

III. Interview

Prof. Richard Sakwa

The Last Gaullist in England

by Mike Billington

Mike Billington, representing Executive Intelligence Review and the Schiller Institute, interviewed Richard Sakwa on October 23, 2023. Prof. Sakwa is Professor Emeritus of Russian and European Politics at the University of Kent at Canterbury, a Senior Research Fellow at the National Research University–Higher School of Economics in Moscow, and an Honorary Professor in the Faculty of Political Science at Moscow State University. He is a prolific writer who has written extensively on Russia, Ukraine, and world affairs. This is an edited transcript of that interview. Subheads and embedded links to source documents have been added.



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Prof. Richard Sakwa

commentary on the Club’s Annual Report. Here at *EIR*, we followed President Putin’s speech very closely. I noticed that you also participated in the press conference and had a question for President Putin, which I’ll bring up later on. You’ve generally been emphasizing the need to stop the rush to war before it gets out of control. Are there other things that you wish to mention about your current activities?

‘Open Channels Are Essential’

Prof. Sakwa: I’ve got another book coming out, with Edward El-

gar Publishers. It’s called *An Advanced Introduction to Russian Politics*. It’s a short book, 60,000 words. It’s a bit of an ambitious or fool’s journey to try to do this at a moment of huge flux. But it’s an attempt to establish some of the frameworks in which we can understand Russian politics today.

Of course, in this incredibly polarized intellectual atmosphere, any attempt to deal with Russia or China today, and a whole stack of other countries in a dispassionate, objective manner, is condemned even in terms of methodology, quite apart from the content. The actual act of doing so is often condemned, even before people get to the substance of what the book actually says. As I think the Schiller Institute and others have argued for so long, we simply must have dialogue and we must have debate.

You mentioned the Valdai Club. Even my attendance there itself has provoked a certain degree of criticism. But I insist that dialogue, debate, open channels are absolutely essential, in fact more essential today

Mike Billington: Thank you for this second interview with *EIR*. Since my first [interview](#) with you Feb. 20, 2023, you’ve published a new book: *The Lost Peace: The Second Cold War and the Making of a New Global Conflict*.

Prof. Sakwa: It’s due to be published in the United Kingdom on the 25th of October, and it’s due to come out in the United States in November. The title has slightly changed, *zhelayushchiy ili ne zhelayushchiy* as they say in Russian, “willing or unwilling.” It’s now called *The Lost Peace: How the West Failed to Prevent a Second Cold War*. It’s out with Yale University Press, and is available on Amazon, for pre-order.

Billington: You also spoke at the Valdai Discussion Club, Oct. 2–5 in Sochi. I watched some of that event, in which you [spoke](#) on “Dilemmas of Multipolarity,” a

than possibly at any other time, because the dangers of war and conflict are so high. So just to talk to people, not just in the formal sessions, but the informal discussions. People from across the world, good friends from China, from India, South Africa, so many other countries. I must say, the Valdai Club is always a very stimulating intellectual environment because the discussions are always measured, informed, reasonable, with a positive view on things. Never does it descend into simple attacks, denunciations, let alone personal *ad hominem* attacks.

‘Sovereign Internationalism’

Billington: I listened to one of your presentations at the Valdai Club in which you noted that there is a growing momentum toward shifting the unipolar world to a multipolar world, which you noted was very important, but you also warned that such a multipolar world must not simply change one hierarchy, with some country in charge, for another. You noted that the Westphalia Peace of 1648, which ended the 30 Years War, established the principle of sovereignty, but that a “Westphalia-Plus”—that was your term—was required. Helga Zepp-LaRouche, as I’m sure you know, has emphasized that the Westphalian principle of the “interest of the other” is more important, or at least equally important, as the self-interest of each nation. What do *you* mean by “Westphalia-Plus”?

