

## PUTIN AT VALDAI

# The World Is Becoming a Synergy of Civilization-States

by Daniel Platt and Dennis Small

Oct. 14—Over the past two decades, the Valdai Discussion Club has emerged as a preeminent Russian think tank. Its annual conferences are attended by political leaders, academics, and others from around the world. Their 20th Annual Meeting, titled “Fair Multipolarity: How to Ensure Security and Development for Everyone,” was held in Sochi on October 2–5, 2023.

Every year, the Club’s conferences are addressed by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Putin spoke on the concluding day of this year’s conference, after which he participated in a question and answer session which lasted over three hours, something which he frequently does. (It is difficult to imagine a Western politician delivering unscripted comments in public for more than a few minutes.)

In his initial presentation, Putin succinctly summarized the present strategic situation:

When we met for the first time at the Club’s meeting nearly 20 years ago, our country was entering a new stage in its development. Russia was emerging from an extremely difficult period of convalescence after the Soviet Union’s dissolution. We launched the process of building a new and what we saw as a more just world order, energetically and with good will. It is a boon that our country can make a huge contribution because we have things to offer to our friends, partners, and the world as a whole.

Regrettably, our interest in constructive interaction was misunderstood, was seen as obedi-



kremlin.ru

*The 20th Annual Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club convened with 140 experts, politicians and diplomats from 42 countries in Sochi, Russia, Oct. 2–5, 2023. Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed the world strategic situation, introducing the notion of the “civilization-state.”*

ence, as an agreement that the new world order would be created by those who declared themselves the winners in the Cold War. It was seen as an admission that Russia was ready to follow in others’ wake and not to be guided by our own national interests but by somebody else’s interests.

Over these years, we warned more than once that this approach would not only lead to a dead-end but that it was fraught with the increasing threat of a military conflict. But nobody listened to us or wanted to listen to us. The arrogance of our so-called partners in the West went through the roof. This is the only way I can put it.

The United States and its satellites have taken a steady course towards hegemony in military affairs, politics, the economy, culture, and even morals and values. Since the very beginning, it has been clear to us that attempts to establish a monopoly were doomed to fail. The

world is too complicated and diverse to be subjected to one system, even if it is backed by the enormous power of the West, accumulated over centuries of its colonial policy. Your colleagues as well—many of them are absent today—but they do not deny that to a significant degree, the prosperity of the West has been achieved by robbing colonies for several centuries. This is a fact. Essentially, this level of development has been achieved by robbing the entire planet.

The Club’s website, in its announcement for the conference, emphasizes that “The Club assumes that after February 24, 2022, the structure of international relations changed completely. It is impossible to return it to its previous state.” This is a reference to the date of Russia’s entry into the eight-year-old war in Ukraine. Putin turned to this topic in his address:

I have said many times that it was not us who started the so-called “war in Ukraine.” On the contrary, we are trying to end it. It was not us who orchestrated a coup in Kiev in 2014—a bloody and anti-constitutional coup. When [similar events] happen in other places, we immediately hear all the international media—mainly those subordinate to the Anglo-Saxon world, of course—[saying] this is unacceptable, this is impossible, this is anti-democratic. But the coup in Kiev was acceptable. They even cited the amount of money spent on this coup. Anything was suddenly acceptable.

At that time, Russia tried its best to support the people of Crimea and Sevastopol. We did not try to overthrow the government or intimidate the people in Crimea and Sevastopol, threatening them with ethnic cleansing in the Nazi spirit. It was not us who tried to force Donbass to obey, by shelling and bombing. We did not threaten to kill anyone who wanted to speak their native language.... But you must know what was really going on: they [the Ukrainians] have been bombing the place for nine years, shooting, and using tanks. That was a war, a real war unleashed against Donbass. And no one counted the dead children in Donbass. No one cried for the dead in other countries, especially in the West.

This war, the one that the regime sitting in Kiev started with the vigorous and direct support from the West, has been going on for more than

nine years, and Russia’s special military operation is aimed at stopping it.

Putin took a moment to address the “rules-based order,” proclaimed by his neocon opponents in the English-speaking world:

They try to replace international law with a “rules-based order,” whatever that means. It is not clear what rules these are and who invented them. It is just rubbish, but they are trying to plant this idea in the minds of millions of people. “You must live according to the rules.” What rules?

