

## **“The World in Search of a New Equilibrium”**

**by Russian Foreign Minister S.Lavrov**

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Russia has returned to the world stage as a responsible state which can defend its citizens. If anyone was mistaken on this score, then our resolute actions to force Georgia to peace and the recognition, compelled by circumstances, of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia should have dispelled any such doubts.

Through its response to the Georgian aggression, Russia has set a kind of standard for reaction, which fully complies with international law, including the right to self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter and our concrete obligations regarding the settlement of this conflict. The actions of Russia to force Georgia to peace have become a model example of moderateness, as they pursued no aims other than those prompted by the need to provide effective guarantees of the nonresumption of Georgian aggression against South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Unfortunately, multilateral diplomacy did not work, nor did Russian-US interaction, aimed at keeping Tbilisi from a perilous gamble.

Military aid had failed to give the United States sufficient leverage to restrain Saakashvili's government. Instead, it encouraged the irresponsible and unpredictable regime in its gambles. The phantom of the Great Game wanders again in the Caucasus. If instead of choosing their national interests and the interests of the Georgian people, the United States and its allies choose the Saakashvili regime, which “has never learned anything,” this will be a mistake of truly historic proportions.

The situation brought on by Tbilisi's attempt to settle the conflict by brute military force mirrors all the negative aspects of the current stage in international relations, of the dangers in whose underestimation Russia has warned more than once, in particular in the speech of Vladimir Putin at Munich and in the Berlin statement of Dmitry Medvedev. They are unilateral response opposed to multilateral diplomacy; staking on force as distinct from a commitment to pacific settlement of conflicts; and the complicated dialectics of such principles as territorial integrity and the right of nations to self-determination.

The last few weeks' events give rich illustrative material on the theme of whether you can replay a real war lost on the battlefield in a virtual reality of the information space. This is also an issue of the moral foundation of international relations – that the norms of morality are not abstract categories in world politics. What is more important: truth or an ability to lie beautifully from TV screens and relay the lie hourly to the whole world?

The developments since August 8 have borne out the correctness of the analysis contained in President Medvedev's remarks at the meeting of ambassadors and permanent representatives on July 15 this year. He said in part that the world, having got rid of the Cold War, simply cannot attain a new equilibrium; that the conflict potential, including in areas close to Russia's borders, is sufficiently high; and that there is an increasing tilt towards methods of force, even though they every time prove untenable. Political provocations, all manner of “revolutions,” and the cynical practice of double standards are brought into play. And probably it is no coincidence that those increasingly meddle in the affairs of other states who do not exactly succeed in doing things right at home.

To us, the CIS space is not a “chessboard” for geopolitical games, but an area of mutual civilization for all peoples of the region, keeping our historic and spiritual legacy alive. Our geography and economic interdependence give tangible competitive advantages to all Commonwealth countries. The integration imperatives of globalization are here as forceful as in other regions of the world. We only need that no one should interfere by creating artificial obstacles, acting in one’s own self interest.

No matter how we may be provoked, we will continue to keep restraint and a soberness of judgment; go on firmly, but unfrontationally upholding our interests and principles.

Someone wanted to “unfreeze” the frozen conflicts. Now we can judge the results. Every cloud has a silver lining. Today’s clarity is better than any uncertainty or ambiguity. It should be obvious that South Ossetia and Abkhazia did not seek independence in general, but independence from the Georgia whose leadership for some reason has always tended to be chauvinistic towards ethnic minorities.

One should not forget that thanks to Russian peacekeeping in South Ossetia and Abkhazia Georgia enjoyed the fruits of peace for the last 15 years. And the biggest failure of all the Georgian governments was their inability to derive benefit from this in the interests of their own country, of their own people. It wouldn’t be bad for Saakashvili’s external patrons to ask themselves the same questions that are being asked by opposition forces in Georgia itself.

For us, recognizing the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was dictated equally by legal, moral and pragmatic considerations primarily in terms of providing effective security for their peoples.

