

The "Collective West" Is Over. Russia Is Looking Ahead | Dr. Andrey Kortunov

Today I'm speaking to Dr. Andrey Kortunov, the Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council. Last week, Dr. Kortunov published a short but highly interesting article about what he called "The Grand Bargain". In the piece, Dr. Kortunov analyses the warming relations between Washington and Moscow and asks if the two Great Powers together will manage to rewrite history. Dr. Kortunov's analysis can be found here: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/andrey-kortunov/>

#M3

Well, you know, my take is that in Moscow, the name of the game is expectations management. Because, of course, they tend to be optimistic, and I think it was a surprise, but a very pleasant surprise, that Trump was ready to make such dramatic changes in the US approach to Russia, to Ukraine, and to many European security matters. But at the same time, we have the experience of the first Trump administration back in 2016. Expectations were very high, and most of these expectations did not come true. The relationship between Moscow and Washington did not get any better.

#M2

Hello, everybody. This is Pascal from Neutrality Studies. Today, I'm speaking to Dr. Andrey Kortunov, the Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council. Last week, Dr. Kortunov published a short but highly interesting article in Russian, which was then translated into English and published on the homepage of Russia Today, about what he called the Grand Bargain. In this piece, Dr. Kortunov analyzes the warming relations between Washington and Moscow and asks if the two great powers together will manage to rewrite history. This is what we want to discuss today. So, Dr. Kortunov, welcome.

#M3

Thank you.

#M2

Dr. Kortunov, in your piece, you make this interesting argument, and I think you make the argument toward your Russian audience, which is: Did we misunderstand the collective West? Could you

maybe explain to us a little bit, and the main audience of this podcast here is going to be English-speaking and Western-language-speaking audiences. How is Russia understanding the West, and what is your argument about how it might have to be readjusted?

#M3

Well, let me start by saying that since the beginning of this special military operation three years ago, Russia has endorsed a rather clear and, to some extent, logical narrative about the West. The first assumption is that the West is collective, that there is a high degree of cohesion within the Western community. But within this collective West, there are nations that lead and nations that are being led. And if you follow some of the official documents, you'll find that there is a clear distinction between the, quote-unquote, continental Europe on the one hand, and the Anglo-Saxon world on the other.

The perception is that the anti-Russian policies and sentiments are generated primarily by and within the Anglo-Saxon world, while continental Europe has to follow the Anglo-Saxon leadership, maybe even reluctantly, because clearly continental Europe has more interest in working with Russia, including economic relations, trade, investment, energy, and also traditional cultural and other types. Meanwhile, the Anglo-Saxons can afford the luxury of an uncompromised fight against the Russian Federation. And, of course, these are the forces which allegedly stood behind the enlargement of NATO and other developments that were detrimental to Russia's security interests.

Today, this narrative is shattered because, first of all, it's not clear how we can define the so-called Anglo-Saxon role. If you look at the positions taken by Washington and by London on relations with Russia and on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, you'll see very clear differences—maybe more than just differences, but I should say contradictions—between the Republican administration in Washington and the Labour government in London. So the whole idea of Anglo-Saxons, which looked rather logical a year ago, is now put into question. But second, more importantly, it is not clear where anti-Russian sentiments and anti-Russian policies are more consistent and more stable.

Is it the Anglo-Saxon world, or is it the continental European countries? And, of course, what we see today suggests that the United States, in particular under the Trump administration at least, is not as committed to this very rigid, very consistent anti-Russian strategy as some European nations, including Germany or France and, of course, the United Kingdom. So that suggests that this narrative, which emerged since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, has to be reviewed and maybe revised in certain ways because the current geopolitical realities question these assumptions that looked so natural and so logical two or three years ago.

#M2

The term "collective West," which I also used on this program quite a lot, is kind of a term of convenience in order to describe the larger—let's call it the US alliance system. On the one hand,

NATO on the European side. On the other hand, of course, also countries like Japan and Korea and maybe partners like Taiwan and all of the countries that then basically also decided to put sanctions in one way or another on Russia. So, do you now think that this term and this idea of who belongs together has to be fundamentally revised, or is the shift more of a form of gradation?

