

**“Face to Face with America: Between Non-Confrontation and Convergence”,  
by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, Published in the  
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Today no one disputes the fact that the world has since the end of the Cold War turned out to be more complex than expected 15 years ago. By all indications, we are at a crucial stage of transformation in the international system.

Understanding the real world is of key importance to domestic and foreign policy. But in the conditions of globalization the international community needs badly to develop a common vision of the contemporary historical epoch. This task was articulated by a number of western political scientists, including Zbigniew Brzezinski, as early as three years ago. The same task is set in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, which was approved by President Dmitry Medvedev this past July. The lack of such a common vision has been the chief source of all the misunderstandings that have arisen in the last few years between Russia and America. In order to settle our relations, whose state causes deep concern not only in Moscow and Washington, but also everywhere in the world, we ought to start the appropriate discussion with each other in the first place. It must be straight talk.

That's what Vladimir Putin meant as he spoke in Munich in February 2007. Unfortunately, in America his suggestion to hold a real discussion of real problems was left unanswered. The reaction in Europe was different. But we want to talk primarily with America. No one will be able to achieve harmony in relations between our countries for us.

Nevertheless, some discussion has begun at the level of academic circles and in the media; for it is obvious that something is wrong. The first to fall under suspicion are naturally the assumptions on whose basis the particular foreign policy decisions were made. We have been watching this debate with great interest, I would even say – with enlightened interest. Our British friends always give us useful promptings – be it splendid isolation, engagement in European affairs or pragmatic cooperation. This last phrase belongs to UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband, who used it in his speech in Kyiv this past August, when he almost called for the creation of an anti-Russian coalition.

All these years we have consistently championed exactly a pragmatic partnership based on the promotion of common interests, leaving aside all that which smacks of the previous ideology. We do not avoid discussions about values.

But the differences between us in this connection should not impede our cooperation on vitally important issues which brook no delay. As to Russia's ideology in the domain of international relations, it can be formulated with the help of two fundamental positions – common sense and the rule of international law.

The Caucasus crisis: crystallization. The recent crisis in the Caucasus, which was imposed on Russia, the United States, Europe and the entire world by the restless and reckless Georgian president, will have a multitude of consequences. There is no doubt that it will exert an elucidatory effect on international relations and clear up the fundamental questions of our time. One may speak of their crystallization – the favorite word of Stendhal and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who sharply criticized Russia, speaking at the German Marshall Fund in Washington on September 18.

On September 11, 2001 the world changed for everyone – not only for Americans. This offered the hope that unity and solidarity would triumph in the face of global threats and challenges. The

start was good, including in relations between the United States and Russia. We acted together in Afghanistan. But then Iraq came and the unilateral approaches with their intrinsic haughtiness. The hopes were not justified.

We are still not clear why. On August 8, 2008 the situation in the world changed once more. The harsh reality stood revealed: not only what has proven to be an unviable system of global governance, arguably represented by the West, but also the European security architecture, presumably NATO-centric, and relations between Russia and the United States had not worked. This abrupt awakening to reality has laid bare the true situation in the world that has nothing in common with the widespread mythology, illusions and self-deception.

This crisis in itself has no added value, with the exception of the fact that it has at last led to the termination of two “frozen” conflicts in the Caucasus. The crude attempt to “unfreeze” them using force in violation of all the existing agreements forced Russia to act independently, but within international law, including the right to self-defense in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. Our hard-made decision to recognize the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia was adopted on serious legal and moral foundations.

No one can tell us what a proportionate use of force means in this particular situation. We acted swiftly, effectively and proportionately.

On the territory of Georgia proper a limited number of targets were struck – all of them military or dual-purpose. Our land forces collected exhibits and the abandoned arms, destroyed the ammunition left by the Georgian army and ensured the security of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We did not advance on Tbilisi and did not pursue any regime change, something that we do not specialize in. We acted with the utmost moderation in an emotionally charged situation, which also inevitably carves its way into appropriate debates in the West. But trust was subjected to severe tests – it will take years to overcome the damage inflicted upon it.

Today people for some reason feel shy to compare our ground operation in South Ossetia with the actions of the United States and NATO in Afghanistan, where – in obvious abuse of the UNSC mandate – civilians, including children, all too often become victims of air strikes and artillery fire. Nor do they like to recall Serbia in 1999, when the illegal air operation, lasting almost 80 days, degenerated into full-scale military pressure on the peaceful population and civilian infrastructure.

As had too often been the case in history, Russia again had to pay for the “broken dishes.” We stand ready to discuss with our international partners the problems of security, refugees, and other aspects of the situation, as Presidents Medvedev and Sarkozy agreed about this. In the final analysis, this will involve significantly fewer problems and differences than would have been the case if the conflicts had gone unresolved, when the threat of aggression and ethnic cleansing constantly hung over the two small peoples.

We are thus rid of the necessity to keep our troops on the other side of the Greater Caucasus Ridge in constant state of combat readiness.

After Saakashvili had tried to seize South Ossetia by force in summer 2004, we practically all the time waited for a new attempt at a use-of-force solution by Tbilisi.

Analogies are being drawn with the shot made in Sarajevo in the summer of 1914. I would agree with them but on the understanding that the First World War was inevitable since all leading European powers had been preparing for it, and Germany had desired it. Thus, this incident was

the pretext for the start of the Great War, but not its cause. For the start of a new Cold War there are no objective reasons. And therefore nothing of the kind threatens us.

The Caucasus crisis: the conclusions. So what did the crisis in the Caucasus clear up? Indeed, as President Sarkozy said, “the cards were redealt.” Of course, it did not make the world polycentric in the twinkling of an eye. But it was shown most convincingly that a unipolar world does not exist. The burden of proof regarding the feasibility of this idea in practice lay on its authors. The obviousness of what happened became a derivative of the circumstances.

