

**Address by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov  
at a Meeting with the Members of the Council on Foreign Relations,  
New York, September 24, 2008**

First of all, thank you for this opportunity to meet again with the members of the Council.

Well, as I am a little bit late, due to my meeting with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, we've decided that I won't read my prepared remarks.

Was it a rocky meeting? No, I did not feel any rocky style. Certainly a rocky style is not my style, and it was not the Secretary's approach to this meeting. We discussed our relationship. We, I believe, agreed that we have to be pragmatic. We would never be able to agree on everything. And of course we discussed the immediate things on which we disagree, the situation in the Caucasus. But we, as I said, agreed that we must not make this situation a rock that would hit everything else.

We considered our future areas of cooperation, including issues related to nonproliferation. And it's obvious that we need clarity.

I welcome the pragmatic mood of the Secretary and the pragmatism of the discussion, as I did the pragmatic attitude of President Bush yesterday when he spoke at the General Assembly and devoted most of his speech to the issues which are indeed of great importance to all humanity, including Russia and the United States, issues like terrorism, like human trafficking, drug trafficking and proliferation. All these issues require collective effort and they can't be solved without pooling the assets we all have, and Russian-American cooperation is certainly a key to such worldwide endeavor.

It is also clear that we need pragmatism in our relations. The extremely emotional reaction of the West, and the United States in particular, to the Russian action to stop the aggression of Georgia against South Ossetia, the action firmly rooted in the right to self-defense as enshrined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, did tell on relations between the two countries. Returning to the issue of pragmatism, a constant recent feature of both US and Russian policy, I think that having it restored will take some time.

I already had the chance to explain that you can't have it both ways, punishing Russia by cancelling meetings we share or work formats which are truly important to the entire world and at the same time expecting Russian cooperation on issues important to you.

I already referred to the fact that we don't understand the reasons why G8 events have been, if not cancelled, then indefinitely postponed, events which are of paramount importance as they concern the activities of the nonproliferation and counterterrorism working groups, and meetings at the level of foreign ministers that are annually held in the margins of the UN General Assembly and which discuss Iran, North Korea, other proliferation risks, and conflicts – in the Middle East and Afghanistan, for example. The meeting of agriculture ministers from the G8 nations also became a victim, although they were supposed to consider a strategy for food security, which had been one of the key issues at the G8 Toyako Summit.

The United States ought to define itself on the list of issues on which it does not want and on which it wants to cooperate with Russia. When that list is made available to us, we will certainly be able to understand better how we are to proceed with this relationship.

I don't think it is right to make important items on our agenda hostage to emotions and the feelings of being offended, though there should be no such feelings: we acted, as I said, on the basis of international law to protect the lives of the Russian peacekeepers that the Georgian fellow members of the joint peacekeeping force had attacked. When the Georgian army had started this assault against the sleeping city of Tskhinval, the Georgian peacekeepers serving in one contingent with their Russian colleagues joined the army and began killing their Russian comrades in arms. We could not tolerate this.

If all this talk about the responsibility to protect is going to remain mere talk, if all this talk about human security is going to be used only to initiate bombastic debates at the United Nations or elsewhere, then we believe this is wrong. So we realized the principle of human security, the principle of responsibility to protect and did so in strict compliance with Article 51 of the Charter.

During today's meeting with Secretary Rice we discussed the state of Iran's nuclear program and the Korean Peninsula nuclear problem in particular. We believe that in both cases our overriding goals have not changed. We want a peaceful solution to these problems. We want to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, and we want to ascertain that the Iranian nuclear program bears truly and solely a peaceful character through the offices of the IAEA. These goals are unchanged, and it would be irresponsible on the part of our countries to give up on these common goals because of some disagreement over the Caucasus.

We never quite saw eye to eye on tactics regarding both issues; there were always some differences over tactical matters, but we have until now been able, on both these issues, to find a common tactic by developing compromise approaches together with the other partners in the six-party talks on the Korean Peninsula and with the Europeans and China on Iran's nuclear program. We reiterate that the same holds true for this particular situation as well. We will continue our discussion of this issue. And we also expect our American colleagues – and others, but I believe it's first of all the Americans – not to prevent G8 discussions on crucial issues for all humanity.