#M3

Well, a frank answer to this question is that no one knows. But what we know for sure is that the West has demonstrated spectacular resilience in terms of its cohesion over the last three years because there were many predictions that the cohesion of the West, which emerged after the beginning of this crisis, would not last for a long time and that we would see some countries changing their positions and questioning the overall collective strategy. And indeed, there are some dissidents in Europe. Look at Hungary or Slovakia or some other nations which are not happy with the current policies and which would like these policies to be changed. However, these dissidents did not prevent the European Union from passing new and new packages of sanctions against Russia.

And just a couple of days ago, there was a new package of sanctions announced, which suggests that these decisions cannot really change the integrity of the European Union and the cohesion of the West at large. However, the challenge came from another side. And, of course, the irony of the situation is that this change has come from Washington, which used to be not only the leader but the country that inspired many of the decisions made in Europe on Russia. So the big issue right now, in my view, is how this very unorthodox and, to some extent, unexpected shift in US policy might or might not influence the positions of other Western countries.

And that relates not only to members of the European Union or the United Kingdom. It is also a question for countries, let's say, in Northeast Asia. How could Japan react to the change in US policies? How might South Korea change its approach to Russia and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict? Can we expect any adjustments by Southeast Asian countries or by countries like Australia or New Zealand? And I think that these questions remain open. We do not know. But definitely, we have to reassess our understanding of the collective West, and the West is not as collective as it used to be, let's say, two years ago.

#M2

It's a very good observation. And it's something that I think the West itself is trying to understand at the moment. The Europeans are clearly trying to understand what to do with their big partner, the United States. And one of the ironies is, of course, that the Europeans have been pushed toward this war for a long time, not only since 2014, but in 2008 as well. It was the George Bush administration that managed to convince the Germans and the French, Merkel and Hollande, to go along with the promise of offering Ukraine NATO membership many, many times. And we still don't have an official explanation for who blew up Nord Stream.

But the one thing we know for sure is it wasn't Russia. And so that only leaves a handful of countries that could have been involved in this. In Europe, the confusion at the moment is huge. In Russia, how do Moscow's foreign policy circles view these changes that are now clearly initiated by Washington and clearly initiated by a change of government that actually has majority US support? We know that the people elected Donald Trump, that they want this, and it's a majority of the US population. How does Moscow make sense of this change?

#M3

Well, you know, my take is that in Moscow, the name of the game is expectations management. Because, of course, they tend to be optimistic. And I think it was a surprise, but a very pleasant surprise, that Trump was ready to make such dramatic changes in the US approach to Russia, to Ukraine, to many European security matters. But at the same time, we have the experience of the first Trump administration. Back in 2016, expectations were very high, and most of these expectations did not come true. The relationship between Moscow and Washington did not get any better under Trump. And in many ways, Trump was the first U.S. president who used sanctions against Russia in such a massive way.

Trump decided to withdraw from the US-Soviet INF Treaty, and he showed no particular interest in negotiating an extension of the New START agreement. So, generally speaking, the first term of President Trump in power was not a very good time for the relations between Washington and Moscow. Of course, optimists would say that today Trump is different from what he was some eight years ago. He's more experienced, he's more committed, he is fighting the so-called deep state with more vigor than he did earlier, and he has a stronger team in the White House than he had eight years ago. Today, expectations might have more grounds.

However, of course, it's yet to be seen, because definitely the inertia of the current negative trends in the relationship is huge. And the international sentiments fly high in Washington and here in Moscow, again, by many skeptics. There are many people who believe that it is a kind of trick that the United States will take advantage of Russia, one way or another. We cannot trust Americans. We cannot rely on what Trump says. So there are many skeptics on both sides. And it's yet to be seen to what extent these early promises will bring some fruits for the two sides and how this change in approach might lead to any breakthroughs, specifically on the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation, but also on more general issues of the European security architecture.

