all sides must comply with the Minsk Agreements. But implementation primarily depends on Kiev. Why them? Not because we are trying to shift responsibility, but because it's their time.

The situation is very unstable, despite progress made in a number of areas (heavy weaponry withdrawal, the OSCE mission and other issues).

What is Russia's biggest concern?

First and most important, a comprehensive ceasefire is not being observed in southeastern Ukraine. Shooting is routinely reported at the line of contact, which should not be happening. And we must send a clear signal to all the parties involved, in this regard.

Second, amendments to the Ukrainian Constitution have not been approved to this day, although this should have been done by the end of 2015. And the law on a special status for Donbass has not been implemented.

Instead of coordinating specific decentralisation parameters with the regions, and this is the crucial issue, Ukraine has adopted so-called “transitional provisions,” even though the above requirements were put in black and white in the Minsk Agreements.

Third, Kiev continues to insist that local elections be based on a new Ukrainian law. Furthermore, Kiev has not implemented its commitment on a broad amnesty that should embrace all those who were involved in the developments in Ukraine in 2014-2015. Without being amnestied, these people will be unable to participate in elections, which will make any election results questionable. The OSCE will not endorse this.

As I said, the Minsk Agreements must be implemented in full and this is Russia’s stance on the issue. At the same time, being reasonable people open to discussing various ideas, including a compromise, we, for instance, accepted the initiative of Mr Steinmeier on the temporary application of the law on special status as soon as the election campaign begins. After the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights recognises the election results, this law must be applied permanently. But there’s still no progress here, despite the compromise suggested.

Of course, the humanitarian situation is extremely alarming. The economy of southeastern Ukraine is deteriorating, that part of Ukraine is blockaded, and the German Chancellor’s initiative on the restoration of the banking system in the region there has been rejected. Tens of thousands of people are living on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe.

Oddly, Russia seems to be more concerned about this than Ukraine, why is this so? We have been sending and will have to continue sending humanitarian convoys to southeastern Ukraine.

I must say that Russia has shown and will continue to show reasonable flexibility in the implementation of the Minsk Agreements where this doesn’t contradict their essence. But we can’t do what is not in our competence. That is, we cannot implement the political and legal obligations of the Kiev government. This is under the direct authority of the President, the Government and the Parliament of Ukraine. But unfortunately, it appears that they don’t have the will or a desire to do it. I think this has become obvious to everyone.

As for Syria, we have been working and will continue to work to implement joint peace initiatives. This is a difficult path, but there is no alternative to an interethnic and interreligious dialogue. We must preserve Syria as a union state and prevent its dissolution for denominational reasons. The world will not survive another Libya, Yemen or Afghanistan. The consequences of this scenario will be catastrophic for the Middle East. The work of the International Syria Support Group gives us a certain hope. They gathered here the day before yesterday and coordinated a list of practical measures aimed at implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 2254, including the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians and outlining the conditions for a ceasefire, except for terrorist groups, of course. The implementation of these measures is to be led by Russia and the United States. I would like to emphasise that the daily work of the Russian and American militaries is the key here. I’m talking about regular work without the need to seek incidental contacts, day-to-day work, everyday work.

Of course, there should be no preliminary conditions to start the talks on the settlement between the Syrian government and opposition, and there is no need to impend anyone with a land military operation.

Third, we sincerely believe that if we fail to normalise the situation in Syria and other conflict areas, terrorism will become a new form of war that will spread around the world. It will not be just a new form of war but a method of settling ethnic and religious conflict, and a form of quasi-state governance. Imagine a group of countries that are governed by terrorists through terrorism. Is this the 21st century?

It is common knowledge that terrorism is not a problem within individual countries. Russia first raised this alarm two decades ago. We tried to convince our partners that the core causes were not just ethnic or religious differences. Take ISIS, whose ideology is not based on Islamic values but on a blood-thirsty desire to kill and destroy. Terrorism is civilisation's problem. It's either us or them, and it's time for everyone to realise this. There are no nuances or undertones, no justifications for terrorist actions, no dividing terrorists into ours or theirs, into moderate or extremist.

