

Sergey Karaganov: By using its nuclear weapons, Russia could save humanity from a global catastrophe

A tough but necessary decision would likely force the West to back off, enabling an earlier end to the Ukraine crisis and preventing it from expanding to other states

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This article has sparked major debate among experts in Russia about nuclear weapons, their role and the conditions of their use.

This is especially the case given Sergey Karaganov's status as a former presidential adviser to both Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, and his position as head of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, a noted Moscow think tank.

Some prominent figures have reacted with dismay, while others have been less critical.

RT has decided it would be beneficial for our readers to read it in full. The following piece has been translated and lightly edited.

Our country, and its leadership, seems to me to be facing a difficult choice. It is becoming increasingly clear that our clash with the West will not end even if we achieve a partial – let alone a crushing – victory in Ukraine.

Even if we completely liberate the Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporozhye and Kherson regions, it will be a minimal victory. A slightly greater success would be to liberate the whole of eastern and southern Ukraine within a year or two. But it would still leave part of the country with an even more embittered ultra-nationalist population pumped full of weapons – a bleeding wound that threatens inevitable complications, such as another war.

The situation could be worse if we liberate the whole of Ukraine at the cost of monstrous sacrifices and are left with ruins and a population that mostly hates us. It would take more than a decade to “re-educate” them.

Any of these options, especially the last one, will distract Russia from the much-needed shift of its spiritual, economic, military and political center to the East of Eurasia. We will be stuck with a wasteful focus on the West. And the territories of today's Ukraine, especially the central and western ones, will attract resources – both human and financial. These regions were heavily subsidised even in Soviet times.

Meanwhile, hostility from the West will continue; it will support a slow-burning guerrilla civil war.

A more attractive option is the liberation and reunification of the east and south, and the imposition of capitulation on the remnants of Ukraine with complete demilitarization, creating a buffer, friendly state. But such an outcome would only be possible if we are able to break the West's will to support the Kiev junta, and use it against us, forcing the US-led bloc into a strategic retreat.

And here I come to a crucial but hardly discussed issue. The root cause of – and indeed the main reason for – the Ukrainian crisis, as well as many other conflicts in the world, and the general increase in military threats, is the accelerating failure of the contemporary Western ruling elites.

This crisis is accompanied by an unprecedentedly rapid shift in the balance of power in the world in favor of the global majority, driven economically by China and partly by India, with Russia as the military and strategic anchor. This weakening not only infuriates the imperial-cosmopolitan elites (US President Joe Biden and his ilk) but also frightens the imperial-national elites (such as his predecessor Donald Trump). The West is losing the advantage it has held for five centuries to siphon off the wealth of the entire world by imposing its political and economic order and establishing its cultural dominance, mainly by brute force. So there is no quick end to the defensive, but aggressive, confrontation that the West has unleashed.

This moral, political and economic collapse has been brewing since the mid-1960s, was interrupted by the collapse of the USSR, but resumed with renewed vigour in the 2000s (the defeats of the Americans and their allies in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the crisis of the Western economic model in 2008 were milestones).

In order to slow down this seismic shift, the West has temporarily consolidated itself. The US has turned Ukraine into a punching bag to tie the hands of Russia, the politico-military lynchpin of a non-Western world freed from the shackles of neocolonialism. Ideally, of course, the Americans would simply like to blow up our country and thus radically weaken the emerging alternative superpower, China. We, either not realizing the inevitability of the clash or hoarding our strength, have been slow to act preemptively. Moreover, in line with modern, mainly Western, political and military thinking, we were rash in raising the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, inaccurate in assessing the situation in Ukraine, and not entirely successful in launching the current military operation.

By failing internally, Western elites have actively fed the weeds that have taken root in the soil of 70 years of prosperity, satiation and peace. These comprise of anti-human ideologies: the denial of family, homeland, history, love between men and women, faith, service to higher ideals, everything that is human. Their philosophy is to weed out those who resist. The aim is to neuter people in order to reduce their ability to resist modern “globalist” capitalism, which is becoming more and more obviously unjust and harmful to man and humanity.

Meanwhile, a weakened US is destroying Western Europe and other countries dependent on it, trying to push them into a confrontation that will follow Ukraine. The elites in most of these countries have lost their bearings and, panicked by the crisis in their own positions at home and abroad, are dutifully leading their countries to the slaughter. At the same time, because of greater failure, a sense of powerlessness, centuries of Russophobia, intellectual degradation and a loss of strategic culture, their hatred is almost more intense than that of the US.

Thus, the trajectory of most Western countries clearly points towards a new fascism, which could be called “liberal” totalitarianism.