#M2

This is, to my understanding, the main goal of Russia: having a genuine security architecture or at least getting a process underway to achieve one. Is that the case?

#M3

Absolutely. And if you follow the narrative coming from Moscow, they always argue that this is not just about Russia and Ukraine. It's about much broader issues of the European security architecture. Today, a lot of discussions in the West are focused on how to provide security guarantees to Kyiv. But, of course, in Moscow, they also think about security guarantees for Russia. This is why they are so emphatically opposed to NATO enlargement, because they perceive the enlargement of NATO, especially if NATO absorbs Ukraine, as a kind of existential challenge to Russia's security.

That's why, you know, they would like to get back to some confidence-building measures in Europe, involving not only European nations but the United States as well. That's why they emphasize the need to demilitarize Ukraine, because otherwise, Ukraine might be tempted to resume its actions against Russia. So, just in a nutshell, it is definitely not only about ending this conflict. It's about European, and I would even venture to say, it's about global security because these days you cannot really distinguish between security in Europe and security in other parts of the world.

#M2

I completely agree. One of the problems we struggle with in Western countries is, of course, that the media portrays a very, very distorted image of the conflict with Russia and, in general, of things that are going on. And one of the things that we are told right now is that the United States—sorry, let me put it this way. The people who are in charge now of the process, at least in the US, to come to an understanding with Russia, have to also be very careful to signal to their own people within terms that they can understand. So one of the signals that they send is to say that what happened in Riyadh last week was a gauging of Russia's sincerity for a peace process.

It's cast as if the waters need to be tested on whether or not Russia is serious about peace. But on the other hand, what we clearly understand from Russia, at least I believe so, is that not only does Russia want peace, but Russia also wants a security structure. Now, how does Russia try to find out, as you said, how serious this new administration and the shift of the mood is in order to achieve this? Like, what are the confidence-building measures that would help Russia to understand, oh, yes, the US is actually serious about this one? It's not a trick.

#M3

Well, I think that definitely the meeting in Riyadh is just the very first step. Whatever you do, whatever you want to accomplish, you need to start with human contacts at different levels. One of the problems that we had with the United States over the last couple of years was that most of these communication lines were blocked or frozen, and we didn't have a lot of discussions with our American partners. That is, I would say, something typical for the United States in general, because I think in the US political culture, communication itself is a kind of reward that you can grant to your partners, and you can take it back if your partners do something wrong.

So it's not something that comes naturally. It is something that the United States can give or take away at its own discretion. And I think that Trump has changed this approach, engaging in these negotiations, which I think is a logical thing to do, because you need to know what your adversary thinks and what interests your adversary would like to pursue. But now, I think we are back to the drawing board, so to speak. Since these contacts are in the room, we now have to come to specific decisions on a number of issues where we do not fully coincide with the United States. The first step is evident: they want to restore business as usual in terms of diplomatic relations.

They want to restore embassies and consulate services because right now our embassy in Washington and the U.S. embassy in Moscow are like besieged fortresses. This is not normal. I cannot get a U.S. visa in Russia because there is no U.S. consulate operating in the country, and that has to be changed. Maybe we can get back to some direct, let's say, air traffic. Again, that would be important. It's a little bit more difficult, but it will also be a signal that we are moving in the right direction. And later on, if we deal with these very basic issues, then the time will come to stop talking about more sensitive, more politically controversial problems that Russia and the United States have to discuss.

And of course, this is not only about Ukraine, although Ukraine remains a very central element right now, but it is about many other regional matters, like the Middle East, for example, or the situation in Northeast Asia, or maybe issues of non-proliferation, strategic stability, and issues of energy security in the world, because both Russia and the United States are major producers of hydrocarbons. To some extent, the relationship between these two nations can have a very serious impact on global oil and gas prices. There are many issues that can be discussed. Cooperation in the Arctic region is another one. But of course, it will take time, it will take effort. It will require restoring a certain level of trust or at least a certain level of confidence in each other. And that's not easy after all these years of confrontation and the absence of contacts. I think it will be quite a challenging task.