**Question:** Do you consider a return to the Cold War era possible in Russian-American relations?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** About three years ago US Vice President Cheney made a speech in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius. Georgia was not yet a cause of disagreement then, and everybody was trying to concentrate on the mechanisms to settle the South Ossetia and Abkhazia crises, that eventually were disrupted by Saakashvili. In that speech and in some other remarks made during that period which wasn't considered rocky by anyone, Cheney used some very harsh language to which we were forced to react. I would not like to recite that language, but I can say that it was absolutely identical to the Cold War language. It was not our choice then. And it is not our choice now.

I can't recall any speech by Putin or President Medvedev that could have provoked a return to the Cold War.

The Munich statement by Putin I think was a very important call that went unanswered. It was a call to begin a serious dialogue on why the security system is not working as intended. He gave examples which we believe indicated that the implementation of the agreements on the issues of what I would call hard security has been flawed. We agreed at Russia-NATO Council, for example – and this is the key issue for what we are discussing – that security is indivisible, and that no one should ensure his own security at the expense of the security of others. It's a very

straightforward statement endorsed, I think, in 2003 at Pratica di Mare during a Russia-NATO summit.

Several months ago, on April 6, at another Russia-NATO summit held in Bucharest, we tried to develop a common statement for the presidents of the NATO countries and Russia to endorse but failed to concur because the United States didn't want to pick up the language of five years ago and to say once again that no one should ensure his own security at the expense of the security of others. It was a very telling position, this inability to be willing to take into account the security concerns of other countries in the Euro-Atlantic space. This refusal to reiterate this phrase came against the background of the deployment of a third missile defense site in Europe and against the background of the reluctance of our American colleagues to discuss seriously a post-START-1 regime, because START-1 is set to expire in December next year. And the only thing the US is prepared to retain in lieu of it is the logic of the Moscow Treaty, which only establishes the limits for operationally deployed missiles with nuclear warheads. The US still doesn't want to keep the limits on all kinds of delivery vehicles. We still cannot get a credible answer regarding US plans to develop non-nuclear warheads for deployment on strategic missiles and strategic delivery vehicles, which would create serious problems for those doing real-time monitoring of the strategic stability situation. Add to this the NATO expansion, which we were told would never happen when the Soviet Union was departing Eastern Europe; add to this the construction of the US Black Sea bases in Romania and Bulgaria, which we were, again, promised wouldn't be the case, as well as the reluctance of the United States to agree that we shouldn't put weapons in outer space while the United States is actually engaged in developing space weaponization plans and the Prompt Global Strike doctrine.

When you take this all in combo, and against this background, ask your American colleagues in the Russia-NATO Council to reaffirm that simple thing they deemed possible to say five years ago that no one should ensure his own security at the expense of the security of others, and they say, no, we can live without this, then one can hardly agree that our reaction, expressed in a call to discuss further actions, is an invitation to a Cold War lite. I do not agree with this.

**Question:** Do you feel that Russia's surrounded by enemies, as President Medvedev stated in a recent interview with Izvestia?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** I think that you have incorrectly translated the Russian President's words from Russian into English. The third US missile defense site, the military bases in Bulgaria and Romania, the space weaponization plans, plans to put new radars somewhere in the Baltic states and further down south, and the similar plans on Russia's eastern borders, I mean the US-Japan missile defense plan – that's what Russia is surrounded by. We are not enemies with anyone, but our military planners just must take this into account as they adopt the measures to develop the mismatching aspects of their own defense capability. That is how the matter really stands. Sometimes we indeed feel the hostility of the policies being pursued toward us.

**Question:** Do you feel threatened by what's known as the color revolutions?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** We don't feel threatened by "color revolutions." We don't believe it is right for a democracy to make revolutions the beacon of promoting democracy. We tried it, you know, in 1917, when in October the red revolution took place. If we assume that a state coup is a state coup wherever made, then I suggest having a look at how the presidential elections were held in Ukraine in 2004 and in Georgia in 2003. Then, essentially, the election results were trampled under foot and thrown away by revolutionary action. I remember Saakashvili storming the parliament and deposing his mentor Shevarnadze as president with the words, "I am the boss

now.” And he was immediately recognized as president. What’s the difference between this and 1917? It wasn’t the Winter Palace, of course, it was a different building.

