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Source: aranca.com

*Karaganov's vision: towards the Word Majority*

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Sergey Karaganov is a very influential person in Putin's circle and the most important co-author of a Russian blueprint envisaging the transition towards a multipolar world. Precisely because NATO allies and several partners are engaged in a very difficult effort of deterrence, reinforcement of the collective defence and indirect denial of a war of aggression, it is worthwhile understanding the strategic thought in the inner circle of most relevant adversary to peace and stability in Europe.

Karaganov in this 55-page detailed report on "Russia's Policy Towards World Majority" highlights the fundamental importance of this 'World Majority' for Russian foreign policy, for the development of its economy and above all for the programme of de-Westernisation (дезападнисуциа) or reduction of the influence of the West as a whole on international affairs at a global level.<sup>1</sup> This radical and structural change must happen with the 'World Majority'. In his work Karaganov refers to the Foreign Policy Concept signed by Putin in March 2023, which deals with the principles and methodologies of action that the Russian Federation will have to implement in order to pursue its goals in the international arena.<sup>2</sup>

The first principle recalled by Karaganov is the fundamental historical contribution made by the then Soviet Union in its anti-colonialist struggle in the decolonisation process of the 1960s against the great European powers. He then recalls the great victory in the Great Patriotic War (aka II WW) and Russia's consequent and fundamental seat in the UNO as the successor state to the Soviet Union, which allows it to act incisively in all the major issues of international order. The World Bank and the Monetary Fund are arenas where Russia is not influential because they are essentially Western power structures from which Moscow intends to gradually detach itself in order to be able to proceed to autonomously finance countries in difficulty in the field of development aid. In Russia's view the present structure of aid providing entails the 'depersonalisation' (обезличение) and dispersion of Russian contributions to the development of Majority countries. But these are only some of the historical and legal "titles" that Russia can bring as a dowry to the "World Majority" because the last, but by no means the least title is precisely its

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<sup>1</sup> [https://globalaffairs.ru/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/doklad\\_politika-rossii-v-otnoshenii-mirovogo-bolshinstva.pdf](https://globalaffairs.ru/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/doklad_politika-rossii-v-otnoshenii-mirovogo-bolshinstva.pdf) .

<https://www.mid.ru/upload/medialibrary/c98/cjmfdf73760bme0y99zqlj51zzllrvs/Russia%E2%80%99s%20Policy.pdf> .

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/fundamental\\_documents/1860586/?lang=ru](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/?lang=ru) ;  
<https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1860586/?lang=en> .

varied historical experience and its manifold cultural and civilisational variety (многородность) within itself, which allows it to approach the other countries that make up the “World Majority” with greater cultural tolerance and openness, without therefore imposing its own cultural, economic, legal, and finally, ideological standards, referring in particular to the LGBT movement, that has been outlawed in Russia as an ‘anti-human’ ideological movement. Karaganov makes use of the cultural, value related (ценностный) and civilisational (самобытность) specificity of the Russian Federation that is therefore to be considered an entity not sheerly in pursuit of geopolitical goals or interests, but as an organic civilisation, made by a strong and sovereign State (суверенная государственность) and a cohesive society based on the faith on the State power, its righteousness (правое дело) and above all sempiternal cultural and civilisation values.

The report considers fundamental Russia’s civilisational and strongly identity-based approach to other states and civilisations, as the Russian Federation itself also contains many allogenic, i.e. ethnically non-Russian, peoples, to justify a flexible and respectful approach, equal (равноправный), very different from the always encroaching and intrusive West towards other non-European and non-Western cultures, always portrayed as in decadence (загнивающий) compared to the rest of the advancing world. For this subjective and objective reason in the medium-term future Russia intends to displace the most representative institutions of the United Nations, whose headquarters are presently in New York, to the capitals of emerging world countries such as Tashkent in Uzbekistan, Addis Ababa in Ethiopia or Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

Of course, both Karaganov as Foreign minister Serghei Lavrov are fully aware that not all countries of the World Majority are allies of Russia or adamant adversaries of the West, but that there is plenty of nuanced positions, “grey areas” and opportunistic behaviours (fence sitters) among the countries of the Global Majority.