In the future, and this is the most important thing, it will only get worse. Truces are possible, but reconciliation is not. Anger and despair will continue to grow in waves and waves. This vector of Western movement is a clear sign of the drift towards the outbreak of World War Three. It has already begun and could erupt into a full-blown conflagration either by accident, or due to the growing incompetence and irresponsibility of the ruling circles of the West.

The introduction of artificial intelligence and the robotization of war increase the risk of unintended escalation. Machines can act outside the control of confused elites.

The situation is aggravated by “strategic parasitism” – in 75 years of relative peace, people have forgotten the horrors of war, have stopped fearing even nuclear weapons. Everywhere, but especially in the West, the instinct for self-preservation has weakened.

I have spent many years studying the history of nuclear strategy and have come to an unequivocal, if unscientific, conclusion. The advent of nuclear weapons is the result of the intervention of the Almighty, who, appalled that mankind had unleashed two world wars within a generation, costing tens of millions of lives, gave us the weapons of Armageddon to show those who had lost their fear of hell that it existed. On that fear rested the relative peace of the last three-quarters of a century.

But now that fear is gone. The unthinkable in terms of previous notions of nuclear deterrence is happening – a group of ruling elites, in a fit of desperate rage, have unleashed a full-scale war in the underbelly of a nuclear superpower.

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The fear of atomic escalation must be restored. Otherwise humanity is doomed.

It is not only, and not even so much, what the future world order will look like that is being decided in the fields of Ukraine right now. But rather whether the world we are used to will be preserved at all, or if all will be left is radioactive ruins, poisoning the remnants of humanity.

By breaking the West's will in imposing its aggression, we will not only save ourselves and finally free the world from the Western yoke of five centuries, but we will also salvage the whole of humanity. By pushing the West towards catharsis and the abandonment of the hegemony of its elites, we will force it to retreat before a global catastrophe. Humanity will be given a new chance to develop.

Proposed solution

Of course, there is an uphill struggle ahead. It is also necessary to solve our own internal problems – to finally get rid of the mindset of Western-centrism and of the Westernizers in the administrative class. Especially the compradors and their peculiar way of thinking. Of course, in this area, the NATO bloc is helping us, unwittingly.

Our 300-year journey around Europe has given us a lot of useful lessons and it has helped us to form our great culture. Let us cherish our European heritage. But it is time to return home, to ourselves. Let us begin, with the baggage we have accumulated, to live in our own way. Our friends in the Foreign Ministry have recently made a real breakthrough by referring to Russia as a civilizational state in their foreign policy concept. I would add – a civilization of civilizations, open to the North as well as to the South, to the West as well as to the East. Now the main direction of development is to the South, to the North and, above all, to the East.

The confrontation with the West in Ukraine, however it ends, should not distract us from the strategic internal movement – spiritual, cultural, economic, political, military and political – towards the Urals, Siberia and the Pacific Ocean. A new Ural-Siberian strategy is needed, one that includes several powerful spiritually uplifting projects, including, of course, the creation of a third

capital in Siberia. This movement should become part of the much-needed formulation of the “Russian Dream” – the image of the Russia and the world to which one aspires.

I have often written, and I am not alone in this, that great states without a great idea cease to be such or simply disappear into the void. History is littered with the graves of powers that lost their way. This idea should be created from above and not rely, as fools or lazy people do, on what comes from below. It must correspond to the deepest values and aspirations of the people and, above all, it must take us all forward. But it is the responsibility of the elite and the leadership of the country to formulate it. The delay in putting forward such a vision is unacceptably long.

But for the future to come to pass, the resistance of the forces of the past – i.e. the West – must be overcome. If this is not achieved, there will almost certainly be a full-scale world war. Which will probably be the last of its kind.

And here I come to the most difficult part of this article. We can keep fighting for another year or two, or even three, sacrificing thousands and thousands of our best men and grinding up hundreds of thousands more who are unfortunate enough to fall into the tragic historical trap of what is now called Ukraine. But this military operation cannot end in a decisive victory without forcing the West into a strategic retreat or even capitulation. We must force the West to abandon its attempts to turn back history, to abandon its attempts at global domination, and to force it to deal with its own problems, to manage its current multifaceted crisis. To put it crudely, it is necessary for the West to simply “piss off” and end its interference in the direction of Russia and the rest of the world.

However, for this to happen, Western elites need to rediscover their own lost sense of self-preservation by understanding that attempts to wear down Russia by playing the Ukrainians against it are counterproductive for the West itself.

