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A WORLD OF INTENTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

“The world will never be the same” is a popular phrase. This is how people comment on certain outstanding events that are happening in their lives or around them. And more often than not, it is an emotional assessment rather than an analytical one. The world as a whole is a very strong, cast-iron thing. It changes, of course, but slowly and imperceptibly.

However, there certainly are such events that really and perceptibly change the picture of the world. And those who say, “The world will never be the same,” referring to all that has happened to us since February 24, after the start of Russia’s special operation in Ukraine, have reason to say so. There is some evidence to it. I will try to present this evidence in a journalistic manner, not scientifically, without any deep conclusions, but rather aiming for a certain accuracy and maybe even artistry of my snapshots. These snapshots will be different, from a variety of areas: social life, economy, military history, and history in general. They all serve as a proof that even such an inert structure as the world can indeed be subjected to serious changes, if there is a political, human will to it, along with favorable circumstances and ways, the opportunities for change.

Opportunities can be technological, mental, intellectual. But they must exist. There is a saying attributed to various political figures, which goes like this: “It’s not the intentions but the opportunities that matter.” This approach explains a lot. It doesn’t really matter who wants what, unless

there are opportunities to achieve these goals; and this is directly applicable to the situation around Ukraine right now.

For example, we know that Poland has always been obsessed with the idea that it should be an empire from sea to sea – that land and areas, pieces of ground, rivers and people who live in the Western Ukraine are in fact Poland. And it would have been nice to get it all back, to take over, but for quite a long time Poland had no opportunity to do so. And suddenly, mind you, these opportunities suddenly appeared, or at least the Poles think they did.

Their policies have changed, their political stakes have changed, their allies in general have been cast in iron, and it is even hard to imagine that just recently the Polish leaders and political figures, albeit disliking Russia, still lived without illusions. Regarding opportunities, for example, to get their hands on a piece of Ukraine. Today they are definitely thinking about it, yes they are veiling it, yes they have to negotiate with NATO about it. Nevertheless, the opportunity came up, and certainly the intentions were there for a long time. This is a very important thing.

What opportunities, what intentions did we have when we began this difficult, complicated procedure called a special operation? In fact it is risky – very risky. What are our intentions here and what are our opportunities? Let’s take a closer look at this.

Concerning opportunities. Do they lie in the realm of the military? Well, thank God, since the early 2000s we haven’t wasted any time, at least in military terms. We did a lot to modernize the army, we did not sit by, and our scientists brought all the Soviet and post-Soviet scientific developments to material embodiment. Everything about our missiles, Sarmats, Kinzhals and Burevestniks – all of this has gone into development, it has all reached the level of a product. As they say in the course of the military acceptance, “The product has been accepted by the military, the products can fly, the products hit their targets, the products

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accomplish their missions” – and that’s certainly an opportunity. We are ahead of our opponents and rivals in this race. But! If you have such opportunities in the military sphere – so to say, in its applied technical aspect – does that mean that a state that has such opportunities necessarily makes that decision? Like, now I have the military capacity, so I will resolve everything in life by military means. No, of course not. It doesn’t happen like that.

The question is, what new opportunities, in addition to Kinzhals, made us so radically change our intentions to live in peace with everyone, to build Eurasia from Lisbon to the Bering Strait, to be friends with everyone, to use our own resources in moderation and offer them to our neighbors, to build “Nord Streams” and the like? At what point did this intention translate into a special operation and why?

Mainly, I think that these changes have taken place in our heads. At least in the minds of those who make decisions, and in the minds of those who support them, who analyze the reality and not run away trying to hide from it. “Peace is better than war!” – say those who surprisingly failed to notice the tragedy of the Russian Donbass. Of course it’s better. Of course, everything that is happening in Ukraine right now is a tragedy. Certainly this is the hardest ordeal, and certainly behind this story of the military solution to the problem is the story of how opportunities for peaceful solutions, political opportunities, have been missed over years. But we must not forget how the political decision was opposed, how the thesis of a Greater Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok was torpedoed, what a counterbalance to this was built, how the enemies – opponents of such ideas – plotted against it.