Prof. Sakwa: It’s precisely the formulation of “sovereign internationalism.” Sovereignty, yes, that’s the core principle of Westphalia. But Westphalia left open the content of what is within the states, as it were, and the model of relations between states. Westphalia didn’t put an end to religious wars. In fact, in some ways it may have facilitated them. We know that bloc politics continued.

What we mean by “Westphalia-Plus” today is two things: First, a genuine and substantive positive mode of internationalism, which is based on the framework established in 1945 by the United Nations and its subsequent protocols, charters, etc. So that’s one of the Plus elements—simply a substantive internationalism, which doesn’t deny some of the U.S.-led bodies, but also suggests that in some ways they have not served the cause of humanity, but they’ve often been rather more narrowly focused on maintaining the power of the previous or the hegemonic powers. Today I think

that the Plus is going to say that multipolarity too often is seen as an empty slogan, whereas it has many facets. One of them is the maturation of the post-war state system.

There are now nearly 200 states in the world, 193 in the United Nations. Many, including the post-colonial states, have now matured. India is number one amongst them because when the United Nations was formed, it was not an independent state. Today, it is a state, the third largest economy in the world, demanding that its voice be heard, and quite rightly. Similarly, Indonesia, Mexico, Brazil, so many others, South Africa.

But also the Plus sign means that there is still a normative dimension. Too often it’s simply reduced to the question of human rights. Human rights are important. Who would deny it? But human rights are within the framework of development, of unleashed potential. So the internationalism takes both an institutional form and a normative form. When we’re talking about groups like BRICS or Shanghai Cooperation Organization, we should also remember that the UN system isn’t just a question of sovereign internationalism.

It’s also a question of—I hesitate to use such a word as “values,” because it’s so often been cheapened and used as an instrument in geopolitical contestation. That doesn’t, though, ultimately mean that those values—and I’m talking about UN values, not those put forwards by a particular bloc—are genuinely human values. Rights are human. That includes, of course, social and other economic rights, which includes the right to life, clean water, and development. So the Westphalia-Plus for me does quite a lot of work.

‘The Change Must Begin with Ourselves’

Billington: You said that the UN Charter was essentially intended as a solution to that issue of sovereign internationalism, but that the charter is now under great threat due to the former colonial powers who have been—and this is your quote, which I appreciate, “locked into a stupid, pointless, savage and tragic war.” We now have a new savage war in Gaza. So what must be done?

Prof. Sakwa: If I knew that,—I think that it’s obvious that change begins with ourselves, with us, and we just simply have to do what we feel is right. We must simply insist that without the UN system, without the charter, without that international system and its genu-

inely universal principles, then we are literally in uncharted waters. There's a lot of condemnation of the UN, including calls for Russia, even China, to lose their veto powers and to be taken out, expelled from the Security Council. I think that's madness. Of course, it's impossible to achieve without the destruction of the system itself. The reason why I say that, is because the 1945 charter system is undoubtedly far from perfect and needs reform. We need India, we need Brazil. We need a representative or two from Africa as permanent members of the Security Council. But even as it is, without it, we really will be in a totally anarchic jungle world. So I think the defense of the charter system is the number one. And then, advancing its principles: peace, development, negotiated settlements, negotiation, diplomacy—all of those elements, because we certainly cannot slip back to a situation which held during the First and Second World Wars. We are very much in danger of slipping inexorably, unavoidably into a possibility of the foothills of the Third World War.

Billington: You just mentioned the rising powers who should be part of the UN. President Putin also said that—in fact, it was in response to your question, which I watched. You asked about the emergence of these post-colonial states, and that they're coming together in new institutions like the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. His response was that the 1945 framework no longer functions, and without a new framework, there will be chaos, which is pretty much what you just said as well. He called for newly-developed major powers like Brazil, India, and South Africa, to be added to the UN Security Council. But is that enough, or are you implying in your last statement that it's really not enough?