As an alternative to the imperial system demanded by the neocons, Putin proposed what he called the “civilization-state”:

The essential characteristics of a civilization-state encompass diversity and self-sufficiency, which, I believe, are two key components. Today’s world rejects uniformity, and each state and society strives to develop its own path of development which is rooted in culture and traditions, and is steeped in geography and historical experiences, both ancient and modern, as well as the values held by its people. This is an intricate synthesis that gives rise to a distinct civilizational community. Its strength and progress depend on its diversity and multifaceted nature.

Putin offered an optimistic prognosis for the future:

I am confident that humanity is not moving toward fragmentation into rivaling segments, a new confrontation of blocs, whatever their motives, or a soulless universalism of a new globalization. On the contrary, the world is on its way to a synergy of civilization-states, large spaces, communities identifying as such...

Russia stands for universal security and lasting peace, built on respect for the interests of everyone: from large countries to small ones. The main thing is to free international relations from the bloc approach and the legacy of the colonial era and the Cold War. We have been saying for decades that security is indivisible, and that it is impossible to ensure the security of some at the expense of the security of others. Indeed, harmony in this area can be achieved. You just need



kremlin.ru

*President Vladimir Putin fielded questions for three hours at the Valdai Discussion Club meeting in Sochi, Oct. 5, 2023.*

to put aside haughtiness and arrogance and stop looking at others as second-class partners or outcasts or savages.’

### **The BRICS Summit in South Africa**

Putin was asked by the moderator Fyodor Lukyanov about the BRICS summit and South African President Ramaphosa’s role as host. Putin responded:

I believe he [Ramaphosa] was a brilliant host of the BRICS summit. Frankly, I did not even expect him to be such a master of diplomacy. Expanding BRICS was not an easy matter, but he managed it well. He steered the conversation back to the same topic several times so politely and tactfully until a consensus was reached. It is a positive outcome and we welcome it....

BRICS was actually conceived in Russia. Let me remind you how it happened. First, we suggested having a three-party forum for Russia, India, and China. We agreed to hold regular meetings. This is how RIC came about, which stands for Russia, India and China. Then Brazil expressed interest in joining these discussions. And we became BRIC. Next was South Africa, hence BRICS.

Now, we have reached the point when we are ready to expand the number of members—and we have done so. In my opinion, this fact is very important and indicates that our authority is growing and, most importantly, that countries want to join a format that does not impose any

obligations but simply creates conditions for compromise and addressing issues of interest for all the participating countries. We are happy to see it and believe it is a positive process.

Liu Gang, of Xinhua Institute, China, asked:

At the BRICS Summit this August, six countries became new members of BRICS, which means that the Global South stands at a new historic point of cooperation.... As China and Russia are important emerging economies, what can both of our countries do to enhance cooperation within the Global South?

Putin responded at some length:

Today, cooperation between Russia and the People’s Republic of China is, of course, a very important factor stabilizing international affairs.... No matter what anyone says about the slowing growth rate of the Chinese economy, it is all chatter and idle talk, because China ensures these high rates and is in fact a leading driver of the world economy. The same thing is happening in India: the growth there is even higher: 7.6%, I believe. Therefore, the countries of the global South are gaining momentum, and our task is to ensure this leadership....

Of course, we will implement the infrastructure development plans related to building the Greater Eurasia and the Eurasian Economic Union, as well as our Chinese friends’ plans to develop President Xi’s Belt and Road Initiative. As I have said, I find it very promising.

We are already implementing fairly large infrastructure projects on a bilateral basis and will continue to do so. I hope that we will discuss all this in the near future during my meeting with President Xi Jinping as part of the forum that the President is holding in Beijing in October.

Putin was then asked by Rakhim Oshakbayev, of Kazakhstan, about the BRICS:

Could you share your view of what needs to be achieved, and most importantly, the possible

structure of the global monetary economic system? What discussions do you have within BRICS? And on the single currency.

Putin responded:

I have already spoken about this, and I will reiterate: At the Russia-Africa Summit, our African colleagues and friends said that the loan burden of the African states is over one trillion U.S. dollars. It is impossible to repay these debts, it will never be done.