The destruction of the Russian plane over Sinai, the terrorist attacks in Paris, London, Israel, Lebanon, Pakistan, Iraq, Mali, Yemen and other countries, the grisly executions of hostages, thousands of victims, and endless other threats are evidence that international terrorism defies state borders. Terrorists and extremists are trying to spread their influence not only throughout the Middle East and North Africa but also to the whole of Central Asia. Unfortunately, they have so far been successful, mostly because we are unable to set our differences aside and to really join forces against them. Even cooperation at the security services level has been curtailed. And this is ridiculous, like we don't want to work with you. Daesh should be grateful to my colleagues, the leaders of the Western countries who have suspended this cooperation.

Before coming to this conference, I read much material, including some by Western experts. Even those who don't think positively about Russia admit that, despite our differences, the "anti-terrorist formula" will not be effective without Russia. On the other hand, they sometimes frame this conclusion in an overall correct, but slightly different way, saying that a weak Russia is even more dangerous than a strong Russia.

Fourth, regional conflicts and terrorism are closely related to the unprecedentedly large issue of uncontrolled migration. This could be described as a great new transmigration of peoples and the culmination of the numerous problems of modern global development. It has affected not only Western Europe but also Russia. The inflow of migrants from Syria to Russia is not very large, but the inflow of migrants from Ukraine has become a serious problem. Over a million Ukrainian refugees have entered Russia over the past 18 months.

Wars and related deprivations, inequality, low standards of living, violence, and fanaticism force people to flee their homes. Unsuccessful attempts to spread Western models of democracy to a social environment that is not suited for this have resulted in the demise of entire states and have turned huge territories into zones of hostility. I remember how my colleagues once rejoiced at the so-called Arab Spring. I literally witnessed it. But has modern democracy taken root in these countries? Looks like it has, but in the form of ISIS.

Human capital is degenerating in the countries the refugees are leaving. And these countries' development prospects have taken a downward turn. The ongoing migration crisis is rapidly acquiring the features of a humanitarian catastrophe, at least in some parts of Europe. Social problems are growing too, along with mutual intolerance and xenophobia. Not to mention the fact that hundreds and thousands of extremists enter Europe under the guise of being refugees. Other migrants are people of an absolutely different culture who

only want to receive monetary benefits without doing anything to earn them. This poses a very real danger to the common economic space. The next targets will be the cultural space and even the European identity. We watch with regret how invaluable mechanisms, which Russia also needs, are being destroyed. I am referring to the actual collapse of the Schengen zone.

For our part, we are willing to do our best to help address the migration issue, including by contributing to efforts to normalise the situation in the conflict regions from which the majority of refugees come, Syria among them.

And fifth, let's be as honest as possible. The majority of these challenges did not develop yesterday. And they were definitely not invented in Russia. Yet we haven't learned to react to these challenges properly or even proactively. This is why the bulk of resources go into dealing with the consequences, often without identifying the root cause. Or we invest our energy not in fighting the real evil, but in deterring our neighbours, and this problem has just been voiced here. The West continues to actively use this deterrence doctrine against Russia. The fallacy of this approach is that we will still be debating the same issues in 10 and even 20 years. Provided there will be anything to debate about, of course, as discussions are not on the agenda of the Great Caliphate.

Opinions on the prospects for cooperation with Russia differ. Opinions also differ in Russia. But can we unite in order to stand up against the challenges I mentioned above? Yes, I am confident that we can. Yesterday we witnessed a perfect example in the area of religion. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Pope of the Catholic Church Francis met in Cuba following hundreds of years when the two churches did not communicate. Of course, restoring trust is a challenging task. It's difficult to say how long it would take. But it is necessary to launch this process. And this must be done without any preliminary conditions. Either all of us need to do this or none of us. In the latter case, there will be no cooperation.

We often differ in our assessments of the events that took place over the past two years. However, I want to emphasise that they don't differ as much as they did 40 years ago when we signed the Final Helsinki Act and when Europe was literally divided by The Wall. When old phobias prevailed, we were deadlocked. When we managed to join forces, we succeeded. There is much evidence to support this. We managed to agree on the reduction of strategic offensive weapons, which was a breakthrough achievement. We have worked out a compromise solution regarding Iran's nuclear programme. We have convinced all sides in the Syrian conflict to sit down at the negotiating table in Geneva. We have coordinated actions against pirates. And the Climate Change Conference was held in Paris last year. We should replicate these positive outcomes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The current architecture of European security, which was built on the ruins of World War II, allowed us to avoid global conflicts for more than 70 years. The reason for this was that this architecture was built on principles that were clear to everyone at that time, primarily the undeniable value of human life. We paid a high price for these values. But our shared tragedy forced us to rise above our political and ideological differences in the name of peace. It's true that this security system has its issues and that it sometimes malfunctions. But do we need one more, third global tragedy to understand that what we need is cooperation rather than confrontation?