The credibility of nuclear deterrence must be restored by lowering the unacceptably high threshold for the use of atomic weapons and by moving cautiously but quickly up the ladder of deterrence-escalation. The first steps have already been taken through statements to this effect by the president and other leaders, by beginning to deploy nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles in Belarus, and by increasing the combat effectiveness of the strategic deterrent forces. There are quite a few steps on this ladder. I count about two dozen. It could even go as far as warning our compatriots and all people of good will about the need to leave their homes near the objects of possible nuclear strikes in countries directly supporting the Kiev regime. The enemy must know that we are ready to launch a preemptive retaliatory strike in response to its current and past aggression in order to prevent a slide into a global thermonuclear war.

I have often said and written that with the right strategy of deterrence and even use, the risk of a ‘retaliatory’ nuclear or other strike on our territory can be minimized. Only if there is a madman in the White House who also hates his own country will the US decide to strike in ‘defense’ of the Europeans and invite retaliation by sacrificing a hypothetical Boston for a notional Poznan. The Americans and the Western Europeans are well aware of this, they just prefer not to think about it. We, too, have contributed to this recklessness with our peace-loving pronouncements. Having studied the history of US nuclear strategy, I know that after the USSR acquired a credible nuclear retaliatory capability, Washington never seriously considered using nuclear weapons on Soviet territory, even though it publicly bluffed. When nuclear weapons were considered, it was only against “advancing” Soviet forces in Western Europe. I know that the late Chancellors Helmut Kohl and Helmut Schmidt fled from their bunkers as soon as the question of such use came up in an exercise.

Movement down the ladder of containment-escalation should be fairly quick. Given the current direction of the West – and the degradation of most of its elites – each successive decision it makes is more incompetent and ideologically veiled than the last. And, at present, we cannot expect these elites to be replaced by more responsible and reasonable ones. This will only happen after a catharsis, leading to the abandonment of much ambition.

We cannot repeat the ‘Ukrainian scenario’. For a quarter of a century we were not listened to when we warned that NATO enlargement would lead to war; we tried to delay, to “negotiate”. As a result, we ended up in a serious armed conflict. Now the price of indecision is an order of magnitude higher than it would have been earlier.

But what if the present Western leaders refuse to back down? Perhaps they have lost all sense of self-preservation? Then we will have to hit a group of targets in a number of countries to bring those who have lost their senses back to their senses.

It’s a morally frightening choice – we would be using God’s weapon and condemning ourselves to great spiritual loss. But if this is not done, not only may Russia perish, but most likely the whole of human civilization will end.

We will have to make this choice ourselves. Even friends and sympathizers will not support it at first. If I were Chinese, I would not want an abrupt and decisive end to the conflict, because it will draw back US forces and allow them to gather forces for a decisive battle – either directly or, in the best Sun Tzu tradition, by forcing the enemy to retreat without a fight. As a Chinese person, I would also oppose the use of nuclear weapons because taking the confrontation to the nuclear level means moving to an area where my country is still weak.

Also, decisive action is not in line with the Chinese foreign policy philosophy, which emphasizes economic factors (with the accumulation of military power) and avoids direct confrontation. I would support an ally by providing him with rear cover, but I would go behind his back and not enter the fray. (In this case, perhaps I don’t understand this philosophy well enough and am attributing motives to my Chinese friends that are not their own.) If Russia uses nuclear weapons, Beijing would condemn it. But Chinese hearts would also rejoice knowing that the reputation and position of the US had been dealt a severe blow.

How would we react if (God forbid!) Pakistan attacked India, or vice versa? We’d be horrified. Upset that the nuclear taboo has been broken. Then let us help the victims and change our nuclear doctrine accordingly.

For India and other countries of the world majority, including nuclear weapon states (Pakistan, Israel), the use of nuclear weapons is unacceptable, both for moral and geostrategic reasons. If they are used “successfully”, the nuclear taboo – the notion that such weapons should never be used and that their use is a direct route to nuclear Armageddon – will be devalued. We are unlikely to win support quickly, even if many in the Global South would feel satisfaction at the defeat of their former oppressors who plundered them, carried out genocides and imposed an alien culture.

But in the end, the victors are not judged. And the saviors are thanked. Western European political culture does not remember, but the rest of the world does (and with gratitude) how we helped the Chinese to free themselves from the brutal Japanese occupation, and many Western colonies to throw off the colonial yoke.

Of course, if they do not understand us at first, they will have all the more incentive to educate themselves. Still, it is very likely that we can win, and focus the minds enemy states without

extreme measures, and force them to retreat. And after a few years, we take take up a position as China's rear, as it is now performing for us, supporting it in its struggle with the US. Then this fight can be avoided without a big war. And we will win together for the good of all, including the people of the Western countries.

At that stage, Russia and the rest of humanity will pass through all the thorns and traumas into the future, which I see as bright – multipolar, multicultural, multicolored – and giving countries and peoples the opportunity to build their own destinies in addition to the common one, which should unite worldwide.