So, what kind of a global financial system could create such a situation?... But it is not normal when such a situation happens, and something needs to change. The Bretton Woods system was created based on the dollar, but it is gradually falling apart. Because a currency is a derivative of the country's economy which issues that currency....

What is the trend there? Their economies are going into recession and are showing negative results, while in the BRICS countries growth is impressive, even after the attacks launched on the Russian economy. It seems that they were counting on the collapse of our country, the destruction of our economy, and the destruction of Russia....

All our companies are able to service all of their debt commitments. Yes, some problems remain, such as unrecoverable revenue and the weakening of the national currency. We see that. Both the Central Bank and the Government are responding to these developments. I am sure that the measures they are taking are correct, and the results will be beneficial.

As far as BRICS is concerned, we not only need to create a single currency, but also build a settlement system and create financial logistics to provide for settlements between our states. We also need to transition to settlements in our national currencies, keeping an eye on them to understand what is actually occurring with them, while taking into account the macroeconomic indices of our economies, exchange rate differences, and inflation processes. It is not an easy situation, but it can be dealt with, and this is what we need to do.

Yesterday, we discussed this with our experts, including the possibility of creating a single BRICS currency. Theoretically speaking,

yes, it is probable. But in order to begin working on this, we need to achieve a certain parity in the development of the economies of the member states, which is a very distant perspective.

As my colleagues told me, in the course of time, the Eurozone transitioned to the common currency, the euro, without thinking about how it would work in countries with a different level of economic development, and problems emerged. Why would we make the same mistake? This issue is not even on the agenda. But we should and we will work to improve the entire financial system, both global finance and financial relations within BRICS.

### **On the Nazi Scandal in Canada**

Putin was asked by Canadian Political Science Professor Radhika Desai to comment on the recent ovation given to an aging Nazi by the Canadian Parliament. He responded:

As for your question, God is our witness that we did not arrange for you to ask this question in advance, but I did expect to hear it, to be honest....

First, if the Speaker of the Canadian parliament talks about this Ukrainian-Canadian or Canadian-Ukrainian Nazi fighting against the Russians, he must know that he sided with Hitler instead of the Speaker's homeland, Canada, or that he was a Nazi collaborator. In any case, he fought on the side of the Nazi troops. Maybe he does not know that.

Make no mistake, I am not trying to hurt the feelings of the Canadian people or offend them in any way. We respect Canada, especially its people, despite all odds.

That said, if he does not know that during the war it was Hitler and his accomplices who fought against Russia, he is an idiot. This means that he simply skipped school and lacks basic knowledge. But if he does know that this person fought on Hitler's side, while calling him a hero of both Ukraine and Canada, this makes him a rascal.... He essentially equates Hitler's collaborators, the SS troops, and the Ukrainian combat units today—fighting, as he said, against Russia. He put them on the same board. This only supports our statement that one of our goals in Ukraine is denazification.



CC/Chatham House

*Russian political scientist Sergei Karaganov proposed that the Russian nuclear weapons doctrine be modified to lower the threshold for their use. Putin explained why it was not a good idea.*

## On Lowering the Nuclear Threshold

Russian political scientist Sergey Karaganov posed this question:

Hasn't our doctrine on using nuclear weapons become obsolete? I believe that it has certainly grown obsolete, and that it even looks frivolous. It was created in different times and, maybe, in a different situation, and it also follows old theories. Deterrence does not work anymore. Is it high time we modify the doctrine on using nuclear weapons, lowering the nuclear threshold, and moving steadily and sufficiently quickly along the staircase of escalation, deterrence, and bringing our partners down to Earth?

They have become brazen. They are saying that, under our doctrine, we will never use nuclear weapons. Consequently, we unwittingly allow them to escalate and conduct an absolutely monstrous aggression.

Putin said, in response:

Let me remind you that there are two reasons stipulated in the Russian Military Doctrine for the possible use of nuclear weapons by Russia. The first is the use of nuclear weapons against us, which would entail a so-called retaliatory strike. But what does this mean in practice? The

missiles are launched, our early warning system detects them and reports that they are targeting the territory of the Russian Federation—this happens within seconds, just so that everyone understands—and once we know that Russia has been attacked, we respond to this aggression.