How To Conduct International Politics

Prof. Sakwa: I must say that Putin did go on to say that the UN needs reform in a way we've just outlined, changing and expanding the membership of the UN Security Council. But he also said, that however flawed the UN system is, there's nothing waiting in the wings to replace it. And that is the absolutely crucial point. There is nothing in the wings.

As I've suggested earlier, international politics takes place within the framework of this international system. But at the second level, if you like, of international politics, leaving aside international political

economy, transnational civil society, we're seeing a reorganization and a shakeup, the likes of which—to quote Xi Jinping and Putin in their meeting in March—we've not seen since 1945.

You mentioned the emergence of, let's call them “post Western political alignments,” because they are characterized by a number of things: one, it's absolutely mistaken to consider them *anti-Western*—they're “*post-Western*.” They're going beyond it. The goal is not to replicate the pattern of politics of what I call the Political West, but to transcend that bloc politics, the competitive dynamic, the attempt to defend hegemony.

So these are counter-hegemonic alliances—not alliances, but alignments—not just simply to balance the existing system, but to transcend it. And thus they take some energy, or certainly some intellectual affiliation, with the type of politics outlined by Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s during *perestroika*, when he was launching reforms in the Soviet Union. The goal was not simply to make the Soviet Union like the West. It was to make the Soviet Union, along with the West, in more close alignment to those fundamental principles outlined in 1945. It is on this basis that he talked about there being no winners or losers at the end of the Cold War, that everyone was a winner. That is similar to the language used by Putin, and above all, by Xi Jinping—win-win situations, and so on. These aren't empty slogans, but a substantive vision of how international politics should be conducted.

The Lost Opportunity in 1989

Billington: Concerning the continuing surrogate war in Ukraine against Russia: You've written extensively on the war, pointing to the fact that the 2014 coup against the elected government in Kiev, sponsored by the U.S., not only put a proto-Nazi regime in power in Ukraine, but it also collapsed the entire European security system. You said this marked the failure of the Western world after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s to create what you called an “inclusive, comprehensive peace order.” I think you know that Mrs. LaRouche has referred to that period as the “lost opportunity.” Your new book is titled *The Lost Peace*. What is the theme of that book?

Prof. Sakwa: A number of themes, but the main one is the assertion and the argument and hopefully substantiated, that there was an opportunity for a new pat-

tern to international politics after the end of the Cold War, based within the framework of sovereign internationalism and the charter international system. Unfortunately, the political West, which is an entity—the European Union is part of it, but above all, NATO. It’s also the dynamic based on U.S. primacy, leadership, call it what you will.

The political West, instead of recognizing this opportunity to reset international politics, only intensified the logic and the pattern that had prevailed during the first Cold War, and thus at that moment of opportunity—this isn’t an abstract, it was genuine, and a lot of people recognized it at the time—there was an ability to transcend bloc politics, to make the charter system work better, to have in Europe a genuine, enduring peace.

One of those elements would have had to have been a genuine pan-continental vision of security; but instead we saw the intensification of the Atlantic power system, which by definition excluded Russia. So, a dynamic in which the fundamental point is that we had an opportunity to establish a positive peace. Many other books have discussed this. Thomas Graham, one of the most perceptive, I think, has just argued similarly in his book, which just came out, called *Getting Russia Right*.

A positive peace is more than a negative peace, which is simply the absence of war. A positive peace would include developmental and other indices in it. Until his death last year, Gorbachev stuck to that vision, surprisingly enough, because his vision was a powerful one. My book is rooted in how the first Cold War ended, creating the framework for the continuation of Cold War, if not intensification, without some of the guardrails, because after 1989, the political West radicalized itself. This is why the second Cold War is so much more intense and more dangerous than the first. Quite apart from the fact that it’s now focused in the first instance on Europe.

