

II. International

PRESIDENT PUTIN AT VALDAI CLUB

‘Human Life Is the Universal Value’ as Pathway Out of ‘Systemic’ Crisis

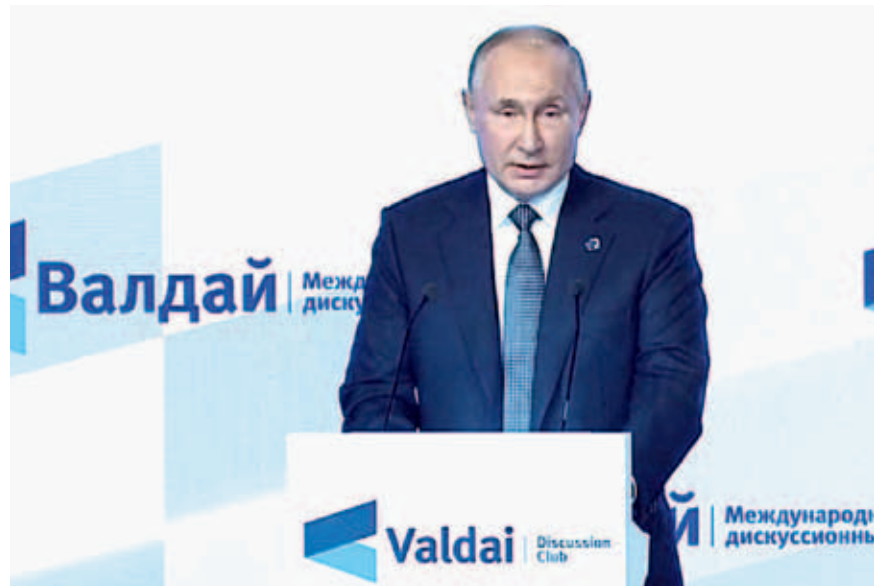
by Gretchen Small

Oct. 23—This year’s annual meeting of the influential Valdai Discussion Club was the occasion for Russian President Vladimir Putin to put on the table of the world’s nations, the core proposition that the value of life itself, is the universally shared principle, around which humanity can steer a course out of today’s “systemic crisis.” He addressed the plenary session of the final day of the group’s meeting in Sochi, which ran from October 18-21, bringing together some 140 experts from Russia and countries across the world.

This is the 18th meeting of the internationally prestigious group, and attendance included many in person, as well as online. The title of the Sochi event was, “Global Shake-Up in the 21st Century: The Individual, Values, and the State.”

Putin reviewed world affairs in depth since World War II, drawing out the history leading up to the present upheaval in economic, strategic and social conflict and breakdown. He stressed that the situation requires new ways of thinking; the “usual approaches” used in world affairs have failed. In fact, we should think in terms of setting a “new precedent” for how to proceed.

He dramatically addressed the worsening decline in Western culture as associated with the decline in principle expressed in Western strategic policy, giving many concrete illustrations. The problem is the near-absence of any shared idea of the public good, whether



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Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, speaking at the 18th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, Sochi, Russia, Oct. 21, 2021.

for compatriots in one’s own nation, or among the family of nations. For example, President Putin pointed to the damage from rejecting Shakespeare, and the damage from rejecting Martin Luther King’s outlook, in favor of fomenting race hatred. Look at the Western craze of encouraging gender-selection by juveniles, which means a young person could make a wrong decision which completely upends their whole life.

Look at the contrast today, in how one nation withdraws its military from the “conquered” nation, then does nothing to uplift it. In the past, for example, after U.S. and other forces left Vietnam, it was not thwarted from developing. But at present, where are traditional “Western” values? Look at what is happening in Af-

ghanistan. He pointed to the urgency to “help Afghanistan restore its economy,” and deal with all the problems, especially the huge drugs problem:

From what sources, and how will they fund their social programs? The main responsibility for what is happening there is still borne by the countries that fought there for 20 years. I believe the first thing they must do is to release Afghan assets and give Afghanistan an opportunity to resolve high priority socio-economic problems.

He reported extensively on the Western energy crisis, as he has done repeatedly in recent weeks, dispelling the contrived lies about Russia using its gas for geopolitics. He focused attention on the inevitable in-

flationary and shortage effects from the European shift to energy spot markets, and the shutdown of high-tech energy production from fossil fuels and nuclear.

President Putin’s plenary address, and the follow-on interchanges with many interlocutors, are a significant contribution to international deliberation at this time of crisis, and urgency for solutions.

In response to a question from Professor Alexei Miller, from the European University at St. Petersburg, asking for an update on the prospects for President Putin’s call in January 2020 for a meeting of the heads of the P-5 (five permanent members of the UN Security Council,) Putin said:

It has been supported by everyone, in principle, and such a meeting could have been organized.

Valdai Club: 'Global Shake-Up in the 21st Century'

The 18th Annual Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club, held in Sochi from October 18-21, 2021, was dedicated to the central subject facing the world today, under the title, “Global Shake-Up in the 21st Century: The Individual, Values, and the State.”