We can no longer afford, as we did in recent years, to merely wait when a Tbilisi blitzkrieg against South Ossetia or Abkhazia starts again. No matter how quickly our military may have responded after the attack on Tskhinval on August 8, it would all the same have been impossible to prevent hundreds of casualties among civilians and peacekeepers, let alone our losses in the bloody battles to dislodge Georgian forces from the territory of South Ossetia. The way events developed – in a forestalling vein – in Abkhazia only bears out the correctness of that conclusion. Of course, if you place people’s lives and interests at the top of the list.

When we are being constantly told about “Georgia’s democratic government,” does this mean that it is permissible for a democratic government to act this way against a civilian population that it considers its own? We will never agree with this British-style “license to murder” that some capitals issue to the “friendly regimes” certified by them.

People living in the conflict regions in the post-Soviet space have found themselves in this “gray zone” through no fault of theirs, often never becoming citizens of states which arose as a result of the breakup of the USSR. It is incomprehensible why those who speak in virtually every place about the “responsibility to protect” forgot about this when it came to the part of the ex-Soviet Union space where the authorities began to kill innocent people by appealing to sovereignty and territorial integrity. For us, the question in South Ossetia was one of repelling aggression and protecting our citizens directly on the borders of Russia and not in the Falkland islands.

Double standards are all the more disgusting when at issue are the lives of people: who are to live and who to die, whose children have a greater right to life and whose children are merely a soulless entity in geopolitical apportionments. Who among those championing Georgia have uttered a single word over the almost daily civilian deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan resulting from actions of the NATO-led coalition forces?

I consider it urgent that Europe should return to simple, not politicized and not geopolitical values.

Realized in Russia's actions to defend the rights of the population in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, of whom Russian citizens form a large part, are not only the fundamental requirements of our Constitution, but also the growing support in the international community of the idea of the security of the individual, which by no means runs counter to the traditional concept of the security of the state. To kill people whom you consider your own citizens is not an internal matter. We cannot regard people as "belonging" to anyone's territory that can arbitrarily, without these people's consent, pass under the sovereignty of this or that state in violation of the UN Charter and the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. Such an approach would return us – in present-day Europe – to the days of serfdom.

Sovereignty, of which the people are the only source, presupposes responsibility. First and foremost, responsibility to one's own citizens, including the ensuring of their rights and freedoms, and herein lies the purpose of the existence of the state itself – not the individual for the state, but the state for the individual.

In the Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhaz zones of conflict, Saakashvili and those who stand behind him (and without external support he would not hold out a day) had decided on testing Russian power for strength. In so doing the present Georgian regime revealed its essence by taking it into its head to bomb the population of South Ossetia into submission to its diktat. Right after this the same fate was prepared for Abkhazia. This did not work and never will. To guarantee the region is protected against new outbreaks of violence Russia will continue to take measures to punish those guilty and to ensure that this regime is unable to commit evil deeds ever again. For a start it is necessary to impose an embargo on arms supplies to this regime until another government turns Georgia into a normal state.

We are interested in the closest cooperation with the OSCE and the UN in order to provide lasting security guarantees for South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as envisaged in the six principles put forward by Dmitry Medvedev and Nicolas Sarkozy in Moscow on August 12.

The turning point in world development requires a deep, philosophical approach. There is no way to dispense with turning to history in this regard – otherwise we will be doomed to repeating it.

This is important, since Europe, unfortunately, still does not have a collective security system which would be open to all and provide all with equal security. But something needs to be done, for otherwise everything in Euro-Atlantic affairs will come full circle. The present crisis also points to this. Europe needs a positive, not a negative agenda. For a start it would not be a bad idea to look at whether the previous structures and mechanisms are adequate today or thought ought to be given to something new for the construction of a new European architecture, firmly guaranteeing the inviolability of postwar borders while taking into consideration the realities of the 21st century. Let us call it an "audit."