I'd like to quote from John F. Kennedy, who used very simple but the most appropriate words, "Domestic policy can only defeat us; foreign policy can kill us." In the early 1960s the world stood at the door of a nuclear apocalypse, but the two rivalling powers found the courage to admit that no political confrontation was worth the human lives.

I believe that we have become wiser and more experienced and more responsible. And we are not divided by ideological phantoms and stereotypes. I believe that the challenges we are facing today will not lead to conflict but rather will encourage us to come together in a fair and equal union that will allow us to maintain peace for another 70 years, at least.

Thank you.

Excerpts from replies to questions by journalists

Question: My name is Mingus Campbell, I am from the United Kingdom. My question is addressed to Prime Minister Medvedev. Is it accepted in Russia that increased influence in Syria brings with it responsibility for all of the citizens of Syria? And if that is so, how has that responsibility been exercised in respect of the citizens of Aleppo who are now fleeing in such numbers?

Dmitry Medvedev: Thank you. I will continue answering questions concerning Syria, including the situation in Aleppo, but not limited to that.

I think a large part of the people present here have never been to Syria, whereas I have been there. I made an official visit there when Syria was a quiet, peaceful, secular nation, where life was stable and balanced for everybody: the Sunnis and the Shiites, the Druze, Alawites and Christians.

Almost six years have passed since then. Today we see Syria that is torn by a civil war. Let us ask a question: who is to blame for that? Is it al-Assad alone? It is absolutely evident that without a certain external influence Syria could have gone on with its life. But I remember those talks, those conversations with my partners, both European and American, who kept on telling me the same thing over and over: al-Assad is no good, he should step down, and then peace and prosperity will reign there. And what has come of it? It resulted in a civil war.

This is the reason I cannot but agree with my colleague, Prime Minister Valls, in that we must join efforts to solve this issue, but we must work effectively, not just watch as events unfold there, not just watch one party attack another; not divide the warring parties into those who are on our side and adversaries, but instead sit them all down at the negotiating table, except those who we have agreed to treat as real terrorists. We know who they are.

Russia is not pursuing any special goals there except the ones that have been declared. We are defending our national interests because a large number of militants fighting there came from Russia and neighbouring countries, and they can come back to wage terrorist attacks. They must stay there...

This does not apply to civilians in any way. Unlike most of the countries present in the region, we have been helping civilians. Nobody has any proof that we have been bombing civilian targets there, even though they keep on talking about it, about wrong targets and so forth. They do not share information. I have just said this from the stand - the military must keep in constant contact. They should call each other a dozen times a day. Otherwise there

will always be skirmishes and conflicts. And this is our mission. We are ready for such cooperation. I expect that we will see some positive development from the dialogue we had here in terms of both achieving a ceasefire in Syria and the humanitarian issues. It is crucial that we should agree on key points, because otherwise, and I think it is no secret for anyone, Syria will split into separate parts, the way it happened to Libya and the way it is in fact happening with a number of other nations in the region. What does that entail? It poses a threat of the conflict becoming permanent. The civil war will go on, Daesh or its successors will always be there, while we will engage in arguments as we try to figure out which of them is good and which is bad, who should receive our support and who shouldn't. We have a common enemy, and that is the premise we should start with.

Now I would like to come back to the topic of Ukraine. I cannot assess the past developments in Ukraine; the Russian leadership has already done this a number of times, including myself. I will answer the part of the question regarding the air crash investigation. Obviously, the Russian Federation is no less interested in an unbiased investigation than the countries whose citizens lost their lives in the crash. It is indeed an enormous tragedy. But even the tone of the question implies that the person asking it has already decided who is responsible, who should bear the legal responsibility, no investigation is needed, certain justice committees should be set up instead and certain legal procedures followed. But this is not the way it is done. This should be a regular comprehensive investigation that would cover all the relevant aspects. This is the first point. And second, this is unfortunately not the first case in the world of this kind. Such tragedies have never been dealt with by criminal courts or other similar agencies. These are issues of a different order. And this is what we have to agree on. Russia is ready to provide any information to contribute to a quality investigation.

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