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Conclusion and mission on COVID-19



Sergey Lavrov Photo: Courtesy of the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) of Russia

The novel coronavirus spread so rapidly that it has changed the rhythm of the globe. Whether from the perspective of a single country or multilateral levels, the solidity of international relations has been put under test. The most obvious consequences include economic recession, a crisis of global governance, trade protectionism and increasing isolationist sentiment. People-to-people, cultural and travel exchanges have all been restricted. Nonetheless, this is just a tip of the iceberg.

After we overcome the pandemic, which will surely happen, we must carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the world's ability to maintain stability when faced with similar challenges in the future. We must also craft measures to cope with these challenges together. But perhaps at the current phase, we can already draw some conclusions.

A pandemic is not new in human history. But what makes the COVID-19 pandemic special is that it takes place in an unprecedented backdrop when the interconnectivity and interdependence between people, between countries and between continents are so deep. The achievements people have made in technology, intelligence and transportation make them both physically and psychologically globalized.

The consequence is that problems in one country will become global ones. Long ago

we raised warnings, and we cannot underestimate the danger of multinational threats, from terrorism to cybercrimes.

Similarly, if one isolates oneself and relies on others to solve one's own problems, it is simply impossible. The effect of the virus has clearly proved this. The pandemic reminds us that we need to stay humble in the face of disasters. Any country or individual, regardless of their geography, fortunes or political ambitions, is equal. The novel coronavirus crisis rips off all fanciful illusions and superficial things and displays the lasting value of human life.

Not everybody was prepared for the test of the pandemic. Even under the current circumstances, when global challenges are supposed to unite people and propel people to even temporarily forget divergences, some still resort to exploitation. Not everyone can resist the temptation of being selfish. Others also take advantage of the situation to play geopolitics by chasing their own interests and revenge against their geopolitical rivals. Once bred in such an environment, the virus will intensify conflicts and heighten unfair competition.

As a result, some "man-made" consequences have been added to the natural effect caused by the virus. These "man-made" consequences are a result of the zero-sum mentality that humans, or precisely some humans, refuse to give up even when faced with common disasters. Nonetheless, to overcome the visible consequences caused by COVID-19, countries are urged to stay more united than ever and to gather all strengths and resources.

We have to admit that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us examples that lack humanitarianism. This may be due to the chaos caused by the spreading threat. However, such lack of humanitarianism seems to be deep-rooted. This is because of some countries' and their ruling elites' incurable egoism. Those who proclaim themselves as moral leaders with democratic traditions did not unite all parties to seek mutual understanding. Instead, they started to act according to the law of the jungle, regardless of etiquette rules and ethical constraints.

They blame China for the spread of the virus, or maliciously slander Russia because we have provided assistance to some countries in response to their requests. They even raised absurd allegations against Russia, accusing us of taking advantage of humanitarian and medical assistance to strengthen geopolitical influence. They cared nothing about the severity of the pandemic and issued a ban preventing people from seeking Russia's medical and humanitarian assistance. This violates basic diplomatic rules and is insulting.

Some Western countries are politicizing humanitarian issues and trying to use the pandemic to punish the governments they dislike. If not, how could we explain that these Western countries, which always talk about respecting human rights, do not want to give up their one-sided economic sanctions on developing countries (at least before the global pandemic situation is eased)? Indeed, such sanctions have weakened ordinary people's ability to exercise their social and economic rights, causing serious difficulties in protecting residents' health and hitting the most unprotected people.

Russia has always firmly opposed such an inhumane approach, and this is completely unacceptable when humanity is facing a disaster. Because of this, at the virtual meeting of G20 leaders on March 26, President Vladimir Putin proposed establishing "green corridors free of trade wars and sanctions" that would ensure supplies of medication, food, equipment and technology.