**Question:** You gave a speech at the beginning of September in Moscow to the diplomatic corps. And you quoted a Singaporean professor who said the following: “The West has gone from being the world’s problem-solver to being its single biggest liability.” Does this imply that you will be guided by this in your foreign policy?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** First of all, I want to note that as I spoke at MGIMO (U) on the occasion of the start of the academic year I quoted these words of Kishore Mahbubani, a National University of Singapore professor, to show that we ought to discuss these problems, that we must not privatize values, that we must not privatize civilizations and that we must admit that there are several civilizations in the world. Unipolarity based on the insistence that it’s only Western civilization which is right, undoubtedly, leads to a dead end. In addition, we must not pretend that European civilization, of which the three branches exist – the European Union, the American branch and the Russian branch – will always be the world’s leader. And to remain a leader you must be competitive. We all must be competitive. It’s only together that we can be competitive. Only in competing with other civilizations can the leader be determined.

The quote I used is to show that we must begin to talk seriously and we must respect others.

**Question:** Could you explain the meaning of the words “privileged interests” that are contained in the new Foreign Policy Concept for the Russian Federation, signed by President Medvedev? Some people in the West have wondered whether it doesn’t involve or imply defining Russia’s security at the expense of others or claiming kinds of rights that go beyond international law or introducing a new kind of hegemony...

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** Well, now I see how easy it is to distort the policy statements. You quoted this specific phrase, declaring that this could be achieved only by violating the norms of international law.

The five principles enunciated by President Medvedev on August 31st are the principles contained in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, which he set out in order of their priority.

Ranking first is the principle of observation of international law, and this wasn’t intended as an abuse to the United States, I can assure you.

Number two: multipolarity. We will henceforth build our foreign policy on the objective realities of multipolar world. A unipolar world might have existed in somebody’s mind, but it has failed dismally in Georgia, as has the existing European security architecture.

Number three: non-confrontational approaches.

Number four, Russia has areas where it has privileged interests. The foreign policy concept says that Russia is going to develop friendly, mutually advantageous relations with all those who are prepared to reciprocate on an equal and mutually beneficial basis, paying special attention to the traditional partners of the Russian Federation. Of course these are countries which were part of the USSR, but not only. We have good, long-standing relations with African, Asian and Latin American countries which sent their students to our country to study and where we built a lot of industrial enterprises. About 150 enterprises were built in Afghanistan alone, with which we also have good relations.

In the '90s, when Russia was considered one of the best democracies and it was said, I think, that a kind of "color" revolution had occurred (but it was truly a democratic revolution without any color hues) – during that period, unfortunately, we were so poor that we could not take care of the immediate needs of our own people and we couldn't afford and, frankly, didn't even remember about relationships with our old friends.

We came out of this crisis, accumulated enough resources, perhaps for the first time in history, to both address all the problems facing the country at this particular point in time, including modernization of the economy, modernization of the army, which was in very bad shape, the solution of social issues, as well as joining the club of donors who engage in official development assistance; by the way, we have just adopted a law to this effect.

We also witnessed the rise of Russian business, which, having gained a firm foothold inside the country, now begins, like any other business, to look abroad for expansion prospects. Of course, the past experience and past connections are very important for business to come back to these countries and regions.

And we will be paying attention to those who graduated from our universities. A couple of years ago we started inviting them to alumni reunions in Moscow.

We began to pay attention to the Russian emigrants, ethnic Russians, including those who left the country before the revolution and now want to reestablish cultural and spiritual links with their Homeland.

We would like to use the economic assets all over the world that were created with the assistance of our country to get some benefit from this now. So that's what is meant.

Lastly, the fifth principle enunciated by our President is protecting Russian citizens wherever they are. Moreover, we intend to protect Russian citizens with all means available to us.

I can give as an example how we are trying to protect the Russian speakers in Latvia and Estonia. The only thing we insist upon is for these two countries to respond positively to recommendations offered by the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the UN. Rapporteurs from these organizations have repeatedly visited these countries and have repeatedly recommended that they speed up the naturalization process and simplify the citizenship procedure for newborns and the elderly.

We will protect our citizens whenever they face discrimination in business or in any other field, through diplomacy, through international instruments and through international organizations.

I hope that no one will repeat the bloody aggression against a sleeping city that was unleashed in the early hours by President Saakashvili, and that no one will be killing Russian citizens. And it is necessary to choose – either to support those who killed hundreds of Russian citizens, including peacemakers serving under international agreements, or not to support them.

Perhaps it's not an entirely correct parallel, but I recall the 1989 invasion of Panama, when President Bush Senior, announcing its start, said we cannot tolerate this anymore: one American serviceman killed, another wounded, still another beaten up and his wife sexually harassed. "That's enough," he said. And all Americans, without exception, supported the effort to protect American citizens. One may recall the motivation for other invasions, when no one was killed but there was a danger to their lives – and whole countries were invaded. You must understand our feelings when we heard no condolences over the loss of Russian lives, but heard the

condolences being extended over the loss of Georgian lives; it's not in the traditions of Christianity.

