

Interview with Sergei Karaganov for VZGLYAD Newspaper, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019

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## **Sergei Karaganov: Protecting the Whole World Could Become Russia's New Mission**

*“Formalizing the fact that Russia is the main supplier of international security for the world and for itself should be one of the underlying ideas of Russia’s foreign policy,” says international relations scholar Sergei Karaganov. This could be Russia’s mission both in its domestic and foreign policy pursuits.*

*“The West has been losing the military supremacy that underpinned its global dominance for several centuries. Russia is becoming the main source of strategic stability. How can a large-scale war be avoided given the low level of world elites and their annoyance at Moscow’s actions? Why is democracy dangerous in peacetime and why do we always need an external enemy?”, says Sergei Karaganov.*

**Sergei Karaganov**, Dean of the Faculty of World Economics and International Affairs at the National Research University-Higher School of Economics, talked about this with *VZGLYAD* at the annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club. Professor Karaganov and political scientist Dmitry Suslov have recently published a report, “The New Understanding and Ways to Strengthen Multilateral Strategic Stability,” where they described geopolitical changes in the military-strategic landscape and assessed risks of outbreak of nuclear war.

**VZGLYAD: Sergei Alexandrovich, why have you published your report now?**

**Sergei Karaganov:** This report should have been made two years ago when it became clear that the numerous factors increasing the threat of war were exacerbated by the disintegration of the arms control regimes, which were not the most important

but still a crucial element facilitating stability. It took us about a year and a half to think this all over and do extensive preparatory work.

There was also an internal rationale for Russia. The country is lacking a strategic idea not only domestically but also in its foreign policy. At first we wanted to become part of the West, and then we were struggling to survive, then “rise from the knees” and become a great power again. But there has been nothing since 2016... Formalizing the fact that Russia is a supplier of international security for the world and for itself should be one of the underlying ideas of Russia’s foreign policy.

**VZGLYAD: Are there prerequisites for becoming such a supplier?**

**S. K.:** We have already become one in the broad and narrow meanings of this word. When the Soviet Union was gone, we all saw what happened. Countries that were considered relatively peace-loving broke loose and started to rape Yugoslavia, and then attacked Iraq and Libya, killing an awfully large number of people. All this happened before our eyes. But then Russia came back and the situation changed dramatically.

We are a supplier of security in a broader sense as well. Having rebuilt our strategic potential and effective deterrence capability, we made it ultimately impossible for the West to regain military superiority. This means that we have most likely finalized a very long process in which the West has been losing its military supremacy, which for almost five centuries served as the foundation of its political, economic, and cultural hegemony. We have freed the world. Now we should start formalizing this step by step, avoiding a war along the way. The risk of war is extremely high now.

**VZGLYAD: What are the reasons for your concerns?**

**S. K.:** New arms plus cyber weapons, plus drones which can be equipped with a nuclear bomb or other types of bombs. Look, the Hussites are already launching drones! This mixture creates a situation which is technically much more explosive

than the one we had thirty or forty years ago during the Cold War. To put it simply, this adds to the dramatically deteriorated level and quality of elites in very many countries and their despair from the defeat.

**VZGLYAD: Do you mean Western countries?**

**S. K.:** In most cases it is Western countries. But there is also a phenomenon of “strategic parasitism” in the world, not only in the West but also in Russia—people have become used to peace. The generation of people who feared war at the genetic level is gone, and there is a seventy-year-old habit of living in peace.

**VZGLYAD: It has been a long time since we had a war ...**

**S. K.:** It has been a long time and people have simply forgotten what a war is like. For most people peace is a normal thing, which is great. But in order to make sure that it is not interrupted by the technical and political circumstances I mentioned above, there must be an active policy of fighting for peace.

**VZGLYAD: Some sort of inoculation?**

**S. K.:** Inoculation, prevention and propaganda. The next series of our works will focus, among other things, on the “struggle for peace”, not only in the traditional sense like initiatives and slogans, but deeper. The idea that Russia is the main stronghold of peace and strategic stability must become one of the key ideas that will unite both our people and the international community.

**VZGLYAD: So this is basically Russia’s mission?**

**S. K.:** It is one of the missions. This is absolutely obvious to me. I am happy to have seen so many publications over the past several weeks [since we released our report]. People intuitively feel that something has happened. Apparently, we have struck the right cord.

**VZGLYAD: How do you assess Russia's latest initiative suggesting that Europe and NATO introduce a moratorium on the deployment of intermediate- and shorter-range missiles?**

**S. K.:** I stand up and applaud! This should have been done sooner.

**VZGLYAD: But there hasn't been much of a reaction so far.**

**S. K.:** Look, people have hunkered down, they are losing, they are hissing. But they need to be pushed and nudged. This is not a one-off act. First of all, the struggle for peace is a process. Secondly, Putin's statement puts one more obstacle to new deployments of weapons and arms race not only in Europe.

