

Russia and the EU: “Business as Usual” Is Over

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Sergey Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister, is the world's foremost diplomat. The son of an Armenian father and a Russian mother, he's just on another level altogether. Here, once again, we may be able to see why.

Let's start with the annual meeting of the [Valdai Club](#), Russia's premier think tank. Here we may follow the [must-watch presentation](#) of the Valdai annual report on “The Utopia of a Diverse World”, featuring, among others, Lavrov, John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago, Dominic Lieven of the University of Cambridge and Yuri Slezkine of UCLA/Berkeley.

It's a rarity to be able to share what amounts to a Himalayan peak in terms of serious political debate. We have, for instance, Lieven – who, half in jest, defined the Valdai report as “Tolstoyian, a little anarchical” – focusing on the current top two, great interlocking challenges: climate change and the fact that “350 years of Western and 250 years of Anglo-American predominance are coming to an end.”

As we see the “present world order fading in front of our eyes”, Lieven notes a sort of “revenge of the Third World”. But then, alas, Western prejudice sets in all over again, as he defines China reductively as a “challenge”.

Mearsheimer neatly remembers we have lived, successively, under a bipolar, unipolar and now multipolar world: with China, Russia and the US, “Great Power Politics is back on the table.”

He correctly assesses that after the dire experience of the “century of humiliation, the Chinese will make sure they are really powerful.” And that will set the stage for the US to deploy a “highly-aggressive containment policy”, just like it did against the USSR, that “may well end up in a shooting match”.

“I trust Arnold more than the EU”

Lavrov, in his introductory remarks, had [explained](#) that in realpolitik terms, the world “cannot be run from one center alone.” He took time to stress the “meticulous, lengthy and sometimes ungrateful” work of diplomacy.

It was later, in one of his interventions, that he unleashed the [real bombshell](#) (starting at 1:15:55; in Russian, overdubbed in English): “When the European Union is speaking as a superior, Russia wants to know, can we do any business with Europe?”

He mischievously quotes Schwarzenegger, “who in his movies always said ‘Trust me’. So I trust Arnold more than the European Union”.



And that leads to the definitive punch line: “The people who are responsible for foreign policy in the West do not understand the necessity of mutual respect in dialogue. And then probably for some time we have to stop talking to them.” After all, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen had stated, on the record, that for the EU, “there is no geopolitical partnership with modern Russia”.

Lavrov went even further in a stunning, [wide-ranging interview](#) with Russian radio stations whose translation deserves to be carefully read in full.

Here is just one of the most crucial snippets:

Lavrov: “No matter what we do, the West will try to hobble and restrain us, and undermine our efforts in the economy, politics, and technology. These are all elements of one approach.”

Question: “Their national security strategy states that they will do so.”

Lavrov: “Of course it does, but it is articulated in a way that decent people can still let go unnoticed, but it is being implemented in a manner that is nothing short of outrageous.”

Question: You, too, can articulate things in a way that is different from what you would really like to say, correct?”

Lavrov: “It’s the other way round. I can use the language I’m not usually using to get the point across. However, they clearly want to throw us off balance, and not only by direct attacks on Russia in all possible and conceivable spheres by way of unscrupulous competition, illegitimate sanctions and the like, but also by unbalancing the situation near our borders, thus preventing us from focusing on creative activities. Nevertheless, regardless of the human instincts and the temptations to respond in the same vein, I’m convinced that we must abide by international law.”

Moscow stands unconditionally by international law – in contrast with the proverbial “rules of the liberal international order” jargon parroted by NATO and its minions such as the Atlantic Council.

And [here it is all over again](#), a report extolling NATO to “Ramp Up on Russia”, blasting Moscow’s “aggressive disinformation and propaganda campaigns against the West, and unchecked adventurism in the Middle East, Africa, and Afghanistan.”

The Atlantic Council insists on how those pesky Russians have once again defied “the international community by using an illegal chemical weapon to poison opposition leader Alexei Navalny. NATO’s failure to halt Russia’s aggressive behavior puts the future of the liberal international order at risk.”

