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## THERE IS NO STABILITY BUT ARE THERE GROUNDS FOR OPTIMISM?



**The whole world has the jitters. The media is focused on crises and disasters and the people are scared. To quote a character from a famous Soviet movie: “There is no stability. The terrorists have again seized an aircraft...” The mass audience often hears the signals that the leaders of major powers send to one another showing determination to fight for national interests to the end. People perceive this communication as a threat to themselves. Not long ago I spoke before an audience of schoolchildren and they asked me when a nuclear war will break out.**

**But despite an avalanche of bad news, a major crisis does not start. Some invisible safety net seems to keep the world away from war. Why does this happen? Mistrust between countries is there, preparations for war continue and dangerous provocations are being staged. The fact that countries know more about each other is helpful. They have more ways of communicating and can check each other’s intentions quicker during a crisis. Has the adversary decided to go off the rails? A long distance traversed together proves that the adversary power is headed not by some lunatic but by a normal person who wants to live and ensure peace and security for his compatriots.**

A look at the world from this viewpoint shows that apart from threats it has opportunities and sudden positive developments amidst crises. Let’s try to look at the world from this perspective to see what can bring us positive news.

The India-Pakistan confrontation, which saw an escalation last week, will not lead to a nuclear war. The crisis has already started to abate. It may be the latest but not a unique event in relations between the two countries. Similar crises in the past were settled peacefully, without a nuclear exchange. There will be no deterioration next year in such conflict points as Korea, Iran, Bosnia or, hard though it is to believe, Ukraine. Ukraine will

have a presidential election but external forces do not want to perceive the state of affairs there as a battlefield, which prevents an explosion. In turn, this reduces the chances for the Ukrainian elites to manipulate foreign involvement.

The situation in Venezuela is grave but an explosion is unlikely to take place there, either. Fluctuations of public discontent are typical for that country, which is now undergoing one of the worst economic crises in its history. Maduro is firmly holding the initiative in his hands and his external opponents, including the United States, are not mobilized well enough to stage direct armed interference. A policy of stifling will continue. It may produce results over time although some countries, for instance Cuba, have lived in strained conditions for a long time.

There are causes for concern but not panic in Russia-US relations. The Mueller report, which will soon be released, will show that Donald Trump was light-fingered in business, but won't substantiate the hypothesis on Trump's collusion with Russia. Symptomatically, the recently released book by the patriarch of American journalism Bob Woodward, *Fear: Trump in the White House*, did not support this idea. Woodward conducted detailed interviews with all personnel at the White House, Congress and Washington and did not find any traces of collusion. We believe that Mueller's investigation will follow this line. Indicatively, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence recently arrived at the same conclusions. However, they didn't produce any impression on the US press and weren't broadly publicized. In the final count, such facts may reduce the interest in Russia's interference in the US election although this topic will not disappear. Russia will be accused of what it has done and what it hasn't done.

The war in Syria will gradually come to an end. The postwar arrangement and national recovery will be the main issues. There may be progress on Transnistria settlement, where the sides are making it clear to each other that they are open to resolute steps. Russia-China relations will continue to grow stronger.

The Russian economy, which is coping well with sanctions, and the strength of the Russian military-political alliances, primarily the CSTO, will pass the test successfully. Despite the continued front pressure from the West for more than five years, both Russia-established systems are performing well.

These symptoms show that although unwell, the world is still in a satisfactory condition on the whole. What recommendations will be appropriate under the circumstances?

First, we must proceed from the premise that the current nervous uncertainty is a new constant and will not disappear in the next two or three years. It may persist for the next five and even ten years. Importantly, in a situation where everything is unpredictable, a party's predictability is particularly appreciated. Indicatively, many countries consider Russia increasingly predictable and pragmatic against the backdrop of the current spontaneous conduct of the United States. Results of public opinion polls published in the Munich Security Conference report show that some US allies call the United States a key threat to their interests.

That said, it is necessary to prepare for many inventive and flashy provocations with excellent media coverage. Teams that plan and stage all kinds of provocations are working throughout the world. Their main goal is to create a media effect, exert



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psychological influence and mobilize people for some action. But most often such provocations are aimed not at changing the strategic situation but at attracting attention, which is testified to by the provocations with the use of chemical agents in Syria or the actions of authorities in Ukraine.

It is important to have information initiative in order to respond to provocations. In other words, it is necessary to respond to them quickly with sound arguments, remaining calm so as to prevent a new wave of media frenzy.

We think this year will not be bad for Russia and the world in general, especially if it is compared to the crises of the past. Sure, it will not be calm. It will be nervous and will test the ability of states to conduct their own line in conditions of multiplying crises. But in general, Russia's method of navigation in a rapid flow of events shows that it can take the heat.

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