We must create a situation where it will become clear that a deployment of a new generation of intermediate-range missiles may not only attempt to change the balance but will also increase the threat of war. This is indeed so. These weapons are more destabilizing than many others.

**VZGLYAD: How would you comment on a British general's recent statement that we are in a state of cyberwar?**

**S. K.:** This is one of the nearest unexplored realms. There is a feeling that several countries can already inflict strategic damage upon each other using just cyber weapons alone. Besides, cyber weapons can become a weapon of the poor, because with development terrorist groups may acquire the ability to cause damage and provoke. This sphere is not regulated at all. Fifteen years ago when we suggested negotiating an agreement, the Americans decided they could retain the upper hand in this field and refused to talk. But now we are completely at a loss over what is to be done because the situation seems to have gone out of control. We do not know how to regulate this sphere. We do not even know how to regulate the Internet. Have you noticed that all countries, now only China, are seeking to nationalize the Internet?

**VZGLYAD: Among the risk factors you mentioned not only the absence of fear of war but also the degradation of elites and their moral decadency.**

**S. K.:** Just think about it. Jacques Chirac has recently passed a way. Compare Chirac and European leaders of his time with present-day ones. It is a physiologically different type of people.

**VZGLYAD: What could be the reason for that?**

**S. K.:** The reason is that life has been too good... but democracy is an anti-meritocratic system.

**VZGLYAD: It sounds like a paradox!**

**S. K.:** It is but only for those who have been using Western ideological products. People do not elect the superior; they elect their likes or those with whom they feel comfortable. In the absence of acute crisis, democracy normally elects the worst.

The world is much more democratic now. But Europe and partially the United States and many others are moving towards what I call “leaderless democracy,” they are going down.

**VZGLYAD: Is this an unavoidable process in a democratic system?**

**S. K.:** It is. I assure you, if there is peace here in Russia in thirty or forty years from now, we will also be electing unassuming leaders.

**VZGLYAD: Does war “cleanse”?**

**S. K.:** War kills the best, but during the war people, as a rule, push leaders up. Churchill is a classic example. When there was a threat of a war, they intuitively elected Churchill. When the war ended, they kicked him out.

**VZGLYAD: You have just mentioned that a television generation is coming to power, to be followed by “an iPhone generation.” How will this affect the behavior of elites?**

**S. K.:** We know about the television generation, it has already come. This generation responds to images. In Russia, too, if you listen closely, many in the elite circles say: “What does it look like on the screen?” They are used to thinking in terms of television images and short periods of time. Luckily, we have a group of people at the top who think strategically.

As for the “iPhone generation,” we simply do not know it. When it comes, there will be different people around. This is not a verdict, but what will the people who are used to sending likes instantaneously do? How will they rule their countries? I have written in my other works that growing the elite that is not dependent on the Internet could be a criterion for providing for the state’s success.

**VZGLYAD: This is pure utopia...**

**S. K.:** No, it is not. I have an iPhone in my pocket which I am trying to get rid of, and I have a push-button cell phone which I am starting to use again because the iPhone reduces my intellectual faculties—it narrows my field and devours my time. It affects me, and I consciously switch over to the old cell phone.

**VZGLYAD: Can you name some of the representatives of the television elite?**

**S. K.:** They are all the same in Europe. Macron is an obvious example. Trump is also quite picturesque. This is the television generation. We have them too, but not as many yet. Television has become part of our life later — we were poor and Soviet television was boring. But the generation of 40- and 50-year-olds is totally engrossed by television.

**VZGLYAD: The search for an external enemy for solving internal problems is intensifying around the world. But this is a rather commonplace strategy: it worked in the Soviet Union and it worked in America.**

**S. K.:** In the Soviet Union we could not exist without an enemy, nor can we do so in Russia, because genetically we are a country that has constantly been fighting and defending. If we take this out, everything will crumble. One of the reasons why we fell apart at the end of 1980s and in the 1990s was that we had decided that no one was threatening us anymore. So unfortunately, we need a certain level of external threat for society to organize itself.

It was believed that democracy did not require an external enemy, but look at what is happening around. They are artificially and feverishly thinking up an enemy. This entire concoction about “Russian interference” is needed largely if not solely for their own self-organization. In America they came up with this fudge about “Russian interference” in order to try to rally society against Trump and take charge of social networks that have gone out of political elites’ control, social networks that gave Trump a chance to win and allow non-elite groups to come to power.

**VZGLYAD: This is not always a reasonable policy ...**

**S. K.:** We must understand and know who we are dealing with, and know ourselves. If many of us believe that everything is fine in the West, I can tell them that not everything is fine in the West and that democracy requires an enemy, especially when it is weak. Even developed and wealthy democracies need an enemy.