I want to assure everyone that as of today, this response will be absolutely unacceptable for any potential aggressor, because seconds after we detect the launch of missiles, wherever they are coming from, from any point in the World, ocean or land, the counter strike in response will involve hundreds, hundreds of our missiles in the air, so that no enemy will have a chance to survive. And [we can respond] in several directions at once.

The second reason for the potential use of these weapons, is an existential threat to the Russian state—even if conventional weapons are used against Russia, but the very existence of Russia as a state is threatened.

These are the two possible reasons for the use of the weapons you mentioned.

Do we need to change this? Why would we? Everything can be changed, but I just don't see that we need to. There is no situation imaginable today where something would threaten Russian statehood and the existence of the Russian state. I do not think anyone in their right mind would consider using nuclear weapons against Russia.... The potential adversary knows everything and is aware of what we are capable of.

## On India and the G20

Arvind Gupta, Director of the Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi, asked:

The G20 also has a certain reference to One Earth, One Family and One Future, which I think ties up with the civilizational approach that you have been talking about. Just like the Russian civilization ... I think India also calls itself and describes itself as a "civilizational state."

I think there is a need for a greater dialogue between the civilizations. Instead of going through the road of clashes of civilizations, which was very popular once upon a time in the Western world, I think the initiative should come from leaders like you and [India's] Prime Minis-

ter [Narendra] Modi. This will help generate a dialogue amongst the civilizations that will be positive, and which might help in fleshing out the principles of international relations that you talked about.

Putin was effusive in his praise of India and Modi in his response:

First of all, I would like to confirm what you said about the Indian and Russian civilizations: this is exactly what I have talked about in my opening remarks. Of course, India is an ancient world civilization—an enormous and powerful country with huge potential.... India is also an enormous multi-confessional and multi-ethnic country. We need to dialogue between all civilizations—we are not the only civilizations in the world—as well as achieve a balance of interests and ways to maintain this balance.... As for the work of the G20, this is, of course, a success of the Indian leadership and of Prime Minister Modi personally.... Politicization of the G20 is a sure path to its self-destruction, and the Indian leadership managed to avoid this, which is certainly a success.

## Relations with Japan

Taisuke Abiru, of the Sasakawa Foundation, said:

Russia and Japan are neighbors. I think that a window for dialogue should always be kept open. In this sense, I believe that it is high time our countries resumed dialogue at least at the expert level. If Japan comes up with such an initiative, Mr. President, will you support this initiative?

Putin responded:

It was not us who introduced sanctions against Japan or shut this “window,” this time on Asia. Japan did that.... You asked me, whether we were ready to respond? We are, if there is an initiative of this kind from the party that has shut those “doors” or that “window.”

## Restoring the Franco-Russian Friendship

There was also an important exchange with Pierre de Gaulle:

Mr. President, I am Pierre de Gaulle. I am the Chair of *Mouvement International Russophile (MIR) France & Francophonie*. And I am a true friend of your country as my family is fighting for the Franco-Russian friendship, and we have got more and more people in France and Europe who have the same belief and the same willingness.

As you know, the friendship and partnership between France and Russia was one of the pillars of my grandfather’s policy. I want to rebuild, and I want to restore the France of my grandfather, the France made of fundamental values like faith, like patriotism, like family, and like true, let’s say, spiritual responsibility, which is completely gone in the occidental world....

Mr. President, this conflict is ideological. That is why I think that it will last and expand. What is your view on this?

Putin responded:

First of all, I want to say that it is a great honor to be hosting General de Gaulle’s grandson here in Russia. (Applause)....

It is General de Gaulle rather than Marshal Pétain who is perceived as a hero in Russia, because the general personified France and its pursuit of freedom, independence, and dignity.... Yes, the situation has changed nowadays, and the leaders of France today are completely different people.... I am not going to give my opinion, as it is none of our business. It is up to the people of France....

But my opinion is that, nevertheless, the pace at which people are coming to realize the importance and the timeless significance of national values and customs will gradually pick up, both in European countries and the United States as well.

In this sense, I think yes, the ideological confrontation will continue. But the future lies in the nationally-oriented forces of the world. As I said in my remarks, their balance on the world stage will be achieved by finding a compromise between civilizations.

*A full transcript of President Putin’s remarks is available [here](#).*