About 140 participants, including 65 experts from abroad, gathered, largely in person, others online, for over 15 sessions. Foreign speakers participated from at least 19 countries, extending over several continents, including participants from Europe, the Americas, China, Central Asia, and India. There were speakers from Brazil, Turkey, Lebanon, Armenia, Mongolia, and Canada. Discussions were held with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and Mayor of Moscow, Sergey Sobyenin.

Whatever the opinions expressed, most of the topics in the dialogue were real issues silenced in Western Establishment settings.

The topic of the first session, “Substitute for a World War or a Prelude to It?” was presented with the assertion:

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a

global shake-up ... [which] coincided with an urgent need to change the existing order. And the pandemic provided the grounds to do this. [This poses the question:] Is the shock that the world experienced sufficient for building a new world order?

The second session, “The Age of Pandemic: Year Two. The Future Is Back,” asserted:

After thirty years of progress, when everyone thought that the future had already arrived and it would always be the same, the era of predetermined outcomes in the ideological, economic, and institutional spheres ended abruptly.... A time comes when each state or society becomes master of its own fortune. Or the master of misfortune, which, unfortunately, is also quite possible.... How to make sure that humanity does not run wild and comes to a new balance?

The theme of Session Six, “Russia and the World: The National Idea in a Global Context,” posed the question people in every nation should be asking themselves, “What contribution is the country ready to make to world progress?”

The full list of speakers, panels and videos, with English translation, is available on the Valdai Club website [here](#).

The problems that arose are not connected with Russia, but with some disputes within this group of five countries ... [and] the pandemic began soon after that, and the situation has become really complicated.

The idea of the meeting received a highly positive response, and I hope it will be held eventually. This definitely will be beneficial. We are discussing this with our American partners, with our Chinese friends, with France—incidentally, the French President supported it immediately, as well as with Britain. They have their own ideas and proposals on additional subjects that can be discussed at such a meeting. I hope the necessary conditions will develop and we will hold this meeting.

The following are selected highlights of topics and quotations from President Putin’s plenary session remarks. The full transcript of those remarks and the dialogue which followed, is available on the [Kremlin website](#) and a video of the same, with English translation, can be found [here](#).

‘Systemic’ Crisis Offers Opportunities, Not Only Danger

President Putin began his address by stressing from the outset the systemic nature of today’s crisis. Our task is how to think our way out of it. He pointed to what he called “Chinese wisdom,” in the spelling of crisis with two characters, one for danger and one for opportunity. He also quoted the Russian proverb, “Fight difficulties with your mind, and fight dangers with your experience.”

We face many threats, but we must not forget:

[There are] opportunities that must not be missed, all the more so since the crisis we are facing is conceptual and even civilization-related. This is basically a crisis of approaches and principles that determine the very existence of humans on Earth, but we will have to seriously revise them.... The question is where to move, what to give up, what to revise or adjust. In saying this, I am convinced that it is necessary to fight for real values, upholding them in every way.

Putin puts the start of the “new era” for Humanity at the collapse of the Soviet system, “about three decades

ago when the main conditions were created for ending military-political and ideological confrontation.” But there is a problem in that the search for “a new balance” in the world system has yet to be found. He elaborates, saying:

[T]hose who felt like the winners after the end of the Cold War ... and thought they climbed Mount Olympus, soon discovered that the ground was falling away underneath even there, and this time it was their turn, and nobody could “stop this fleeting moment” no matter how fair it seemed....

[T]he transformation that we are seeing, and are part of, is of a different caliber than the changes that repeatedly occurred in human history, at least those we know about. This is not simply a shift in the balance of forces or scientific and technological breakthroughs, though both are also taking place. Today, we are facing systemic changes in all directions—from the increasingly complicated geophysical condition of our planet to a more paradoxical interpretation of what a human is and what the reasons for his existence are....

He cited climate change and environmental degradation as real, even as he acknowledged that scientific debates continue as to the mechanisms behind it. Then, the arrival of the coronavirus demonstrated that our communities are fragile and vulnerable.

Securing Humanity’s Survival

[O]ur most important task is to ensure humanity a safe existence and resilience. To increase our chance of survival in the face of cataclysms, we absolutely need to rethink how we go about our lives, how we run our households, how cities develop or how they should develop; we need to reconsider economic development priorities of entire states. I repeat, safety is one of our main imperatives, in any case it has become obvious now, and anyone who tries to deny this will have to later explain why they were wrong and why they were unprepared for the crises and shocks whole nations are facing.

On the fragility of whole communities, and the strategic implications, he said:

The socioeconomic problems facing humankind

have worsened to the point where, in the past, they would trigger worldwide shocks, such as world wars or bloody social cataclysms. Everyone is saying that the current model of capitalism which underlies the social structure in the overwhelming majority of countries, has run its course, and no longer offers a solution to a host of increasingly tangled differences.



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President Putin enumerated many aspects of breakdown, saying:

Attendance at this year's internationally famous Valdai Discussion Club meeting, "Global Shake-Up in the 21st Century: The Individual, Values, and the State," included many in person, and more online.