In the first Cold War, Europe was relatively static, and the Cold War was fought elsewhere, above all in Korea, Vietnam, and Africa. But in this second Cold War, the epicenter, has come home to roost in Europe. And that’s something I’ve been warning against for 30 years. It’s utterly tragic for all of Europe and above all, for the Ukrainian people and indeed the Russian people.

Billington: As you’ve just referenced, your histories of modern Russia portray *glasnost* and *perestroika*

as efforts by Gorbachev in particular, and others, to create a “genuinely transformative program of change”—that’s one of your terms—but that the West rejected that, as you’ve just explained. What was Putin’s role in that dichotomy in Russia and internationally? And what is it today?

Prof. Sakwa: It’s important to understand that Putin’s thinking has evolved over the years. Certain base concepts which he stuck to all throughout—Russia as a great power and a statist inflection, things which we can criticize because of the failure, perhaps, to really envisage an independent public sphere. But in terms of international politics, he came to power as, perhaps, the most pro-European leader Russia has ever had.

But because of the context, the structural context, which was this radicalization of the political West, ultimately, there was no space to maneuver. We can chart the landmarks, the signposts: which include the U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in June 2002; the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003; the installation of anti-ballistic missile systems in Eastern Europe; Libya in 2011; then the events in Ukraine 2013–14. Ultimately, in Russia, it isn’t just Putin—the Russian elite, or certainly the political-military security elite, felt that the room for maneuver was becoming smaller and smaller. That is, of course, quite clear because there was no transformation of the European security order after 1989. NATO was effectively an instrument of collective defense.

What we failed to do was establish a pan-European institution of collective “security.” The United States quite clearly vetoed any substantive attempts to transform the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the OSCE, to move in that direction. So we ended up in the impasse in which we find ourselves now.

As to the implication of your question about maintaining the power of the colonial powers—you call them that, I call it the political West, but it’s the same thing—they insisted on maintaining their powers. But what we see today, of course, is the intellectual exhaustion of the political West. There are no ideas coming from them. They had no idea of how to deal with the problems of Southwest Asia, as we nowadays call it—I noticed that you’ve been calling the Middle East “Southwest Asia” quite consistently. I think that’s right, actually. I’ve been doing so for some time as well.

The Unity of Neoconservatism and Neoliberalism

Billington: You've referred regularly in various publications, to Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History*, which has been used as sort of a meme to justify the unipolar world, the neoliberal order. You may know that Fukuyama is being promoted again by the Council on Foreign Relations in an [article](#) he co-authored Aug. 22 and published in the September/October issue of their journal *Foreign Affairs* called, "China's Road to Ruin: The Real Toll of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative." It's a classic assault on the Belt and Road. How do you read these neoconservative efforts to demonize both Russia and China?

Prof. Sakwa: It's a continuation of what we've seen over the last 30 years. There are two major streams which feed into this. There's the neocon one, Fukuyama's line, and on the other side, we have this "liberal interventionism," which have become fused effectively in the politics—there's almost nothing to distinguish between them over the last few years, their interventionism, their lack of respect for sovereign internationalism. Instead of the principle being sovereign internationalism, it becomes "democratic internationalism" for the liberal interventionists. For the neo-cons, they couldn't care less about the values and normative side—its power which they're concerned about. But it's a very substantive coalition from those two interventionist and activist traditions.

In the United States, we have other traditions. We have the Pat Buchanan line. The Paleoconservatives, which, in the best sense, I think the Schiller Institute finds itself in that [tradition], talking about a traditional American foreign policy based on conservative—small c conservative—engagement with the world, but without a sense of American exceptionalism and a messianic vision and a need to lead.

These neo-con and liberal interventionist ideas, if the proof of the pudding is in the eating, have been catastrophic. I read the *Foreign Affairs* journal, where you mentioned Fukuyama's article is published. Some of the stuff is interesting. But one has to say that it's a sign of intellectual exhaustion. To be honest, there is no positive vision of how to transcend the logic of conflict and how to move into a world which could allow genuine human development to take place.