So what has actually happened? What happened was this: we couldn’t take it anymore. It has become impossible. It has become clear that if we continue to swallow the attitude toward Russia as a secondary power, we will be multiplied by zero. Remember when we were called a gas station and felt offended, and so on? It was just the beginning of the process. It soon became clear: to feel offended is not enough. If we fail to take seriously what our “partners” are saying today, and these are existential things, concerning the very possibility of Russia’s existence, our posterity will not forgive us: we will have squandered our inheritance instead of preserving it.

I hold an opinion that is not uncommon today: what is called the imperial tradition, the imperial way of existence, is actually (and there is no need to be timid and cunning when choosing words) Russia’s way of existence. Multinational, gigantic, historically established. The threat of losing, for example, access to the Black Sea, can no longer be tolerated. Or to the Baltic Sea. The threat of reducing the flight time of missiles to Moscow to a minimum. Turning Ukraine into a nuclear quasi-power.

At the same time they tell us: you must respect the territorial integrity of another state. When someone needs to bomb Yugoslavia, it’s only welcomed; it’s the world community that has decided that bombing is necessary. Now the world community has decided that there is no need to do away with the Nazis in Ukraine. And we decided that we need to. And we can’t do without it. Once again, a change occurred in the heads when Chechnya was returned instead of the shameful peace with the international militants. When we realized that we had to defend Syria – and ourselves in Syria. When we returned the Crimea to its native

harbor. Such steps are based on an unconditional, consolidated military technical component, which is crucial. But the main change occurred in the understanding of what Russia actually is. Well, there’s no way it’s a gas station.

Now let’s see if we have the ability to withstand massive sanctions. There are few cheerful assurances to it. Yes, there is a political will, there is an understanding of the historical challenge; we are gaining determination and going into open confrontation with a large, serious and very difficult opponent. Because the threat is absolutely clear, it is quite visible. But do we have the strength to fight many opponents at once? And here we cannot escape the question: how irreversible is our decision to be free and independent? For now we are freer than many. We are now more independent, more sovereign than literally anyone else. There is still China, and even so, maybe it is a more dependent country. This is a very important point. In order to be free and independent, we need strength, fortitude, good groundwork in the economy and resources, and so on. And here there is one quandary which I would also like to mention.

It’s about the certainty that we are doing the right thing, moving toward independence, sovereignty, that it’s how we defend our own civilizational path. Are we convinced that this is the one and only way of Russia’s development? While engaging in an intellectual kind of argument, I tried to formulate it figuratively and came up with a question like this: “Do we take Mariupol so that Ikea would come back to us, or do we take Mariupol so that Ikea would never come back to us?” I realize that this is a kind of exaggeration, a mental quandary, but one that is extremely important. It may be paradoxically phrased, but I think the answer to this question is unequivocal: “We want to be independent in a real way.”

It’s not something post-modernistic. This does not mean that we should fence ourselves off from the world, build some kind of a wall, return to the USSR, etc. All this nonsense immediately came to the surface of the public discussion of the situation. But they are not the point. Our confidence should manifest not in the readiness to tighten our belts or endure, although perhaps it is inevitable, we’ll see, as they say. But in fact, this is a story about learning to do a lot of things ourselves, not to hope that someone else will solve our problems, not to trade our blood and flesh, and I mean the blood and flesh of our land, that is, oil and gas, in order to get the “goods” (“We’ll sell the oil and buy the rest”). Fortunately, we did not rely on this thesis in the military domain. Although, as I remember now, we were going to buy Mistral. We have come a long way from trying to buy the Mistral to understanding that we have to “solve problems ourselves, and this serious business cannot be trusted to anyone,” according to the old Soviet love song.

I can’t help but refer to my own experience here. In between the work and writing papers, I restored an old Soviet Moskvich car from 1959. What I have to tell you is that everything in this car has been import-substituted. There is not a single part, not a single screw, not a single bolt that was not made on the territory of the great Soviet Union. Yes, the car’s concept is absolutely in line with the automotive tradition of that period. It resembles some car models of the world. Certainly the technology was studied, certainly it was a post-war machine, and certainly our victory and our penetration into some of the sanctuaries of applied science of that the time contributed to its emergence. Surely some

technology and engineering solutions have been spied. But at the same time, looking at this device, rather complicated for 1959 – mechanical, electrical and otherwise – one can't help but wonder: didn't the country that produced Moskvich have a large margin of safety to pursue an independent, sovereign policy? One hundred percent yes.