Everywhere, even in the richest countries and regions, the uneven distribution of material wealth has exacerbated inequality, primarily, inequality of opportunities both within individual societies and at the international level.... [T]hese problems threaten us with major and deep social divisions... Furthermore, a number of countries and even entire regions are regularly hit by food crises...

[T]here is every reason to believe that this crisis will become worse in the near future and may reach extreme forms. There are also shortages of water and electricity ... not to mention poverty, high unemployment rates or lack of adequate healthcare.

President Putin further discusses the problem of many countries and peoples "losing faith in the prospects of ever catching up with the leaders," leading to extremism. "Unfulfilled and failed expectations and the lack of any opportunities not only for themselves, but for their children, as well," are driving "uncontrolled migration, which, in turn, creates fertile ground for social discontent in more prosperous countries... The fact that society and young people in many countries have overreacted in a harsh and even aggressive manner to measures to combat the coronavirus showed ... that the pandemic was just a pretext: the causes for social irritation and frustration run much deeper."

Solutions using "the usual approaches" will not work. "Or, to be more precise, they do work, but often and oddly enough, they worsen the existing state of affairs."

He says that there is talk of working together, all the

while there are sanctions "against those states that badly need international assistance" is intolerable and must end. He asks:

Where are the humanitarian fundamentals of Western political thought? The approach based on the proverb, 'Your own shirt is closer to the body,' has finally become common and is now no longer even concealed. Moreover, this is often even a matter of boasting and brandishing. Egotistic interests prevail over the notion of the common good.

The dynamics of global processes poses a challenge, Putin argued.

To put it bluntly: the Western dominance of international affairs, which began several centuries ago, and, for a short period, was almost absolute in the 20th century, is giving way to a much more diverse system. This transformation is not a mechanical process, and, in its own way, one might say is unparalleled. Arguably, political history has no examples of a stable world order being established without a big war and its outcomes as the basis, as was the case after World War II. So, we have a chance to create an extremely favorable precedent. The attempt to create it after the end of the Cold War on the basis of Western domination failed, as we see. The current state of international affairs is a product of that very failure, and we must learn from this.

The claim of recent decades that globalization made the role of the state outdated, is unfounded. The coronavirus pandemic, in its way, has shown that the “international order is structured around nation states.”

One Universal Value: Human Life

Putin presented his reasoning:

Only sovereign states can effectively respond to the challenges of the times and the demands of the citizens. Accordingly, any effective international order should take into account the interests and capabilities of the state and proceed on that basis, and not try to prove that they should not exist.

Furthermore, it is impossible to impose anything on anyone, be it the principles underlying the sociopolitical structure or values that someone, for their own reasons, has called universal. After all, it is clear that when a real crisis strikes, there is only one universal value left and that is human life, which each state decides for itself how best to protect based on its abilities, culture and traditions....

The fight for equality and against discrimination has turned into aggressive dogmatism bordering on absurdity, when the works of the great authors of the past—such as Shakespeare—are no longer taught at schools or universities, because their ideas are believed to be backward. The classics are declared backward and ignorant of the importance of gender or race.... Countering acts of racism is a necessary and noble cause, but the new “cancel culture” has turned it into “reverse discrimination” that is, reverse racism. The obsessive emphasis on race is further dividing people, when the real fighters for civil rights dreamed precisely about erasing differences and refusing to divide people by skin color.

He pointed out that the dream of those who truly fought for human rights was to erase distinctions and reject the idea of dividing people on the basis of their skin color:

I specifically asked my colleagues to find the following quote from Martin Luther King: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by

the color of their skin but by their character.” This is the true value.... Each of us is a human being. This is what matters.

In contrast:

In a number of Western countries, the debate over men’s and women’s rights has turned into a phantasmagoria.... Anyone who dares mention that men and women actually exist, which is a biological fact, risk being ostracized. “Parent number one” and “parent number two,” “birthing parent” instead of “mother,” and “human milk” replacing “breastmilk” because it might upset the people who are unsure about their own gender. I repeat, this is nothing new; in the 1920s, the so-called Soviet Kulturträger also invented some newspeak believing they were creating a new consciousness and changing values that way. And, as I have already said, they made such a mess it still makes one shudder at times.

Not to mention some truly monstrous things when children are taught from an early age that a boy can easily become a girl and vice versa. That is, the teachers actually impose on them a choice we all supposedly have. They do so while shutting the parents out of the process and forcing the child to make decisions that can upend their entire life.

Just previously, he had said,

We look in amazement at the processes underway in the countries which have been traditionally looked at as the standard-bearers of progress.... [T]hey have a right to do this, we are keeping out of this. But we would like to ask them to keep out of our business as well.... [T]he overwhelming majority of Russian society ... has a different opinion on this matter.

President Putin concluded:

The conservative views we hold are an optimistic conservatism, which is what matters the most. We believe stable, positive development to be possible. It all depends primarily on our own efforts. Of course, we are ready to work with our partners on common noble causes.