This is all the more tragic, not only given the chal-

lenges facing humanity, but also because of the enormous potential. I think this is what the Schiller Institute constantly stresses: the technological advances by humanity allow the possibility of so much positive good, a positive peace. And yet, what they call the foreign policy blob in the United States is still intent on relitigating the first Cold War today.

One of the major tragedies of our time is the failure of Europe to devise and pursue an independent policy. At Valdai, I met and had a really marvelous talk with Pierre de Gaulle, the grandson of Charles de Gaulle, and was very keen to meet him because, as I introduced myself to him, I'm probably the last Gaullist in England today—there's a few elsewhere. By Gaullist, I mean, not necessarily domestic politics, but that vision of pan-continental European unity, not against the United States, but as an autonomous and independent force sometimes guiding our American friends, but working, if there's a positive agenda, on positive goals.

Political 'Dialogism,' not Hegelian Dialectics

Billington: In your 2022 [essay](#), "The End of Endism," which also was referring to Fukuyama's *End of History*, you referred to the "march of neoliberalism" in the late 20th century, which you defined as "neo-Hegelianism." Please explain what you were referring to.

Prof. Sakwa: Hegelian logic is based on a dialectical approach to history, not just even thesis-antithesis-synthesis, but the dialectical approach, which suggests a certain ineluctable spirit of history, marching forwards, usually in the form of a state or constellation of states.

I've long been highly critical of this determinism, this historicism—the idea that we can know the meaning and purpose of history and guide it on its way. I think that we have to understand international politics through the lens of tragedy; that a lot of human endeavors don't achieve their lofty goals, and the loftier the goals, often the more disastrous the outcome.

Compared to the neo-Hegelian or the dialectical view of history, I've been putting forward for a number of years a "dialogical" approach. The political dialogism obviously draws from people like Mikhail Bakhtin, but the key point is dialogue, diplomacy, openness to the experience of others, learning from others. "Political dialogism" is a term Bakhtin himself never actually used. But political dialogism draws on

him, as in a novel by Dostoyevsky, where people talk and then talk some more and then talk yet more, and another 500 pages have passed, and they're still talking, as in *The Brothers Karamazov*. But at the end they all change. That is dialogism, political dialogism, and that absolutely repudiates Hegelian or neo-Hegelian thinking of dialectics of the Fukuyama sort, because Fukuyama is very much a neo-Hegelian, as filtered via Alexandre Kojève.

Bakhtin is a very, very important thinker. He developed an art and literary cultural criticism, the idea of dialogism. I'm pushing it a little bit further by talking about "political dialogism," which could be the foundational basis for a more sustained vision of diplomacy today, and how we can get out of this mess through only dialogue and diplomacy. And that is one reason why I attended the Valdai meeting, because that's what we do. We talk, open-ended talk. And it really is genuinely why I'm talking with you today.

How to do these things? I don't for a second pretend to have all the answers. But I certainly think that we simply have to keep channels of dialogue open everywhere, and precisely where we have the deepest political differences. That is when, perhaps, it's most important to return to diplomacy. That applies to the war in Ukraine as well.

Geopolitical Colonial Wars, or Mutual Economic Development

Billington: And the Mideast.

Prof. Sakwa: And Middle East, of course—Southwest Asia.

Billington: This is clearly the view of the nations that formed the BRICS: the idea of bringing together all nations of different continents, of different political outlooks and so forth, but to bring them together around the concept of mutual development. They've now expanded with six new members, unless it gets sabotaged.

One of those new members is Argentina. In Argentina yesterday, the current government candidate, Sergio Massa, won in the general election for president, but as he did not get an absolute majority among the three contenders, there will be a runoff election Nov. 19 between Massa and Javier Milei, the candidate of those who were openly peddling that Argentina should not go into the BRICS, that it should break relations

with China and so on.