What Karaganov says about the colonialist methods implemented by the West in the past and even now is has its part of manipulation and its part of truth.<sup>3</sup> Of course this behaviour does not only contribute to the unpopularity of the West in the countries of the World Majority, but it deprives it of a ground solid “moral high-ground”, a weakness that can be easily exploited by its competitors. This is what Karaganov and also Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov use to engage

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<sup>3</sup> The Russian Author mentions: the aggression and invasion of Iraq by the USA and the consequent forced exportation of democracy, eventually weakening US influence in the Muslim and Arab world; the French neo-colonialism in Africa by the exploitation of local raw materials and monetary serfdom through the CFA franc, contributing to the migrations to Europe and to considerable resentment among African countries.

many countries of the World Majority against Western imperialism and neo-colonialism, thus helping to unhinge their political and economic mechanisms, but he carefully avoids, apart from a generic Soviet and then Russian ideological anti-colonialism, referring to the specific mining interests of the Russian Federation in Africa and the ways in which they were realised by Wagner before and the Afrikansky Korpus now, that are quite far from any moral.

So, it is difficult to appeal to an alleged ‘moral superiority’ of contemporary Russia as the Soviet Union had or boasted of having within the ‘socialist brotherhood’. The problem is rather that the political and ‘moral’ assessment on the expediency of foreign aid (bearing in mind that a hegemon may be more or less ‘benevolent’ towards other smaller states, but is never completely ‘altruistic’ towards them and above all ‘grants’ them a freedom of movement and choice that is not unlimited and absolute within the framework of a dominant/subservient state relation) made by the World Majority states among the different development prospects offered to them by Russia and the West and, of course, China, will have to be based on objective criteria of evaluation and not ideology or propaganda.

It will then also be up to the individual states or clusters of states to choose between the different models of development cooperation offered to them by the West and Russia. In fact, Karaganov, when he speaks about “full and absolute sovereignty” actually means to limit it only to the larger states, the smaller states can however take refuge within clusters of similar size and comparable level of economic and technological development that can be carried out by a dominant regional power.

Karaganov’s writing, like in part also the new Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation signed by Putin in March 2023, seems to oscillate between the concept of intrinsic strength and almost absolute sovereignty/independence of the Russian state, *superiorem non recognoscens* (as is also frequently observed in Russian foreign policy writings, drafted by Russian state authorities) and the importance of *hard power in international relations*, that entails the traditional conception of a state in power relations with others.

Hence another version of exceptionalism, where the full and absolute sovereignty of the Russian State is, in some cases, even above the commonly accepted international jurisdiction when Moscow is not sufficiently represented in international jurisdictional bodies or if some rulings do not comply with the constitutional precedents set by Constitution.

Conversely, when the Russian Federation or Russian high officials hint at justice (справедливость) and equal rights (равноправие) in international relations, they imply that they should be implemented through a rewriting of UN rules, guaranteeing peaceful coexistence among states at a global level and preventing any state, no matter how powerful, to threaten the national sovereignty of other states.

One should remember that the Russian Federation considers international security as an “indivisible good” (неделимый), i.e. that the security of one state cannot be at the expense of another state; this entails that a shift in the balance of power (сдвиг расстановки сил) against Russia is considered obviously unacceptable and threatening, as it happened with the expansion of NATO in East Europe. In that case Moscow claims a so called “droit de regard” in what it considers its area of influence. Therefore, notwithstanding the presence of the words of “equality” and “justice”, in the Russian conception of power it exists also an ideological element of a Darwinian type that goes back to the supremacy of the strongest and thus a hierarchisation of power that also goes by the name of ‘кто кого победит’ (who prevails on whom). It essentially dates back to Soviet times, has remained unchanged to the present day, unsurprisingly up to Putin’s Russia, where (as the tragic war in Ukraine has shown) the use of force has been substantially legitimised when the state’s interests, security and integrity imperiously require it.

In short, the Russian doctrine is a particular mixture of traditionalism, use and conceptualisation of hard power/raw force, and at a same time of constant attention to balance, legal elements and restraint to the unsanctioned use of force by the United Nations. Ironically this should constitute the main legal framework of relations between states, especially in the case of a structurally multipolar world, as the Russian scholar intends and hopes.