Why can't we say yes to ourselves with absolute certainty today? For many reasons. Because we sincerely wanted to integrate into the global economic project. Did it work? Let's be honest: it didn't quite work out. Has the "civilized" world accepted us? No, it pushes us to make stools, cars, missiles, Kinzhals and whatever else ourselves. With God's help, of course, and with the help of our true friends. Make, not buy. After all, in that same Ikea, a lot of products are made in Russia. Then why do we need this brand? Why do we need this foreign word? I don't know. They say that this is how we got and are getting (perhaps the West really helped) the technology, logistics, and marketing moves. Some have peeked at how someone turns the screws, how beautiful they can be, so they've stepped up here. Moreover, there are industries in which we really can't pull it all off by ourselves; no other country, by the way, does. But here, too, the question of freedom and sovereignty looms. Say, the problems that automotive producers have today are not technological at all, not market-related but political, with Renault crying, losing revenue, but going away.

They are losing both profits and markets. They wouldn't want to leave, but they are forced by the harsh Euro-Atlantic solidarity. This is how they see their freedom: not to work in Russia, to leave from wherever they are told to.

All right, it's not just about that after all. And it's not about whether Renault goes or stays. There is a shortage of electronic elements. It appeared long before the special operation. And there are monopolists in the world who are the only ones producing them. We can't let everything that runs on lithium-ion batteries go down. We have now decided to finally build a giant factory and produce these batteries ourselves. Because batteries are extremely important to us – we need them for existential functions! And we don't need the Ikea brand for existentials, it seems to me. We can do without it.

Now the danger is that we switch from one seller of goods to another, with our traditional gas. That's what we'll do, of course, in a sense. The world depends on our gas, our oil, our wheat, as it turns out, and many other things, like our titanium, our nuclear energy, our nuclear technology, etc. Nevertheless, we will have to take more and more steps in order not to lose our training, not to lose the ability to make and grow and produce by ourselves what we buy in other countries for some reason. We have to finish with the story of sending metal all over the world to bring in nails made of it. We have to stop sending our wood somewhere far, far away, and then suddenly getting stools from there. Thank goodness we have localized the stools by now, but the story still seems strange. No, we can't grow bananas. I guess we can't. Well, let's buy bananas. Yes, maybe we don't make some first-rate microchips, some technology, well, let's buy them. But the world doesn't want to sell them to us, you say. Sanctions. Well then, we'll have to change that world.

The whole thing is this: we have proclaimed that we are free, autonomous, and pursue our own, independent politics. We can no longer move in line with the Western civili-

zation project, as its contradictions with the interests of the country have been exposed to the core. It seems to us, and it is true, that a civilizational project based on a libertarian idea, with its libertarian ineptitude, seems dangerous for our purposes. Thus, we say no to this world. Perhaps largely because the world says no to us. Did someone appreciate our good intentions? The famous formula that I already mentioned, "from Lisbon to Vladivostok," was it adopted or at least considered? No, they were horrified by it. Why?

The answer is there. The point is that we don't really want to close ourselves off from everyone. Yes, we are being forced (and I believe for good) to become more independent and produce our own nails and beyond. We know how, and apparently we can. We look at our armament and say, "Gosh, wow, look what we can do!" We have this evidence working beautifully in a special operation, although it is not a joyful, not a humane way. But what can be done, such ways still exist.