**Question:** Are there any disagreements in Russian political circles on how to build relations with the United States?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** First of all, I would like to say that there have always been disagreements, including in the time of the Soviet Union. That they were not made public is another thing. But as far as I can judge, because I don't know about how the foreign policy was made at the time – I was just a junior diplomat – the disagreements were very, very serious at times. But according to the rules of the game of Soviet times after the adoption of a decision everyone was to support it regardless of the previous disagreements.

And there will always be disagreements in any, even a closed society; it's just that in the open society those disagreements are known to everyone, they are being openly talked about. By the way, you yourself have referred to the "not very free" Russian media, often seeing things differently than the government. Hopefully you will be able to explain to those criticizing us for curbing the media freedom that it's not difficult to find many, many alternative views in Russia. From these newspapers it is obvious that some people criticize us for the events in Georgia, for our reaction to this aggression, and they criticize us out of utilitarian considerations. They say over and over again that the US is unhappy, the US is angry, the US will cancel visas for officials, and the US will impede Russian business abroad, and so on and so forth. Therefore, if you follow this logic, we should have swallowed it all. Others say we were not resolute enough, that we acted only in response, though we knew about these plans, and that we should have taken preemptive action; then hundreds of lives would have been saved. Still others say that we should have taken Tbilisi and created a tribunal to try President Saakashvili. And some people cite Saddam's fate as an example. All these possibilities have been widely discussed.

Yet ours was the only possible solution for all the reasons combined – moral, legal and pragmatic in the first place. When President Saakashvili tried to win his first war with South Ossetia in August 2004, he didn't have enough arms and the peacekeepers and South Ossetia security forces quickly stopped it, whereupon he rearmed hugely. His country is a world record holder in growth of budgetary outlays for military purposes. But since that August, for the last four years, we had to keep on alert our military units on the Russian side of the border along the Caucasus Ridge because we knew of his preparations. And for us not to react or to react without destroying the assets that were used to shell Tskhinval and other South Ossetian towns would have meant to continue this never-ending watch over the gentleman who never keeps his promises and who never accepted the offer to conclude a nonuse of force treaty which would have made it possible to preserve Georgia's territorial integrity. He undermined it by violating each and every agreement signed by Georgia to resolve this conflict. And those agreements were steeped in the spirit of preserving the territorial integrity of Georgia. He himself destroyed everything.

**Question:** Returning to the themes of your conversation with Condoleezza Rice, will Russia now continue to postpone imposing new sanctions on Iran? And secondly, can you shed some light on exactly what sort of military cooperation are you planning with Syria.

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** In the course of the meeting with Rice we did not discuss any sanctions. We just agreed that the three-plus-three group or five-plus-one group, whatever it is called, remains united in trying to achieve its original goal, namely, making sure that the IAEA has access to all the facilities it needs to see to conclude that Iran's nuclear program has no military dimension. We also agreed that the time was not right for any ministerial meeting now,

but that sometime down the road our experts could continue discussing how to move on and how to support the IAEA, especially as Iran's guilt is not proven. According to the latest report by ElBaradei, the IAEA does not possess any evidence that Iran has a military nuclear program, though it says that Iran must still cooperate fully on the issues which are still outstanding.

We conduct no negotiations with any country in violation of international agreements and existing international legal norms in a specific area.

**Question:** What stands behind the cancellation of the Iran Six meeting of foreign ministers? It is known that the IAEA said in its latest report that it was very frustrated with Iran's position.

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** It can't be said unambiguously that the IAEA is frustrated with Iran's position. As I said, the IAEA does not have any evidence that the Iranian nuclear program has a military dimension.

As to the meeting, Sean McCormack said today that they agree with us that this meeting is not timely.

And I can tell you that if anyone has the slightest doubt that the overriding goals of the three-plus-three group remain valid, we can tomorrow adopt a resolution which would bluntly say that we reiterate all the existing resolutions of the Security Council and that we strongly call upon Iran to implement all these resolutions. This would send a very clear signal to all those who believe that, because of what is going on some games would be played around nonproliferation issues. No, this would not happen.

**Question:** Who determines Russian foreign policy after all: the president or the prime minister?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** I think you well know the recent statements by President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin on this matter. President Medvedev, in full conformity with the Russian constitution, is in charge of Russian foreign policy.

