

Putin Warns Against Military Force

The following are excerpts from Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's Feb. 27 article for "Moscow News," taken from the Prime Minister's [website](#). The article was entitled "Russia in the Changing World."

Foreign interference in support of one side of a domestic conflict and the use of power in this interference gave developments a negative aura. A number of countries did away with the Libyan regime by using air power in the name of humanitarian support. The revolting slaughter of Muammar Gaddafi—not just medieval but primeval—was the incarnation of these actions.

No one should be allowed to use the Libyan scenario in Syria. The international community must work to achieve an intra-Syrian reconciliation. It is important to achieve an early end to the violence, no matter what the source, and to initiate a national dialogue without preconditions or foreign interference, and with due respect for the country's sovereignty. This would create the conditions necessary for the Syrian leadership-announced measures on democratization. The main objective is to prevent an all-out civil war. Russian diplomacy has worked and will continue to work towards this end.

Sadder but wiser, we are against the adoption of UN Security Council resolutions that may be interpreted as a signal to armed interference in the domestic developments of Syria. Guided by this consistent approach in early February, Russia and China prevented the adoption of an ambiguous resolution that would have encouraged one side of this domestic conflict to resort to violence.

In this context and considering the extremely negative, almost hysterical reaction to the Russian-Chinese veto, I would like to warn our Western colleagues against the temptation to resort to this simple, previously used tactic: If the UN Security Council approves of a given action, fine; if not, we will establish a coalition of the states concerned, and strike anyway.

The logic of such conduct is counterproductive and very dangerous. No good can come of it. In any case, it will not help reach a settlement in a country that is going through a domestic conflict. Even worse, it further un-

dermines the entire system of international security, as well as the authority and key role of the UN. Let me recall that the right to veto is not some whim, but an inalienable part of the world's agreement that is registered in the UN Charter—incidentally, on U.S. insistence. The implication of this right is that decisions that raise the objection of even one permanent member of the UN Security Council cannot be well-grounded or effective.

I hope very much that the United States and other countries will consider this sad experience and will not pursue the use of power in Syria without UN Security Council sanctions. In general, I cannot understand what causes this itch for military intervention. Why isn't there the patience to develop a well-considered, balanced, and cooperative approach, all the more so, since this approach was already taking shape in the form of the aforementioned Syrian resolution? It only lacked the demand that the armed opposition do the same as the government; in particular, withdraw military units and detachments from cities. The refusal to do so is cynical. If we want to protect civilians—and this is the main goal for Russia—we must bring to reason all participants in an armed confrontation.

And one more point. It appears that with the Arab Spring countries, as with Iraq, Russian companies are losing their decades-long positions in local commercial markets and are being deprived of large commercial contracts. The niches thus vacated are being filled by the economic operatives of the states that had a hand in the change of the ruling regime.

One could reasonably conclude that tragic events have been encouraged to a certain extent by someone's interest in a re-division of the commercial market rather than a concern for human rights. Be that as it may, we cannot sit back and watch all this with Olympian serenity. We intend to work with the new governments of the Arab countries in order to promptly restore our economic positions. . . .

Today, Iran is the focus of international attention. Needless to say, Russia is worried about the growing threat of a military strike against Iran. If this happens, the consequences will be disastrous. It is impossible to imagine the true scope of this turn of events.

I am convinced that this issue must be settled exclusively by peaceful means. We propose recognizing Iran's right to develop a civilian nuclear program, including the right to enrich uranium. But this must be done in exchange for putting all Iranian nuclear activity under reliable and comprehensive IAEA safeguards. If

this is done, the sanctions against Iran, including the unilateral ones, must be rescinded. The West has shown too much willingness to “punish” certain countries. At any minor development it reaches for sanctions, if not armed force. Let me remind you that we are not in the 19th Century or even the 20th Century now.

Developments around the Korean nuclear issue are no less serious. Violating the non-proliferation regime, Pyongyang openly claims the right to develop “the military atom” and has already conducted two nuclear tests. We cannot accept North Korea’s nuclear status. We have consistently advocated the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula exclusively through political and diplomatic means—and the early resumption of Six-Party Talks.

However, it is evident that not all of our partners share this approach. I am convinced that today it is essential to be particularly careful. It would be unadvisable to try and test the strength of the new North Korean leader and provoke a rash countermeasure.

Allow me to recall that North Korea and Russia share a common border and we cannot choose our neighbors. We will continue conducting an active dialogue with the leaders of North Korea and developing good-neighborly relations with it, while at the same time, trying to encourage Pyongyang to settle the nuclear issue. Obviously, it would be easier to do this if mutual trust is built up and the inter-Korean dialogue resumes on the peninsula.

All this fervor around the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea makes one wonder how the risks of nuclear weapons proliferation emerge and who is aggravating them. It seems that the more frequent cases of crude, and even armed outside interference in the domestic affairs of countries may prompt authoritarian (and other) regimes to possess nuclear weapons. If I have the A-bomb in my pocket, nobody will touch me because it’s more trouble than it is worth. And those who don’t have the bomb might have to sit and wait for “humanitarian intervention.”

Whether we like it or not, foreign interference suggests this train of thought. This is why the number of threshold countries that are one step away from “military atom” technology, is growing rather than decreasing. Under these conditions, zones free of weapons of mass destruction are being established in different parts of the world and are becoming increasingly important. Russia has initiated the discussion of the parameters for a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East.

It is essential to do everything we can to prevent any country from being tempted to get nuclear weapons. Non-proliferation campaigners must also change their conduct, especially those that are used to penalizing other countries by force, without letting the diplomats do their job. This was the case in Iraq—its problems have only become worse after an almost decade-long occupation.

If the incentives for becoming a nuclear power are finally eradicated, it will be possible to make the international non-proliferation regime universal and firm based on the existing treaties. This regime would allow all interested countries to fully enjoy the benefits of the “peaceful atom” under IAEA safeguards.