#M2

In a lot of the talk over here, and by over here, I mean in the West, because I'm located in Japan, but again, it's also part of this collective. A lot of the talk is about a meeting at the top level between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin. But if I understand you correctly, your recommendation would actually be to take baby steps and try to build from basic levels up, not from the top down. Is that correct?

#M3

Well, yeah, let me say that for the meeting in Riyadh, nothing but a clear failure would be a success. And definitely, we've got a success story in Riyadh. But if you are thinking about a summit meeting, I would argue that nothing but a clear success would be a failure. We had a summit meeting between Putin and Trump in the summer of 2018 in Helsinki. Maybe you remember the meeting.

And again, expectations were very high, and the meeting went relatively well. I think there was some chemistry between the two men. But then Trump got back to Washington, and nothing happened. On the contrary, the relationship started to deteriorate quite fast because there was no real output, not something specific that would constitute a basis for a further positive change in the relationship.

So I think that it's better to have a meeting later rather than earlier if they cannot prepare it fast enough, but it's better to have something specific, something on the table that they could discuss and agree upon. So if I were to give recommendations to those who prepare this meeting now, I would say to make sure that this meeting will not be just a formal encounter between the two leaders with no substance. We should think of small incremental steps, but very practical steps that would change the momentum of the relationship. Because it's not just the level of cooperation, but the dynamics, which are important. We need to reverse the momentum. We need to demonstrate that we have already hit the bottom in this relationship and have started going up.

#M2

Do you think that the success Russia had with its BRICS strategy and policy, especially last year when Russia was the chair of BRICS, with all the many agreements that were signed and the various levels of cooperation achieved, is going to help the process of mending ties with the United States? Is there a chance that through the now extended BRICS network, there is a way to signal to the US that we are very serious about trying to improve the global business situation for you as well? Is that something that goes through your mind or not?

#M3

Well, of course, Trump doesn't like BRICS. He stated more than once that BRICS is not a friendly institution, that BRICS has some anti-American plans regarding, let's say, the role of the US currency and the international financial system. And that's why the United States is not really interested in seeing BRICS getting stronger or gaining new members. But I think that what is important in this particular situation is that by turning the last BRICS summit into a major success story—and I think that cannot be denied—indeed, the Russian side was capable of making BRICS bigger than life, if you wish, with a very long and comprehensive declaration accepted in Kazan in October of last year. I think that raises the level of Russia as a potential partner for the United States.

Because the BRICS process, among other international developments, suggests that Russia cannot possibly be isolated in the international system, no matter how hard the West might try to do that. Russia is making significant progress in its relations with major countries in the Global South, including China, India, Gulf states, and some Latin American countries. So that should motivate the United States to start working with Moscow because Moscow is an actor that will be there no matter whether the United States likes it or not. So it's better to have a dialogue rather than not have a dialogue with the Kremlin. So that would be my take on BRICS.

#M2

I see it that way, too. The statements that came out of Washington over the last four weeks all seem to point to the fact that this administration now clearly understands that, whether they like it or not, Russia and China are great powers in their own right, and they cannot be dealt with in the way that other countries could be—just isolated, let's say, the way that sanctions are able to isolate and, to a large extent, also devastate Cuba, for instance, right? Cuba and Russia are not in any way comparable in terms of what sanctions can do to their local economies. Now, given that, do you think that there is now a new spirit in general around how the global system works? And how do you think the Europeans, both continental Europeans and the British, understand this change? Are they in denial at the moment, or do you think they genuinely don't see this new multipolar world yet?