**Question:** Do you think that, in upholding its position on South Ossetia in dialogue with the United States, Russia is not saying everything?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** You know it's not right to read anything more into this episode than the protection of Russian citizens and protection of the peoples of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We didn't have any geopolitical background in what we did. We did what we did and nothing more. The geopolitical twist was all perceived in other people's minds. And some people of course began to speculate immediately that this is the beginning of a restoration of the Soviet Union. Some heated statements were made that NATO must now protect Ukraine from Russia's aggression, aimed at seizing the Crimean Peninsula. The Baltic States said the usual thing about their fears of being reoccupied. And some people in NATO even began discussing ideas of creating a rapid reaction force to save NATO members from Soviet aggression. One might have thought, you know, that all these were excerpts from a fantasy novel had it not been things which people actually said.

We have no intentions to claim anybody's territory. We want everybody to reiterate the principles which have been guiding us in Europe and in the world, including the principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty, mutual respect, nonuse of force, noninterference in the internal affairs of other states, and indivisibility of security.

Let's look at all these principles once again. That's what President Medvedev suggested as he spoke in Berlin on June the 5th and said, let's have a summit and discuss Euro-Atlantic security issues. If all these principles which we agreed on since the Helsinki Final Act was adopted are still valid, then let's discuss why they fail to be applied in practice. Maybe the implementation mechanisms are not adequate? Maybe we need to enlarge some of these mechanisms? Maybe some additional mechanisms need to be set up?

President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin, speaking to the Valdai Club members, when asked this question said very clearly that we have no territorial ambitions against anyone. It was President Saakashvili himself who violated the territorial integrity of Georgia, in the part of it that was governed by the international regimes established after the previous war which another Georgian president waged against South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who put forward in 1991 the slogan "Georgia for Georgians" and said that "we must deport Ossetians to Russia. We must cut Abkhazian territory. We must abolish the Adzharian autonomy and there must be no autonomies in Georgia," only the titular nation should rule there. And then he unleashed the war.

I talked to Henry Kissinger this morning. Even he did not know the background story. He did not know how Abkhazia and South Ossetia became part of the Russian Empire, as entities totally independent of Georgia. He did not know the history of the establishment of the USSR, when Abkhazia was one of the constituent republics, with the same rights as other members and having the same status as Georgia. He did not know that it was Stalin who made Abkhazia a part of Georgia, who cut Ossetia in two and gave South Ossetia to Georgia and left North Ossetia in Russia. He did not know that after Stalin transferred Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Georgia it was very difficult for the Abkhaz and Ossetians to make a decent career unless they Georgianized their names. People remember this. They remember how even before joining the USSR, when Georgia was an independent state for several years after the October revolution – how in 1920 the Georgians tried to conquer Ossetia, which was not part of Georgia. Thousands of people died then.

If you put all these facts together, it will even be clear to outsiders that this question is not that simple, that it's not just about restoring the territorial integrity of Georgia, it's essentially about two centuries of a very complicated history. If outsiders can understand the complexity of the issue, then what about the Ossetians and Abkhaz who lived through all this? Their ancestors had lived through this and emotions and feelings in the Caucasus are passed from generation to generation in a very specific way.

When President Saakashvili, in 2006, was asked whether he would use force to resolve this conflict, he said: "Never. I would never use force because I know what blood means in the Caucasus." He himself said this: "Blood there means not decades, but hundreds of years of blood."

**Question:** How will you comment upon the sharp criticism Condoleezza Rice in her Marshal Fund speech leveled at Russia on the eve of the opening of the UNGA session? Do you feel that Russia is in isolation?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** As to isolation, we don't feel isolated at all. This year I have more requests for bilateral meetings during the Ministerial Week than in the past years. And I really don't remember when there was so much interest in meeting and discussing things not only related to bilateral relations but concerning global problems as well and the need to discuss those problems openly and the need to address those problems not under the slogans like "you are a bad guy; you must do this; you must do that," but intelligently. This is what I feel. Even if you



take the countries who openly disagree with us, and even if you accept that they really feel what they say publicly, then the problems relating to the Caucasian crisis would be limited to 25-30 countries. The very notion of Russia's isolation reflects the philosophy of a unipolar world. And I believe this philosophy is not going to prevail; for life is much more complex and significantly more interesting than a unipolar world. Even though the Chinese say "God forbid you live in interesting times," we live in interesting times.