President Medvedev suggested that a European Security Treaty be concluded, starting this process at a pan-European summit. It is about creating a truly universal system of collective security in the Euro-Atlantic area, with Russia fully integrated into it. In this context the problems that have arisen over the CFE Treaty and the deployment of elements of a US global antimissile system in Eastern Europe must also be honestly considered. In the absence of a reasonable multilateral dialogue we will respond ourselves based on the principle of reasonable

sufficiency; national security cannot rest on a word of honor: President Medvedev also spoke of this.

But we would, of course, prefer collective work on European security problems – naturally on an equal, not a bloc basis. Our relevant initiatives remain valid.

Russian relations with NATO are experiencing a long-cherished moment of truth. NATO itself has embarked on the path of raising the stakes. There is a feeling that the alliance again needs “front-line states” to justify its own existence in the new conditions.

It is not we who subject the present architecture of European security to test. Its systemic defects are obvious, including above all NATO-centrism, which by definition negates the creation of a truly universal mechanism of collective security in the Euro-Atlantic area.

I am certain that Europe is perfectly well aware of this. It has been Europe, taught by its own historical experience and having gone through national catastrophes, that has come closer than others to reformulating the meaning of its existence in a truly global, collectivist vein, when all global issues are seen as one's own. National egoism does not work anymore. There should be no rollback allowed, whether in the form of populism, intolerance or Islamophobia. Russia is ready to search for new fruitful ideas together which would bring our common future nearer. Now is the time to follow Paul Kennedy's advice, in his article in Foreign Affairs for May/June 2008, and “take intellectual risks.”

As for Russian-American relations, their positive program is set out in Russia's Foreign Policy Concept. We have noted that, during the current US presidential campaign sensible voices have begun to be heard, particularly about the need to maintain real control over strategic offensive arms. I am certain that a positive agenda can be built on such a pragmatic basis, reflecting the true state of affairs and national interests, not ideological fantasies.

At a point in the past the US responded with the presidency of John Kennedy to the intellectual, military-political and technological challenges of that era. The situation repeats itself. America needs to acknowledge the reality of the “post-American world” (Fareed Zakaria) and to start adapting to it. I can only agree with Fyodor Lukyanov, who in his article in the newspaper Vedomosti for July 21 says that “the next presidency is fundamentally important – it will show how deep the crisis of American policy is and how long it'll take to overcome it.”

We will have dealings with any America. But our US partners should realize that positive relations between leading world powers can only be built from strict reciprocity and absolute honesty, with the “package” in place, not just its selected elements. We are going to dialogue with Washington as long as there is the slightest hope of understanding each other and coming to an agreement. And we frankly admit that we would like that in international affairs the US would take the path of changes, not stand in their way.

Unless this occurs, complicated times await the US and the entire world. An attempt to live in its own unipolar world has gone on too long, and this is dangerous in every respect. We see its manifestation in anti-Russian provocations, including Tbilisi's aggression against South Ossetia.

I am convinced that the discredited practice of maintaining client states and dummy regimes should not be revived.

It will take time to sort all these things out well and decide which is more important. The mythology of separate, bloc security in an era of globalization or a successful antiterrorist and

antinarcotics struggle in Afghanistan and a joint analysis of likely global implications of the developments in Pakistan; a further fragmentation of the Balkan states or united action to stabilize this explosive region.

I think that sooner or later we are going to arrive at the recognition of the necessity of reviewing the whole international agenda so as to agree on its truly collective version. While no one needs to start from scratch, a radical revision is unavoidable, since it is the imposition on all, including Russia, of the West's unilaterally painted view of the world's development since 1992 that lies at the base of all the present misunderstandings.

The only reasonable way forward is pragmatic and sensible cooperation, without self-deception and illusions, which the partners have definitively freed us of. The criterion for our relations can only be total reciprocity.