The BRICS is committed to that principle of mutual development with all the new countries that will formally join as of Jan. 1, 2024. These include Iran and Saudi Arabia—China played an amazing role in bringing these two fierce enemies together. And now they'll both be part of the BRICS, if the process proceeds.

The BRICS meeting in South Africa, the G20 meeting in India, the Far Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok just this month—all featured discussions of the end of colonialism, that colonialism is essentially finished. The new system hasn't really come into place, or at least it's only there as a potential through the BRICS and the expanded BRICS-Plus.

There have also been extensive discussions about establishing a new international financial system, which I think you know that Lyndon LaRouche and our organization have been deeply involved in for many years. The Russian economist Sergei Glazyev, whom you certainly know, has promoted a concept which Lyndon LaRouche promoted in his July 18, 2000 [article](#), "On a Basket of Hard Commodities: Trade without Currency," breaking out from under the dollar hegemony and establishing a basis for International trade that is based upon the values of production rather than the values established by the speculation on currencies.

Where does this discussion stand at this point, and do you expect that there will be a new policy in place in time for the 2024 BRICS summit, which is going to be held in Kazan?

Prof. Sakwa: Yes, Russia takes over the chair of BRICS-Plus on the 1st of January. So it'll be up to it to devise policies. Can I add one more institutional organization to the list you mentioned and that is ASEAN (the ten countries of Southeast Asia). For many years there's been this concept of the ASEAN method, which is one precisely of focusing on development, focusing on trade, not trying to interfere in internal political matters. An ASEAN-Plus meeting also took place not long ago. It's very important.

So all of that, what you've just said, is absolutely right, the BRICS-Plus with the six new members. There were 17 others who were really keen to join, Algeria, for example, Indonesia's membership was offered, but they have elections coming up as well and they thought it would be best to postpone.

The Case of Argentina

Can I just go back to Argentina? It's fascinating that Argentina figured so heavily in the initial San Francisco conference, when the United Nations was established in 1945. The question then was whether to invite Argentina or not. So there's a certain pattern, and history seems to be emerging because Argentina clearly is facing a fundamentally important runoff election in mid-November between the populist Javier Milei and Sergio Massa, from the incumbent party.

Billington: "Populist" is a very polite term for Milei.

Prof. Sakwa: Yes indeed. Libertarian crazy guy. Yes, yes indeed.

Billington: I might mention—In what you were saying about various things earlier, that many, many years ago LaRouche referred to some of the policies promoted by circles around the Rockefeller family as "fascism with a democratic face." And I think that's what you were getting at with the issue of, not the necons, *per se*, but the so-called "liberal interventionists," that this is a fascist ideology, but it's portrayed as a democratic intervention.

Prof. Sakwa: I would avoid personally using the f-word, fascism, but clearly it's there. Some people do indeed characterize it thus. I avoid the word "fascism" because one has to be very careful in delineating exactly what we mean. But the point stands.

The Emergence of Non-Dollar-Denominated Trade

As for the currency and economic change: Jeffrey Sachs addressed the Valdai meeting online, but I think he gave a very powerful overview of this issue, precisely. And I agree. He didn't say this as such, but there's two things involved at the moment. The first step will be to de-dollarize and to conduct trade in a basket of currencies, including an alternative financial architecture to facilitate this. The actual development of an alternative currency is a far more challenging prospect. It took the euro at least two decades, if not more, to develop, and even then we can see its downsides.

Putin, in one of his interviews recently—in fact, it was at Valdai—said that the alternative currency, a re-

serve currency, or a BRICS currency, as such, a new currency, is not on the agenda at the moment. What is on the agenda is the more effective utilization of the yuan, the ruble, the rupee, and facilitating mechanisms for trade.

It may come to it [an alternative currency], but an alternative financial architecture is something that is happening. We can see it in the data. The percentage of global trade which is bypassing the dollar, is going up very fast. It's remarkable how fast people are de-dollarizing because of the brutality with which the dollar has been weaponized recently.