#M3

Well, I think that indeed the world is changing. Of course, you know, we can have many disagreements in terms of how fast the world is changing and what the destination of these changes is. Some say that it's natural, it's good, the system becomes more democratic, more diverse. Others argue that there is more and more chaos and fewer and fewer rules and that these developments are not positive but rather negative. But these developments take place in any case. And I think that all of us, be it in Russia or in Japan or in the United States or in Europe, are confused because no one has the ultimate answers to the problems posed by these changes. We understand that this process is accelerating and that it definitely contains risks and challenges.

It also contains opportunities, but it's very hard to make predictions about what will happen even in a year, not to mention five or ten years from now. So I think that we are in disarray, but for Europeans, I think it is particularly difficult to find a new path in this environment because they are so used to relying on the United States. They are so used to delegating some strategic decisions to Washington, D.C., and to considering Washington to be the natural leader of the liberal world order. And right now, the United States, at least under the Trump administration, demonstrates that it is not particularly interested in maintaining the old system, that the United States will focus on its own immediate national interests.

And of course, that means that Europeans are now on their own, or at least they might be on their own, and they are not ready for that because, for many, many years, for decades, they existed in a very different environment. To some extent, this environment was very favorable for Europeans because they didn't have to bother about these very difficult strategic decisions that Washington was taking on behalf of all the collective rest. So I can imagine that it will be a very bumpy road for Europeans. So far, they try to act as if nothing has happened, but that's not the most efficient way to cope with the new situation. I think that at some point they will simply have to face new realities, and that will be very painful.

#M2

If we just suppose that, okay, the way the world used to run or the way the post-Cold War era used to work with the United States at its center and Europe, as you said, delegating a lot of strategic decisions to it and perceiving it as a transatlantic marriage, right? And this marriage is ironclad. If we now suppose that this is actually... and we won't see a return to this anytime soon. Is Russia worried that the reaction of the Europeans to this would be overcompensating for their security, would be militarizing even harder, and in a sense, by not relying on the US anymore, by not having the US, as John Mearsheimer would say, as an offshore balancer, actually becoming more of a free radical that might, again, turn its entire security thinking against Russia as a significant other? Is that something that is on the mind of the security community in Russia at the moment?

#M3

Well, I think that there are concerns about this scenario because indeed we can argue that Europe is in crisis, that there are many problems in Europe, but still, Europe remains a very formidable, at least, geoeconomic actor. And it's a big player. Definitely, it has a lot of capacity. And if Europe decides to act on its own, over time, it might become also a formidable geopolitical player in this world. It might increase its defense budget, it might pursue its strategic autonomy from the United States, and it might try to focus primarily on the confrontation with Moscow, and definitely, this is not what they would like to see from Russia.

There are also doubts about whether the European political establishment these days has the political will needed to stand up to this challenge, because so far we hear a lot of strong rhetoric coming from European capitals. But at the same time, it seems that Europeans still hope they will find a way to somehow iron out their problems with Washington and come up with a deal that would reunite the West and basically maintain the status quo. We don't know how much Europeans are ready to pay for their strategic autonomy in terms of blood and treasure, because strategic autonomy is something that is not going to come without a price.

And this price might be higher, especially given the fact that Europe has so many other conflicting priorities and other problems that have to be kept in mind. That includes the future of the European project in general. It is about financial issues. It's about migration. It's about the role of transnational mechanisms of governance. There are many issues. And if you compare Europe today with Europe, let's say 20 years ago, of course, the Euro-optimism that we used to observe is no longer there. So we do not know. We do not know whether Europe is ready, whether Europe is willing, whether Europe is capable of fighting for its strategic autonomy. And definitely, we will know the answer to these questions, maybe only in a couple of years from now, right?

#M2

Definitely. You're very right about this. I mean, what we are doing here is engaging in a lot of guesswork, but I think guesswork is important at the moment because certainty has gone out of the window. How do you, and how does Russia in general, view the European Union at this point? Is the Union itself something, as a project, that, let's say, the Kremlin would still think of as overall a positive thing to have? Or if there was a button in the Kremlin saying "dissolve now," would the Kremlin press it?