It is very dangerous to try to use the current situation to sabotage the UN's basic principles. To effectively resolve the problems faced by humanity, UN agencies should still be the main coordination mechanism for multilateral cooperation. In view of this, people are deeply concerned about the defamation of the World Health Organization (WHO). Most countries agree that the WHO has been fighting at the forefront since the outbreak of the COVID-19. Indeed, like all other multilateral institutions, the WHO should improve its work and adapt to various new situations. But to achieve this, the WHO must not be undermined. All WHO member states should maintain their constructive dialogues with each other, so as to jointly formulate solutions to deal with the new challenges.

The pandemic has once again debunked the long-held myth in the West about the "end of history," an all-powerful model of hyper-liberal development, based on the principles of individualism, and a firm belief in the ability to solve all problems through the market alone.

Today, it is clear to all that the main players on the international stage are still those who stand up for their own interests. But that doesn't mean, nor is it meant to suggest, that everyone is going to go their separate ways and get into a state of competition. Potential should be combined to effectively address the key issues of our time.

What is needed is a global concert of diplomatic symphonies, with the UN continuing to play its central guiding role. We hope that the current crisis will help people realize that the UN-centered world order, formed after the World War II, has stood the test of time and is highly resilient to pressure. It is the only possible

alternative. The principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations remain, in today's circumstances, an unshakable basis for building exchanges between states.

Like any living body, the UN needs to make constant, subtle adjustments and, in doing so, can better adapt itself to the realities of a multipolar world. Of course, the potential of global governance mechanisms such as the G20 and the World Trade Organization should continue to be maximized.

International alliances, initiatives and ideas based on the values of inclusiveness, cooperation and equality have good prospects for development. Cooperation within the framework of the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which Russia chairs this year, is based on this philosophy and on the principle of respect for culture-civilization and national characteristics and traditions, development paths and models. In the difficult times experienced by today's world, a dialogue of mutual respect is an important safety net that can help guide everyone in a constructive direction.

When a virus attacks someone, it affects the collective economic architecture. Stagnation in business activity and disruption in global production chains have had a huge impact on the world economy. We need to help the world economy overcome the difficulties and work collectively to ensure its gradual recovery after the crisis. At the same time, we must not allow economic gloom to undermine international cooperation, deepen the crisis of confidence, or provoke a new round of conflict in international affairs.

Ideally, such a mission should unite us - for the well-being of all peoples, without exception, depends on a successful solution to this task. Together, we need to find new sources of growth that can help overcome the overall recession. The integration of the potential of various integration projects implemented in pan-European and Asian areas can contribute to this work on a global scale. That's why President Putin has called for a Greater Eurasian Partnership. The partnership is based on international law and the principles of transparency and is open to all countries on the vast continent, including members of the Eurasian Economic Union, the SCO and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The step-by-step realization of the Greater Eurasian Partnership will not only actively promote economic connectivity and enhance the competitiveness of all participating countries, but also serve as a solid basis for building a space of peace and stability from Lisbon to Jakarta.

I believe if the EU countries can join this work, then they will also benefit from it. By participating in common efforts, they will be able to secure their rightful place in a new, more equitable and democratic, multi-centric world order. It is time for

Europeans to stop breaking away from their own continent, to stop peeping into the world's survival landmarks and to invite external military presence. This external military presence is not only failing to enhance their security, it is also depriving the EU of the possibility of becoming an independent center of international influence in a multipolar world. In any case, it is the choice of the European partners themselves.

Everyone wants to turn the page on COVID-19 as soon as possible. But lessons are inevitable. And it's up to each of us to decide if those lessons are right.

Throughout its long history, Russia has repeatedly faced the most dangerous challenges that threaten its survival. And each time, it not only rose from the ashes and emerged stronger, but it also set an example to other nations in terms of humanity and selflessness.

That is why our country, as an important international center, exporter and guarantor of security, will continue to advance a constructive and unified agenda and to play a balanced and coordinating role in international affairs. We are ready to cooperate with all those who are willing to work together on the principles of sincerity and consideration of each other's interests and concerns. We start with the indivisibility of all aspects of security, and we stand ready to help other governments, whatever their policies may be.

It's time to give up conventional thinking based on stereotypes and finally start acting from a moral perspective. After all, our best bet is a happy future for all who live on Earth, our common home.

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