I just saw some figures today about the Chinese divesting themselves of U.S. debt. Obviously, they've still got vast stocks, and this is going to take a long time. But it's certainly happening. And this is, as we say, a shift in international politics and international political economy with huge consequences, because it will mean that the United States will not have that exorbitant privilege of the dollar being the unique reserve currency, which allows it to run what is now \$32 trillion debt and of course, extensive trade deficits for year upon year. So clearly, de-dollarization is going to force the United States to get its own finances in order. We just hope they will be able to find the leadership to do that.

Russian Military Doctrine On the Use of Nuclear Weapons

Billington: A separate subject: A lot of discussion, including at the Valdai Club in part, in a back and forth with President Putin, about the issue of nuclear weapons. A lot of the Western press is claiming that Russia is threatening the use of nuclear weapons. Putin responded to the proposal by Sergei Karagonov, one of the leading Russian political scientists, who was essentially arguing that Russia should put the use of nuclear weapons back on the agenda as a way of reinforcing the fact that the West has, as you mentioned, canceled all of the treaty agreements to limit nuclear weapons and to limit tests and so forth.

Putin responded very strongly by saying such a change is not on the table, at least not now, because there's no threat to the existence of the Russian Federation, nor is there a threat of a nuclear attack on the Russian Federation—the only two bases on which there would be the use, by Russia, of nuclear weapons.

But there are people in the West who are pushing for the destruction of Russia and China. They make it

very clear, and especially in the Ukraine case, openly state their intention is to drastically weaken Russia so that they can never do the “nefarious things” that they do. That kind of talk, which means that especially with, essentially, the loss of the war in Ukraine and the failure of the counteroffensive and so forth, that they’re pushing toward open confrontation with Russia, which could very likely end up being nuclear. What is your view on that?

Prof. Sakwa: The first thing is the ideas put forward by Sergey Karaganov about nuclear weapons. It’s a more nuanced and complex position than is sometimes presented in the Western media. Sergei Alexandrovich, as we call him, Karaganov, has done two or three versions of it, including an extended version in the bimonthly journal, *Russia in Global Affairs*, in which he is basically not calling for the use of nuclear weapons, but he is calling for the return of healthy deterrence to avoid the use of nuclear weapons. He’s arguing that it is the West, as you’ve just suggested, which has lost a fear of nuclear weapons and indeed discounts the dangers of sliding into some sort of nuclear escalation.

What Sergei is trying to do is to up the ante, in other words, so that the ante doesn’t have to be upped all the way. It’s a complex position, but I think it’s an important one. Putin of course, as you said, said at Valdai that he understood that position, but he rejected it. And that is absolutely, fundamentally important. And he reiterated the two points that, as you’ve said, that according to the Russian Military Doctrine, there are only two circumstances in which nuclear weapons are to be used: a counter-strike in response to a first-use nuclear weapons attack against Russia; and if the country’s existence was existentially challenged. That’s the standard nuclear doctrine.

The United States has not signed the “no first use” declarations, which is interesting. So that means that everybody has to be constantly on the alert. The danger of accidental nuclear conflict is therefore always ever present. But you’re right, that the political West seems to be on a trajectory with almost no limits. It’s been driven, of course, by the extremists in Ukraine, who—for them there is no limit. They’ve always wanted to negate Russia. This is western Ukraine. As far as they are concerned, even the very name, Russia, is illegitimate. Not long ago, Zelensky and his adviser said we

should use the word Muscovy instead of Russia! This sort of attempt to cancel Russia, negate it, is clearly one of those issues in the political West today.

Of course it won’t work. Russia is a nuclear power, and it’s actually expecting over 2% economic growth this year. It has survived the challenges of sanctions so far. Clearly it has difficulties. The economy has suffered, no question about it. But it won’t be going anywhere soon. And indeed, this is a point which a lot of commentators make, including Thomas Graham: that even without Putin himself, the views of the Russian elite and a large section of the Russian population maintain the position that Russia has to maintain itself as an independent great power.