**VZGLYAD: You say that the political systems in Russia and China are freer from short-term demands of society. Is this an advantage?**

**S. K.:** China and we are different, but both are more authoritarian and partly more governable. This is our advantage. This is why our geopolitical competitors are so

nervous. When they impose democracy upon us, there is more to it than just an ideological message.

Democracy, especially in poor and large countries, is a kiss of death. Democracies are less governable even though they create a more comfortable living environment, for most.

**VZGLYAD: Is this something one needs to aspire to from the viewpoint of humanism?**

**S. K.:** Yes, one needs to aspire, but democracies, too, have a strong element of coercion and criticism... Democracy in China would mean its extinction. Democracy in Russia... We've experienced it already in the 1990's. Each society should develop by its own laws. Democracy is only one of the ways to govern a complex society. It is absolutely clear now that we are lacking democracy at the municipal level. This is our main mistake of the past thirty years. But if we go back to the situation of the 1990s, we will collapse again.

**VZGLYAD: You say that the system of strategic stability becomes increasingly complex. The Valdai Club's latest report goes even further by asking whether we need such a rigid system at all.**

**S. K.:** This is a big and complex dispute. It is good that Russia is seizing leadership in the intellectual sphere on strategic issues. In the past we always followed in USA's intellectual community footsteps. Now we are beginning to take the initiative. As for what the world will be like, we are engaged in a subtle discussion. I think that general trends will push through sooner or later anyway. The system will settle down within twenty years or so when a new military alliance basis will be created. Now this foundation is in tatters.

**VZGLYAD: Will the military balance be based on new technologies?**

**S. K.:** On new technologies, nuclear weapons, and post-nuclear weapons. And we don't know yet what else. But Russia's efforts have cut the ground from under the old system of international relations, a Western one. This is one of the main reasons for such a furious attitude towards us—we have stripped the West of its supremacy.

**VZGLYAD:** We assume that elites should be more thoughtful and more responsible. But then we see this girl, Greta Thunberg. Is this a new kind of the elite or what is this?

**S. K.:** This is a tough story. Yes, they should be, but can they? I think new elite must be raised and brought up purposefully.

**VZGLYAD:** Special selection?

**S. K.:** This should be done in special, closed Ivy League type educational institutions protected from the Internet.

**VZGLYAD:** But Greta Thunberg is influencing politics already now. The Canadian prime minister's rating fell after his meeting with her.

**S. K.:** That's because it is the "iPhone generation." Poor girl. They are just using her for advancing their agenda. But I don't think that Greta Thunberg will have any serious impact on human history outside a small group of countries and elites. This is one of the numerous manifestations of this new culture.

**VZGLYAD:** Let's go back to the strategic stability crisis. How can it be overcome?

**S. K.:** We suggest several solutions. Firstly, there must be an active struggle for peace. Secondly, it is necessary to adopt a new philosophy: instead of aiming of overcoming nuclear weapons, we must strengthen multilateral nuclear deterrence. In other words, the philosophy is that we should be interested in creating a situation where the U.S. will be deterring us thus not fearing us, and we, in turn, will be

detering the Americans thus not fearing them. The same goes for China. The third element is fostering dialogue and contacts. Eventually, it should be a trilateral dialogue between Russia, China, and the United States. And, of course, there should be normalizing political relations.

**VZGLYAD: As regards China, there is certain concern in our society that it is too big, too close and unfathomable. Why, on the one hand, don't our countries want to be direct allies, and on other hand, why don't we consider China a threat?**

**S. K.:** We do not want to be allies because sovereignty is the highest value for us and for the Chinese. We cannot be allies. By definition, China and we can only be leaders. Secondly, we de facto need each other in many ways. Their economic cushion makes us stronger, and our military power strengthens them.

Thirdly, we do not fear China because we have huge nuclear superiority. It is in the interests of China that we maintain it and do not fear them. If we start fearing them, this will raise suspicions and concerns and eventually may even cause conflicts.

**VZGLYAD: What about the U.S.? You advocate a resumption of formal and informal contacts. But our relations are at their lowest since the 1950s. How can we overcome this if no one trusts anyone?**

**S. K.:** We can start with purely symbolic moves, something like Samantha Smith...

**VZGLYAD: But this won't be any different from Greta Thunberg, only it will be about nuclear weapons.**

**S. K.:** It would be much better if grown-up persons dealt with this, of course. I do hope that the American system will somewhat calm down if Trump wins, and we will get more opportunities.

**VZGLYAD: In other words, Trump can be beneficial for us?**

**S. K.:** No, we could certainly benefit more from Hillary Clinton who would have wrecked America, while Trump will make it stronger. After all America is our strategic competitor.