#M3

Well, you know, I don't think that there is a full consensus in Russia on the European Union. There are people who are still enthusiastic about the European Union, about the European project as an idea which has a broader universal value and that would re-emerge at least at some point in the future. But on the other hand, there are many skeptics. There are many people who believe that the European Union as a project is no longer relevant to the international system, that Europe is decaying and this long-term decay is irreversible, that the population is aging, and that technologically Europe loses competition to North America and East Asia. There are many critics of Europe, and of course, right now there are many emotions in this discourse on both sides.

I think maybe those who had such high hopes of Russia joining Europe today are so disappointed that they tend to blame everything on Europe, on the alleged European hypocrisy and on the quote-unquote genetic anti-Russian feelings which are present in Europe. And on the other hand, you go to Europe and you know better than I do that anti-Russian sentiments still fly high in every European capital. So I think that it's like an unhappy marriage. It's not that we simply dated each other, but it was a marriage in many ways, with deep interaction at various levels. The interaction unfortunately didn't produce the results we hoped for. And that's why I think the emotional background of this conflict should not be underestimated.

#M2

I view it the same way. One question that remains in my mind is, what happened to this? Or how is this very strong European reaction to the war in Ukraine going to affect future relations? I mean, if we take the Nordics, just for one moment, because there's also this very important security component, instead of having a, well, at least nominally neutral Finland and neutral Sweden, we now have NATO member Finland and NATO member Sweden. And even more, we now have 15 and 17 U.S. military bases in both of these countries.

And we see the militarization, very strong militarization, of the entire Nordic countries, and that includes Norway as well. They're now willing to go into cooperation with the U.S. military to levels that have never been seen before. Is that also changing, altering the security calculus of Russia?

And how do you view this reaction, this kind of very strong... even stronger, like throwing themselves into the arms of Washington that we have observed, not just from the Nordics, but also other European states?

#M3

Well, you know, I agree that it was a very dramatic and, in my view, even unpredictable shift, especially in Finland after so many years of very good relations with Moscow and a lot of communication at various levels. Such an abrupt end of the relationship was, in my view, quite surprising. And you're right, you know, Finland and Sweden are ready to throw themselves into the arms of Washington. The question is whether Washington is ready to embrace them, and right now we cannot take it for granted. But specifically, I think if we're talking about the north, there is a very fast change in the environment in three sub-regions, including the Russian-Finnish border, which is a long border, the Baltic Sea, which becomes a NATO lake in a way, and the high north.

And Russia will have to keep in mind the geostrategic changes in all of the three sub-regions and will have to act accordingly. I think that would imply a heavy military presence in places like Kaliningrad and in the Russian north. It might result in an arms race. I'm not very optimistic about the development. I hope that we'll be able to contain this competition to some extent, but the changes in the north of Europe are evident, and these changes are likely to complicate security challenges for the Russian Federation in the future, maybe for a very long time.

#M2

And the new structure of Russia's security partners—in the West, they are often described as allies, but I really think that's the wrong way of framing it. With North Korea and Iran, with whom there are now security agreements in place—how does this play into Russia's strategy of building stability in its periphery? And is this something that we might see more of, more bilateral security agreements that Russia will try to strike?

#M3

Well, I think that this is probably a signal of where Russia is likely to go, at least within the next couple of years. It will rely primarily on bilateral agreements with select neighbors. And I don't think that these agreements are likely to be standard. If you compare, let's say, North Korea and Iran, you'll see that there are very serious differences in these two relationships. If you take other countries like China, you'll see that the differences are even more significant. So it will be a kind of customized agreement reflecting specific strategic challenges and opportunities in various parts of the world. And in each case, Russia will try to calibrate the scale of its commitments and the particular wording of the agreements to avoid taking excessive responsibilities for security problems in areas which do not belong to its immediate periphery. That's how I see the situation emerging.

#M2

Right. And maybe since we're speaking almost on the day of the three-year anniversary of the special military operation—today is February 25th—you mentioned that in Russia, there's still a lot of disagreement about how to view the situation and the way forward. But what would you say are the commonly accepted learning outcomes from the last three years of warfare with Ukraine that Russia can unanimously agree on?