**Source:** Foreign Policy Research Institute. One of the several representations of the Eurasian space.

Karaganov, however, indicates also that the main way to achieve Russia's maximum influence in the world, consists in shifting Russia's geopolitical centre of gravity eastwards in the best tradition of the Eurasianists, in particular Gumilev.<sup>4</sup> A Eurasian centre of gravity exploits and underlines also the traditional "spatial dimension" (пространственное измерение) of Russian geopolitics that includes channels (such as the Volga-Don Canal), inland seas (the Sea of Azov) and large areas of the Eurasian landmass in synergy with states such as Iran in a South-North direction for commercial and energy traffic that represents a valuable strategic, energy and commercial asset for Russia. These elements are all the more important because Moscow never had (not even in the heyday of Adm. Gorshkov's powerful War Sea Fleet – Voennoe Morskoy Flot) an absolute control over the oceans like the United States, that through a mighty fleet firmly controls 90% of world oceanic commercial traffic. Space is, therefore, a very important concept within strategic Russian thinking: 1) Space seen as a buffer zone from possible enemy incursions should give Russia pause

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<sup>4</sup> Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev (1912–1992) was an important Soviet and Russian historian, ethnologist, and anthropologist known for his influential theories on Eurasianism. His ideas have also been appropriated by various nationalist movements in the post-Soviet space, leading to debates about the implications of his work for contemporary politics and identity. His influence extends beyond academia because it has shaped the contemporary Eurasian, espoused by Vladimir Putin among others. His works have sold millions of copies, influencing discussions about national identity and cultural heritage in Russia and Central Asia.



for thought. 2) Space seen as an economic potential for Russia's economic development because it allows trade in natural resources, industrial production and agricultural products to grow.

In addition, the incremental increase in the space controlled by Moscow gives it also access in to precious raw materials useful for the development of its own industry, that rarely does keep up with the 'technological revolution' that is taking place in the most developed Western countries (i.e. United States and Germany), where the legal protection of technological innovations and intellectual property is very advanced contributing in turn to technological development. Hence the intrinsic link between Russia's technological development that is not always competitive with the West and China (linked to internal reforms that allow industrial and technological development) and its external aggression that is, however, also linked to other factors.

Another element that might lead to a substantial increase of Russia's clout in international relations is represented by the reinforcement of its cooperation with other states of the World Majority within the large regional international organisations such as: the Eurasian Economic Union, the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation), the ODBK or ODBK or Collective Security Organisation, and of course the BRICS. This group represents a very extensive territorial organisation that Karaganov sees as a forum for discussion and promulgation of regulations and above all financial regulations. The aim is the gradual replacement or elimination tout court of the strongholds of global finance and economy like: London and Wall Street, the regulatory centres in the field of technology standards and standardization like Brussels and the high-tech companies, that impose exclusively US standards such as Google, Microsoft etc. The latter companies govern technological development worldwide to the detriment of other economies such as the Russian economy that therefore must be able to attain technological sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> At the same time the BRICS should equip themselves with their own rating agencies and bodies to regulate monetary exchanges, because they precisely an integral part of the de-dollarisation project, carried out by Russia, and recently joined by Iran, considered a fundamental given its geographical and geopolitical centrality in world energy trade.

In conclusion Karaganov, obviously speaks only from the Putin's Russian point of view and in that interest; by Western academics he can be easily qualified as a hawkish eminence grise of the President. Dmitry Trenin, who also co-signed the "Russia's Policy Towards World Majority", is

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<sup>5</sup> <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202402280003?index=4> .

an even more interesting person, because, until beginning of 2022 he was absolutely organic to the Euro-Atlantic think tank mainstream where he had eminent positions, despite being a former colonel of the military foreign intelligence service GRU. Difficult to explain from outside his change, but probably a classic “Right or wrong my country” stance.

That said, one can disagree with every tenet and content of the report, but it signals concrete problems that cannot be wished away. The advocates of an infinite “Western hegemony” should probably ask themselves few simple questions: Is the West monolithic as in the past? Is this indefinite leadership sustainable and at what cost? Are we not already, de facto, in a multipolar system where the Global South’s (whatever this might mean) GDP could surpass the G7 GDP? And, if many powers are facing the prospect of a real decadence, will they put up a fight, risking a world war, or their élites will be wise enough to manage the messy transition towards a murky multipolar world?

The current Ukrainian war is the terrible and plastic manifestation of a difficult and complex transition from the “No one’s world” to a possible multipolar order: it would be tragically ironic if Kiev would become a new Sarajevo, the irrelevant gate to another cycle of much more devastating global conflicts.