



Putin's 'civilizational' speech frames conflict between east and west

Description

Russian President Vladimir Putin's much awaited address to the Russian Federal Assembly on Tuesday should be interpreted as a tour de force of sovereignty.

The address, significantly, marked the first anniversary of Russia's official recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, only a few hours before 22 February, 2022. In myriad ways, what happened a year ago also marked the birth of the real, 21st century multipolar world.

Then two days later, Moscow launched the Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine to defend said republics.

Cool, calm, collected, without a hint of aggression, Putin's speech painted Russia as an ancient, independent, and quite distinct civilization – sometimes following a path in concert with other civilizations, sometimes in divergence.

Ukraine, part of Russian civilization, now happens to be occupied by western civilization, which Putin said "became hostile to us," like in a few instances in the past. So the acute phase of what is essentially a war by proxy of the west against Russia takes place over the body of Russian civilization.

That explains Putin's clarification that "Russia is an open country, but an independent civilization – we do not consider ourselves superior but we inherited our civilization from our ancestors and we must pass it on."

A war dilacerating the body of Russian civilization is a serious existential business. Putin also made clear that "Ukraine is being used as a tool and testing ground by the west against Russia." Thus the inevitable follow-up: "The more long-range weapons are sent to Ukraine, the longer we have to push the threat away from our borders."

Translation: this war will be long – and painful. There will be no swift victory with minimal loss of blood. The next moves around the Dnieper may take years to solidify. Depending on whether US policy continues to cleave to neo-con and neoliberal objectives, the frontline may be displaced to Lviv. Then German politics may change. Normal trade with France and Germany may be recovered only by the

end of the next decade.

Kremlin exasperation: START is finished

All that brings us to the games played by the Empire of Lies. Says Putin: “The promises...of western rulers turned into forgery and cruel lies. The west supplied weapons, trained nationalist battalions. Even before the start of the SMO, there were negotiations...on the supply of air defense systems... We remember Kyiv’s attempts to obtain nuclear weapons.”

Putin made it clear, once again, that the element of trust between Russia and the west, especially the US, is gone. So it’s a natural decision for Russia to “withdraw from the treaty on strategic offensive weapons, but we don’t do it officially. For now we are only halting our participation to the START treaty. No US inspections in our nuclear sites can be allowed.”

As an aside, of the three main US-Russian weapons treaties, Washington abandoned two of these: The Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty was dumped by the administration of former president George W. Bush in 2002, and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty was nixed by former president Donald Trump in 2019.

This shows the Kremlin’s degree of exasperation. Putin is even prepared to order the Ministry of Defense and Rosatom to get ready to test Russian nuclear weapons if the US goes first along the same road.

If that’s the case, Russia will be forced to completely break parity in the nuclear sphere, and abandon the moratorium on nuclear testing and cooperation with other nations when it comes to the production of nuclear weapons. So far, the US and NATO game consisted in opening a little window allowing them to inspect Russian nuclear sites.

With his judo move, Putin returns the pressure onto the White House.

The US and NATO will not be exactly thrilled when Russia starts testing its new strategic weapons, especially the post-doomsday Poseidon – the largest nuclear-powered torpedo ever deployed, capable of triggering terrifying radioactive ocean swells.

On the economic front: Bypassing the US dollar is the essential play towards multipolarity. During his speech, Putin made a point to extol the resilience of the Russian economy: “Russian GDP in 2022 decreased only by 2.1 percent, estimates of the opposing side did not become reality, they said 15, 20 percent.” That resilience gives Russia enough room to “work with partners to make the system of international settlements independent of the US dollar and other western currencies. The dollar will lose its universal role.”

On geoeconomics: Putin went all out in praise of economic corridors, from West Asia to South Asia: “New corridors, transport routes will be built towards the East, this is the region where we will focus our development, new highways to Kazakhstan and China, new North-South corridor to Pakistan, Iran.”

And those will connect to Russia developing “the ports of the Black and Azov Seas, it’s necessary to build logistics corridors within the country.” The result will be a progressive interconnection with the International North South Transportation Corridor (INSTC) whose principals include Iran and India, and

eventually China's mega-trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

China's plan for global security

It's inevitable that apart from sketching several state policies geared towards Russia's internal development – one might even compare them to socialist policies – a great deal of Putin's address had to focus on the NATO vs. Russia war till-the-last-Ukrainian.

Putin remarked on how “our relations with the west have degraded, and this is entirely the fault of the United States;” how NATO's goal is to inflict a “strategic defeat” on Russia; and how the warmongering frenzy had forced him, a week ago, to sign a decree “putting new ground-based strategic complexes on combat duty.”

So it's no accident that the US ambassador was immediately summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs right after Putin's address.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told Ambassador Lynne Tracey in no uncertain terms that Washington must take concrete measures: among them, to remove all US and NATO military forces and equipment away from Ukraine. In a stunning move, he demanded a detailed explanation of the destruction of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines, as well as a halt to US interference in an independent inquiry to identify the responsible parties.

Keeping the momentum in Moscow, top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi met with secretary of Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, before talking to Lavrov and Putin. Patrushev remarked, “the course towards developing a strategic partnership with China is an absolute priority for Russia's foreign policy.” Wang Yi, not so cryptically, added, “Moscow and Beijing need to synchronize their watches.”

The Americans are doing everything to try and pre-empt the Chinese proposal for a de-escalation in Ukraine. China's plan should be presented this Friday, and there's a serious risk Beijing may fall into a trap set by the western plutocracy.

Too many Chinese “concessions” to Russia, and not as many to Ukraine, may be spun to drive a wedge between Moscow and Beijing (Divide and Rule, which is always the US Plan A. There's no Plan B).

Sensing the waters, the Chinese themselves decided to take the offensive, presenting a Global Security Initiative Concept Paper.

The problem is Beijing still attributes too much clout to a toothless UN, when they refer to “formulating a New Agenda for Peace and other proposals put forth in Our Common Agenda by the UN Secretary-General.”

Same when Beijing upholds the consensus that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” Try to explain that to the Straussian neo-con psychos in the Beltway, who know nothing about war, much less nuclear ones.

The Chinese affirm the necessity to “comply with the joint statement on preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms races issued by leaders of the five nuclear-weapon states in January 2022.” And to “strengthen dialogue and cooperation among nuclear-weapon states to reduce the risk of nuclear war.”

Bets can be made that Patrushev explained in detail to Wang Yi how that is just wishful thinking. The “logic “of the current collective western “leadership” has been expressed, among others, by irredeemable mediocrity Jens Stoltenberg, NATO’s secretary-general: even nuclear war is preferable to a Russian victory in Ukraine.

Putin’s measured but firm address has made it clear that the stakes keep getting higher. And it all revolves on how deep Russia’s – and China’s – “strategic ambiguity” are able to petrify a paranoid west flirting with mushroom clouds.

by Pepe Escobar

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