#M3

Well, of course, there are some important lessons, not only political lessons but also military lessons. We learned a lot about modern warfare, I think, on both sides. For example, three years ago, no one would have expected drones to play such a significant role, or that you might get back to some of your very basic weapons instead of relying on a limited number of very sophisticated, technically advanced systems. I'm sure that everybody in the world, not just in Russia, but in all the general staff, is analyzing the outcomes of these fights to understand how modern high-intensity warfare in the 21st century should or should not be conducted.

So, in this sense, definitely there are many lessons to be learned and many conclusions to be made. There are also lessons about how fast you can change the system of your foreign policy priorities, what kind of obstacles and opportunities you might see in the Global South, what the limitations are there, the importance of economic sanctions, including secondary sanctions, and how you cope with them. How far you can go with import substitution, what you can do, and what you cannot do, at least in a couple of years. Definitely, you know, this conflict has changed a lot, and the country will be very different when the conflict ends from what it was when the conflict only started. And I think that is true for all the direct or indirect participants in this conflict.

#M2

Maybe a last question, also directly related to the name of this channel. According to my studies, I find a lot of periods in history when Russia understood and used the value of neutral spaces, either in the legal sense of neutralization—Switzerland is neutral because Russia helped it in 1815, Austria is neutral because Russia agreed to it. Neutrality was something that Russia wanted for Ukraine and, to a good extent, still demands. Is this something that will continue, or has this run its course? Is this idea of buffer states and neutral buffer zones still something that is important to Russia today or not?

#M3

Well, I think that it remains important, but I would say even more. I think that we are moving to a very different understanding of alliances. In a way, I would say that NATO is a 20th-century alliance. It is very robust. It is very hierarchical. It is very rigid in terms of the decision-making process. It has

many layers of bureaucracies. But I think that given the rapidly changing international environment, we are entering a period where nations are more likely to rely on ad hoc situational alliances.

Nations will shift sides if they feel that a particular arrangement no longer suits their interests. Flexibility will become much more important. This borderline between neutrality and membership in alliances will probably not matter as much as it did in the second half of the 20th century. So we will probably see many lateral arrangements around specific problems. It will be a very different picture in the years to come, and maybe this whole issue of neutrality will no longer have as much importance as it had in the 20th century.

#M2

Sorry, I said it's the last question, but a very last one. Do you think there's a case for increased cooperation to hammer out international law or to create new norms around which this new order or these new mini-lateralisms are built, in order to come to a common understanding of what to expect from each other?

#M3

Well, I think that we do not have an alternative. If we want to survive, we'll have to work together, even if sometimes we do not like each other or if we cannot fully understand each other, we'll have to work together. But let me just say that at the beginning of our conversation, you quoted my piece, which was called "Grand Bargain." In the spirit of full disclosure, I have to say that I do not believe in grand bargains. Now, I think that a new world order is likely to emerge from the bottom up rather than from the top down.

It will start with small, maybe technical, maybe situational, maybe incremental agreements on issues on which we can agree. And then it might gradually grow into something more substantive, something more strategic, something more lasting. It will be a long way, and I do not expect any breakthroughs. But we have to start somewhere, and I think that we should start with relatively sterile, relatively non-controversial issues. Then we can gradually build around these issues something more ambitious and something more lasting. That would be my take.

#M2

Smallest common denominators, that would make a lot of sense. Dr. Kortunov, thank you very much. For people who watch this and would like to read more from you, is there a place where you regularly publish your pieces?

#M3

Well, basically, the site of the Russian International Affairs Council is the place where I post most of my modest contributions to the international political forum.

#M2

Everybody, if you want to read the very important contributions of Dr. Kortunov, go to the link that I will post in the description of the Russian International Affairs Council. Dr. Andrey Kortunov, thank you very much for your time today.

#M3

Thank you.