



# SERGEY KARAGANOV

Honorary Chairman of the Presidium of the non-governmental Council on Foreign and Defense Policy of Russia

**Steven Erlanger, London Bureau Chief, *The New York Times***

That is a good segway to Russia, as we have brought Russia up. I think that you all know Sergey Karaganov. He is one of the best interlocutors between the puzzle mystery of great Russia and we humble people in the West. Some people think that Russia has emerged as something of a winner from the problems of Syria and that its policy has been more consistent than many others'. Other people are less convinced of that. What therefore does Russia really want?

**Sergey Karaganov, Honorary Chairman of the Presidium of the non-governmental Council on Foreign and Defense Policy of Russia**

Russia seems to be a political winner in the Syrian case. If there could be a winner. It won because it has been competent. It is as simple as that. We knew what was happening in and around Syria and we acted accordingly. We asked our partners all over the world to do the same. But unfortunately the steps which that were done by others were sometimes incomprehensible and even on the verge of being insane. The strengthening of the Russian position is therefore simply a result of a sane and responsible behaviour. If you could have a productive behaviour in a situation like that.

I am happy to be with the policy of my country in the region. We are very friendly with Israel, although we have some differences, have good relations with Iran and excellent relations with many other countries. And we are strengthening our position in Egypt. However I could not advice to everyone else to follow the Russian way.

Just try not to make the same mistakes again that most of us have been making. Most of our policies in the area, including those of Russia or of the Soviet Union, have been counterproductive for decades. We believed that this region is still an area of the Big Game and even now we can see that there are remnants of the Big Game. Then it was a combination of the Cold War policies. And still later it was believed that the region would become the reserve of Western democracy, which is funny. It is not the reserve of democracy and there will be no Western democracy in the region in my lifetime, even if I live long life.

The problems of the region are obvious. They are cultural, demographic and educational. There are problems with identity and economies lagging behind because of above mentioned reasons. The area will be unstable or worse for decades. What, then, is to be done by outside powers, if we can learn the lessons?

First, do not intervene. Our interventions have hampered development of the region. The Soviets devastated Afghanistan and the Soviets and Americans, with some help from our European friends, supported an unbelievably ugly aggression of Iraq against Iran. We even closed our eyes to the fact that Hussein's Iraq murdered tens of thousands of people with chemical weapons. And after that we consider ourselves to be civilised peoples. We now want Iran to trust us.

Do not do the things that have been done in Libya. I am sorry to say unpleasant things, when I am in France. Libya was not a very pleasant country but it functioned and it had the best social system in the area. Today, it is a territory that has fallen apart. It is a failed state that spreads instability and weapons.

One thing, therefore, is to stop intervening.

The second thing is to help peoples in the region to build up their security system. There is a huge security vacuum and void in this area.



The third piece of advise stop ostracising Iran. This has been the international community's worst mistake over the last few decades. We know what has been happening in the nuclear area. But Iran is one of the most well-educated and potentially responsible countries in the region, one with a great history. Of course, defensively it has supported all kinds of Hezbollah and it has been moving – although I do not know for sure as of now – possibly towards a nuclear status. But mainly because it has been constantly threatened. However, Russia's experience with Iranians has shown that they have been acting very constructively in calming crises in the former Soviet Central Asia and quite responsibly in calming crises in the Caucasus, including in Chechnya and elsewhere. They should therefore not be looked at automatically as an enemy but as a potential partner and a force for stability in the area. Which will be becoming more and more unstable by definition.

The wise thing would be to stop acting as if we are children playing with fire or elders trying to replay the games of our brilliant past – and we never had a brilliant past. Let us therefore act, as if we are realistic adults.

**Steven Erlanger, London Bureau Chief, *The New York Times***

I would like to ask you a very quick question, to which I hope you will give a very quick response. When President Obama decided to go with Mr Lavrov and work on chemical weapons in Syria, that will not do a lot to end the war, but, in your view, does this implicate Russia in a solution? Is it promising for that reason or do you think that it is not important?

**Sergey Karaganov, Honorary Chairman of the Presidium of the non-governmental Council on Foreign and Defense Policy of Russia**

I think that Russia is, of course, implicated in a way and we have a moral and political interest in finding a solution. That is clear. However, I must say that we had that policy from the beginning. We did not want a war. That was the main driving force of our policy. We knew that a new war would provide new grounds for the multiplication of terrorists. Very close to our borders, by the way. We therefore wanted to stop the deterioration of the situation and to do so in a way that will help. Of course, those who wanted to oust Assad at all costs are not happy, but we are there for stability and not revolution.

**Steven Erlanger, London Bureau Chief, *The New York Times***

I do not think that you wanted a war, but you are not much in favour of regime change either.

**Sergey Karaganov, Honorary Chairman of the Presidium of the non-governmental Council on Foreign and Defense Policy of Russia**

We had regime changes twice in the previous century. It cost us about 60 million people after the democratic revolution of February 1917 brought about a regime change. And it costs a large part of our territory and collapse of the living standards of tens of millions and their desperate suffering after another democratic revolution in 1991. After these experiences in less than one century and quite recently, we are quite anti-revolutionary.