The policy manifestations may be debated, but the fundamental principle is one shared by the elite and the population. Putin is now supported by, still, over 80% of the population. Well, you may say, how do you measure these things in war time? Clearly there’s methodological issues, but nevertheless Russia is not going anywhere soon, and neither is China.

One is almost left—and I think that’s the logic of your question—is that we appear to have two trains on the same track heading inexorably towards each other. Before the time that the two collide, there are a number of junctions or sidings. The U.S. presidential elections next year are one of those big events. The difficulties in Congress today are another. There are also elections elsewhere in the world, in the UK next year, for example. But that’s hardly of any significance to most people apart from us. So, nothing is inevitable, yet the dangers are unprecedentedly great.

The Wars in Ukraine and Southwest Asia

Billington: You’ve written books and a great deal of material on the Ukraine war and the Ukraine situation. What’s your forecast at this point for what’s going to take place in Ukraine?

Prof. Sakwa: Well, in some ways this also depends on what’s going to happen in Southwest Asia, because what we’re now seeing is a genuine global crisis, or certainly in Southwest Asia and in Eastern Europe.

It’s very difficult talking now, because I’ve actually argued that certainly as far as Israel-Palestine is concerned, the next couple of weeks will be crucial. In some ways, depending on how that goes, this will affect the conduct of the war in Ukraine.

As for Ukraine, I just want the killing to stop, the war to stop. There has to be some sort of negotiated settlement. There's no sign of that at the moment. My feeling is that in the next few months, Russia may move on to a more active offensive position. This is certainly the position, the view of some generals. It is not clear whether Russia actually has the military muscle power.

For example, the fighting over Avdiyivka, in the eastern region of Donetsk, has been going on for several weeks. Of course, the Ukrainians have dug themselves in very, very deeply there, the coking coal and chemical plant, and so on. We thought that Russia was just about to take over. And yet it hasn't even managed to close the access to the city. It's from Avdiyivka that the Ukrainians were shelling Donetsk for the last seven or eight years. Now, how is it going to go? I think that we're in for a long, dark period, and only in about 2025 will we begin to see the lineaments, the outline of some sort of post-conflict solutions.

Billington: If it doesn't explode beyond those borders.

Prof. Sakwa: And it may do so because this Southwest Asia crisis has got huge explosive potential. At the moment it's all being kept in. But as developments in Gaza develop, then it may draw in other actors. And thus we have an escalatory dynamic which may become unstoppable.

Billington: In this week's *EIR*, we have a map of North Africa and Southwest Asia, which shows this very small country of Israel on the far eastern coast of the Mediterranean, surrounded by five huge countries that we have in bright gold, all of whom have just become members of the BRICS: Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, UAE. It makes you wonder what those two U.S. aircraft carriers, now under Central Command control, are there for: just as a warning regarding Israel, or are they there preparing for a war against the BRICS? This is the thing, unfortunately, you have to consider at a time of such vast instability in the world today.

Prof. Sakwa: And also, Putin announced the other day that Russian planes will be on patrol over the Black Sea with Kinzhal hypersonic missiles,

which, of course, you know, if utilized ...

Billington: ... can reach the Mediterranean.

Prof. Sakwa: Yes. As Col. Douglas Macgregor said, an aircraft carrier today is, is basically a target. And that's really what it is.

Billington: Okay. Do you have any final thoughts for our readers?

Prof. Sakwa: Keep up the good work. I quite like the new format of the *EIR* bulletin [the *EIR Daily Alert*]. And I must say it's phenomenally informative and always a pleasure to read for what's to learn, and the tone, the positive tone of peace and development. It's in short supply nowadays, so keep up the good work.

Billington: Thank you very much. I hope we can continue this process of these interviews.



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