Only fools falling for the blind leading the blind syndrome don’t know that these liberal order “rules” are set by the Hegemon alone, and can be changed in a flash according to the Hegemon’s whims.

So it’s no wonder a running joke in Moscow is “if you don’t listen to Lavrov, you will listen to Shoigu.” Sergey Shoigu is Russia’s Minister of Defense, supervising all those hypersonic weapons the US industrial-military complex can only dream about.

The crucial point is even with so much NATO-engendered hysteria, Moscow could not give a damn because of its de facto military supremacy. And that freaks Washington and Brussels out even more.

What’s left is Hybrid War eruptions following the [RAND corporation-prescribed](#) non-stop harassment and “unbalancing” of Russia, in Belarus, the southern Caucasus and Kyrgyzstan – complete with sanctions on Lukashenko and on Kremlin officials for the Navalny “poisoning”.

“You do not negotiate with monkeys”

What Lavrov just made it quite explicit was a long time in the making. “Modern Russia” and the EU were born almost at the same time. On a personal note, I experienced it in an extraordinary fashion. “Modern Russia” was born in December 1991 – when I was on the road in India, then Nepal and China. When I arrived in Moscow via the Trans-Siberian in February 1992, the USSR was no more. And then, flying back to Paris, I arrived at a European Union born in that same February.

One of Valdai’s leaders [correctly argues](#) that the daring concept of a “Europe stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok” coined by Gorbachev in 1989, right before the collapse of the USSR, unfortunately “had no document or agreement to back it up.”

And yes, “Putin searched diligently for an opportunity to implement the partnership with the EU and to further rapprochement. This continued from 2001 until as late as 2006.”

We all remember when Putin, in 2010, proposed exactly the same concept, a common house [from Lisbon to Vladivostok](#), and was flatly rebuffed by the EU. It’s very important to remember this was four years before the Chinese would finalize their own concept of the New Silk Roads.

Afterwards, the only way was down. The final Russia-EU summit took place in Brussels in January 2014 – an eternity in politics.

The fabulous intellectual firepower gathered at the Valdai is very much aware that the Iron Curtain 2.0 between Russia and the EU simply won’t disappear.

And all this while the IMF, The Economist and even that [Thucydides fallacy proponent](#) admit that China is already, in fact, the world's top economy.

Russia and China share an enormously long border. They are engaged in a complex, multi-vector "comprehensive strategic partnership". That did not develop because the estrangement between Russia and the EU/NATO forced Moscow to pivot East, but mostly because the alliance between the world's neighboring top economy and top military power makes total Eurasian sense - geopolitically and geoeconomically.



And that totally corroborates Lieven's diagnosis of the end of "250 years of Anglo-American predominance."

It was up to inestimable military analyst Andrey Martyanov, whose latest book I reviewed as a [must read](#), to come up with the utmost [deliciously devastating](#) assessment of Lavrov's "We had enough" moment:

"Any professional discussion between Lavrov and former gynecologist [actually epidemiologist] such as von der Leyen, including Germany's Foreign Minister Maas, who is a lawyer and a party worm of German politics is a waste of time. Western "elites" and "intellectuals" are simply on a different, much lower level, than said Lavrov. You do not negotiate with monkeys, you treat them nicely, you make sure that they are not abused, but you don't negotiate with them, same as you don't negotiate with toddlers. They want to have their Navalny as their toy - let them. I call on Russia to start wrapping economic activity up with EU for a long time. They buy Russia's hydrocarbons and hi-tech, fine. Other than that, any other activity should be dramatically reduced and necessity of the Iron Curtain must not be doubted anymore."

As much as Washington is not "agreement-capable", in the words of President Putin, so is the EU, says Lavrov: "We should stop to orient ourselves toward European partners and care about their assessments."

Not only Russia knows it: the overwhelming majority of the Global South also knows it.

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