There is no rule-based international order without this rule

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For Russia, violations of agreements and treaties by the West have been a recurring theme throughout history. Among the most emblematic examples is the 1812 invasion by France and its European allies just a few years after Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I signed the Treaty of Tilsit, which promised “perfect peace and friendship” between the French and Russian Emperors. The treatly explicitly declared this peace “immutable”, yet it was swiftly broken. The resulting conflict led to Napoleon's downfall and exile less than two years later.

A more recent and tragic episode ocurred in 1939, when Germany signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, pledging peace for ten years. That decade, however, lasted barely two years: Germany invaded in 1941, with even worse consequences than France had suffered a century earlier. If Hitler was more treacherous, cruel, and unscrupulous than Napoleon, he lacked Napoleon's military talent. Evilness without talent is a grave mistake that leads to self-destruction. Hitler's minister for foreign affairs, Ribbentrop, also met a worse fate than Talleyrand: he was hanged in Nuremberg for crimes against peace.

Today's conflict between Russia and Ukraine once again underscores the issue of deception among states via broken international commitments. That is a reality even aknowledged by Western leaders. Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel publicly admited that the 2014 Minsk Protocol, co-signed by Germany and France, was never intended to be implemented in good faith. Rather, it aimed to “give Ukraine time to become stronger” - a strategic maneuver, not a diplomatic solution. Given this, it is unsurprising that president Putin, a lawyer with a doctorate in public international law, expressed his frustration, stating: “the West has decided that it does not have to follow the rules in its relations with Russia”. He accused NATO of “blatantly lying” about its eastward expansion and decried the “hypocrisy” of the collective West.

This *hypocrisy*, etymologically meaning “to act or decide underneath or covertly”, is glaring when some Western capitals promote a so-called “rules-based international order”. International law indeed has many rules, but one stands above all: *pacta sunt servanda*. Agreements must be kept. This principle is enshrined in Article 26 of the Vienna Convnetion on the Law of Treaties: “Every treaty in force binds the parties and must be performed by them in good faith.” Evidently, Merkel either ignored or disregarded this provision. Even prior to treaty obligations, the very admission of a state to the United Nations requires that it “be able to fulfill its obligations and be willing to do so” (Article 4 of the UN Charter).

If the rest of the world were to behave toward one another as the West has behaved toward Russia, public international law would cease to function. This is not hyperbole. A legal system where treaties carry no obligtation would devolve into anarchy: *I’ll pay if I feel like it. I'll defend you if it's convenient. I'll fish up to this boundary, unless I change my mind. We'll have a trade agreement, but only if I'm in a good mood.* The legal doctrine of *estoppel* would collapse under the weight of opportunism, and the world would slide into a state of perpetual *rebus sic stantibus* where every agreement is conditional, fleeting, and revocable.

Classical international law views *pacta sunt servanda* as foundational to legal certainty and international order. Early legal scholars even spoke of the “sanctity of treaties,” warning that withouht this principle, “the superstructure of contemporary international law would collapse,” with consequences that are entirely unpredictable.

The likely outcome of today's contradictions is not just Russia's understandable distrust toward Western commitments, but a broader erosion of global confidence. Disregard for the most basic rule of international law undermines the very credibility of those claiming to uphold a “rules-based order”. Consequences are already visible: the weakening of the dollar's role as a global reserve currency; rising inflation in supposedly stable nations; the emergence of alternative trade blocs; and the development of new financial centers beyond the West. They are all signs of a shifting global order provoked by the West's own failure to uphold its commitments.

In this context, what can Russia diplomacy do to address the West's inconsistency? Two things. First, stop placing trust in those who have proven untrustworthy. Second, strenghthen relations with emerging partners genuinely interested in establishing reliable, long-term agreements. Only by doing so can a true rules-based international order be established: one rooted not in hipocrisy or hegemony, but in mutual respect and legal integrity.