The world has built a global system – economic, political, and I would say cultural. If you can call it culture. It has built such a global system, where we, firstly, do not fit in any way, and secondly, even if we did, it would not give us advantages. Instead, we would be forced to part with what we hold dear. With our independence and sovereignty, for instance. Then why do we need it? And that's where I see a huge conflict. It doesn't mean we can't create – we have to create our own global system. This task is more difficult than reconstructing an old 1959 Moskvich. No, it's not the one that needs to be restored. We must rebuild our global economy, and life itself is building it, we only need to understand it and defend it, including the situation in Ukraine. What do I mean? What is called Eurasia as opposed to the American world. Eurasia is a very powerful and underrated player. China, India, Russia, the old Europe being written off. Well, only if it writes itself off. This is the only possible outcome. It will grow decrepit and die, along with its European Union and its indulgence in the American uncle as its unconditional spiritual economic, political and otherwise appreciated leader.

Once again, it is Eurasia, the Eurasian globalism that interests us (nothing prevents South America from joining it as well). An expanded version of BRICS would do us good. Here we can cooperate, here we understand how to live and how to respect each other. See how we have come the giant way with the Chinese. We had the Damansky too, and look where we are now. Because we are evolving in the same universe. We are developing in parallel. We need each other. We are not a danger to each other, in the end. And we are gradually coming up with the essential, most interesting solutions. For instance, do we have to worship the decrepit Europe, let's say, for former merits, the Beatles and Mozart? And the Americans? And the dollar?

There are self-proclaimed kings of pop music. Who elected Michael Jackson king of Western pop music? No one. He just sang a lot, put out a lot of records, and then he called himself king. We have our own self-proclaimed king in Russia, Philip Kirkorov. Let him be. There is no danger in that. But the self-appointed global croupiers who shuffle all the cards... I am reminded of a phrase from The Pokrovskie Gate movie, "Savva, what do you need it for?" Here we are like that Savva. Why do we need it for? We have our own tasks around us, our own existential challenges. Why do we have to go in that direction, can we accept being

treated like that – by the horns and into the stall? No, we'll never go there. First, because the bear has no horns, thankfully, and the bear doesn't ask anyone's permission, as we know from the proverb.

All right, it's all just fancy words. But we really do not need some of the ideology, ideas and other trends that are imposed on us as a precondition for entering the "civilized" world. Well, for example, they are terribly concerned about overpopulation. Therefore they support any kind of human relationship, including personal relationships, except for a normal large family. What do we need it for? Why does Savva need it? We barely have 150 million people for a huge territory! We need large families badly.

What we are now telling each other about Eurasia is a nightmare of the global world as it is now. This is the end of the world hegemony. That's where we got in, that's what happens when we assault Azovstal. That's why we are taking Mariupol. That is my answer to these questions.

I do not claim to have any complete theoretical statements. However, there is another important point that I can't help but mention. When I ask myself the hard questions, "Can we pull it off? Can we do it? Do we really need all that, or maybe we're fooling ourselves here, and we really just want a privilege?" I think not. I and many others are very concerned about the lost lives and the fact that we are forced to deal in such harsh ways with the tasks that determine our future, the very existence of Russia. It's a pity we haven't learned how to do it peacefully.

I am especially sorry that Slavs fight with Slavs, Russians with Russians. It's a kind of a civil war, in fact. What did the story with Azovstal teach us, among other things? When our valiant army was about to storm the factory, the commander-in-chief said, "Stay out of these catacombs." And now, thanks to this precise decision, I think hundreds or even thousands of lives have been saved. I'm not talking about the ones who are out now. These prisoners are not particularly interesting. Many of them deserve trial and the harshest punishment for their crimes. And those who were there by mistake, by stupidity – well, we must also judge, examine, understand, and then decide their fate. But! They are alive, as are those who were going to storm their catacombs. This is a very important point. We explain to the world what we want, and who, in fact, opposes us. In the West, people listen to more than just their propagandists – sometimes genuine footage gets through there, and when they saw those tattoos on the backs and other body parts of the Azov people, they suddenly wondered, "Are we for fascists or what? We support Ukraine, pump it with weapons, is it for fascists?"

A minor epiphany, of course. But there is little good in war, and it's all so shaky, to be honest. But we must value it and gather it up bit by bit – into one truth of the righteous cause. The certainty that we have chosen the right path means that to reinforce that certainty, we have to walk that path to the end and win.

This is the dialectic.