In the actions of our opponents it is hard not to discern a striving – at the level of the subconscious – to somehow make up for the lack of obedience on the part of Russia. Dissatisfaction with this unavoidably leads to the path of a policy of “containment.” And all this is contrary to the wise advice of Joseph Nye on the harmfulness of policies from a position of military strength in our time. And contrary to the thesis formulated by Chancellor Alexander Gorchakov in his famous circular of August 21, 1856 that this kind of policies ultimately “give back to Russia the full freedom of action,” and also contrary to the view of Fyodor Tyutchev (in his unfinished treatise “Russia and the West”) that “it has been the most sworn enemies of Russia that have contributed best to the development of its greatness.” It is hard to argue with this last point if you recall who started the wars that ended with Russian forces' entry into Paris in 1814 and into Berlin in 1945.

A standoff is again being imposed on us in virtually the same region where one and a half centuries ago Russia was being contained under the slogan of the Eastern Question. The slogans are different now. Only naval demonstrations in the Baltic Sea are lacking (in the Black Sea we are already watching them). But this is also not far off, if you bear in mind the US plans to deploy its antimissiles on the Baltic coast of Poland, and for their protection, the appropriate systems of not only ground, but also of sea basing. It will be recalled that after the Crimean War Western Europe was never able to restore its equilibrium without the participation of Russia, particularly on the fronts of World War I.

So there is no way we can get away from the fundamental theme “Russia and the West.” We have in fact shared all the tragedies of Europe in the 20th century, when the continent's western part used to set the tone in European civilization. Now, with the end of the Cold War, truly collective decisions are possible in the Euro-Atlantic area, but which are unthinkable without the equal participation of Russia.

The problems facing the historical West are most acutely manifest on the other side of the Atlantic, first of all because it is there that the load of a policy based on instincts and prejudices of the past has proved the heaviest. But in a cardinaly changed, globalizing world everyone will have to rearticulate their mission. Western Europe has actually done so, its majority refusing to share the Americans' staking on military force. The new Russia has also made its choice, reaffirming it in its Foreign Policy Concept as endorsed by President Medvedev. Now it is up to the rest of the members of the European and Euro-Atlantic family.

Today, in order to claim a privileged position in the international system, it is necessary to prove one's capacity for real leadership in tackling global problems, be it global poverty, energy and food security or climate change. Look at the unsettled Arab-Israeli conflict alone. Representing a

different civilization, Kishore Mahbubani, a National University of Singapore professor, writes (in Foreign Affairs for May/June 2008) that “the West has gone from being the world's problem solver to being its single biggest liability.” That’s the bill for which those will be held to answer to the rest of the world who aspire to formulate the position of the “entire West.”

Our view of, and Russia’s goals and objectives in the contemporary world are clearly articulated in the Foreign Policy Concept, approved by President Medvedev.

We will never agree with legal nihilism in world affairs, with an attitude towards international law as a “draft pole” and as the “fate of the weak” or with any attempts to “cut corners” to the detriment of international legality, which is the embodiment of the moral principle in relations among states. Indeed, international law is our ideology in international affairs. To use Fyodor Tyutchev’s phrase, we want “once and for all to establish the triumph of law, of historical legality over the revolutionary mode of action.”

With the end of the Cold War the prerequisites for establishing the principles of genuine freedom in the international community arose. Grounds for bloc policies have disappeared. The multivariant behavior of states on the international scene has increased. The notorious principle of “you’re either with us, or against us” no longer operates. Conditions are being created for a multipolar world in which states are driven by their national interests cleansed of ideology and by a common understanding of collective interests. Herein is the basis of an emerging new, self-regulatory international system.

We will not let ourselves be drawn into any confrontation. If, however, partners are not ready for joint action, Russia will be forced to go it alone in defending its national interests, but always on the basis of international law. Firmly based on international law and the Constitution and laws of Russia, we are going to protect the life and dignity of our citizens, wherever they may be, to support the interests of Russian business and to develop privileged relations with Russia’s friends in various regions.

Somebody does not want us to focus on construction, to successfully tackle important tasks for our people and occupy our lawful place in the world. But we will have the patience not to succumb to provocations. Overall, the stage of “concentration” has been traversed by us. The task today is to unfold the accumulated potential in the interests of Russia, for the sake of achieving a new quality in its internal development and of making our active contribution to the formation and realization of an international agenda.