This was in no way connected with our intentions. When we had to react to the “major military operation” of Georgia (the words of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice), there was nothing geopolitical on our minds. The geopolitical consequences were one of the natural side effects of this situation.

Our reaction was a one-off measure which the particular circumstances forced us to take. Opinion polls show that 87 percent of Russia’s citizens backed up our actions. We do not foresee an analogous situation in any other place. So there are no foundations for reasoning in the spirit of the “domino theory.” President Medvedev said unambiguously about this as he spoke to the participants of the international Valdai Club on September 12. All this talk in Eastern Europe, a sort of attempts to take their place in the queue for the honor to turn out to be the next on the list of potential targets, is nothing else than a crisis exploitation of the first water for unseemly political aims since one can earn something on it. We won’t play along with this.

It appears this gamble, among other things, was so planned as to make us take the path of militarization and curtail modernization.

Indeed, we had to react to the crisis at the political and military level, but President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin particularly stressed that there would be no change of tack either in domestic or in international affairs.

Since the First World War has been mentioned it is appropriate to dwell on the question of the dialectics of the relationship between the principle of territorial integrity and the right of nations to self-determination. The latter has long since become the mantra of American foreign policy. The United States’ position towards postwar settlement in Europe was thus determined. That’s why it does not seem that Vice President Dick Cheney made a slip of the tongue as he mentioned self-determination along with the noblest ideals in our world in his recent speech at the Ambrosetti Forum in Italy. Of course, the example with crumbling empires is the most obvious.

But there exist mini empires which the same approach must cover. If we are to be guided by principle and not by prejudices and political expediency, size must not matter. What applies here is suppression, the threat of genocide, the inability or unwillingness of central authorities to bring back a breakaway minority under their control by peaceful means – through persuasion, the creation of an atmosphere of trust and formation of a government worthy of all its citizens and caring for their needs.

We do not agree with the unilateral declaration of Kosovo’s independence, but in this case the West applied the same criteria. Although, in our view, with lesser foundations for this and with far more serious implications in the form of a threat of destabilization for other Balkan states and the dismemberment of Serbia having a democratic government.

And there is the following important distinction. Serbia after 1999 never violated the terms of the post-conflict settlement. Saakashvili, for his part, repeatedly ignored the peacekeeping and

negotiation formats set up in 1992-1994 after the end of the wars against Abkhazia and South Ossetia, started by Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his overthrewer Tengiz Kitovani under the slogan "Georgia for Georgians." Russia had defended these agreements, based on recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity. Saakashvili violated these agreements and, consequently, the territorial integrity of his country.

It has so happened that Russia has become the first state to uphold such new principles as human security and the responsibility to protect, not in violation, but on the basis of international law. And that was a forced measure, not a war of choice.

Democracy in Georgia is not a problem for Russia. But on the understanding that those in power are such honest and sober-minded people as its former prime minister late Zurab Zhvania. Democracy serves no good purpose if people with authoritarian and gangster-like instincts receive support. They may be easier to control. But the events of the last two months prove the opposite.

It appears that military assistance did not turn out to be a sufficiently effective US lever over Saakashvili's government. Actually it pushed the irresponsible and unpredictable regime onto the road of adventures.

The problem of perception: Our western partners reacted to the crisis exclusively in a geopolitical vein as though the facts and victims of the Georgian aggression were of no importance.

Essentially, it was an avowedly information war. From the West's reaction it followed that the crisis concerned some geostrategic if not existential issues. Of course, this could not stop us because our aims were far simpler. First of all we were defending the supreme value, the most sacred human right – the right to be alive – as well as the right to development. Development was a real problem for South Ossetia and Abkhazia throughout the last 16 years. This problem does not lend itself to solution in the absence of security guarantees.

Nevertheless the media campaign had a great significance. It was dirty, full of distortions and outright forgeries. Suffice it to say that CNN used the TV channel Russia Today footage of destroyed Tskhinval to pass it off as destroyed Gori. Belgium's Le Soir accomplished the same substitution with photographs. We know that many heads of Moscow offices of western media experienced serious disappointment when their information was doctored or shelved.

That approach by western media coverage will exert long-lasting influence on our perception of the West, including discussions on "common values," a factor to be considered in the definitive analysis of the Caucasus crisis.

There will simply be less readiness on our part to interpret doubts in the western partners' favor.

The inability of governments of many western countries and western media to acknowledge our dead and our pain has exerted serious influence on Russia itself, on how we conceive ourselves. After the Caucasus crisis we see that some of our partners, whatever their motives, supported a regime guilty of crimes against us and its own people. They there did not deem it possible to take the side of truth and justice, which are dear to us, because they are at the very heart of our system of values, with roots stretching back to Christianity.

The cruel behavior of Saakashvili and his total lack of ability to atone will adversely affect America's image in the eyes of Russian public opinion. Even though our relations may still be

good, there will be no emotional warmth in them. This rudely takes us down to earth, making it necessary to conduct our mutual affairs on the basis of rigid interests and complete reciprocity.

Everyone will eventually have to deal with the facts, which is already taking place. The nature of the discussions at the hearing on Georgia in the US Congress on September 9 proves exactly this. And as the concealed facts carve their way into western media, responsible commentators ever more often acknowledge the true sequence of events.

This leads us up to the broader question of how US foreign policy is decided. It is already being raised in America. But Russia also has the right to ask it. The US is our most important partner regardless of the present state of our relations. We must know how far the political leadership of America controls pursuit of the foreign policy of the country. If it is made at the level of middle-tier State Department officials that are provided with the powers of deputies, then we must consider this in our strategy. The impression is that there were mediocre decisions taken on vital issues. Who did the analysis? Who tried to foresee all the consequences? This kind of privatization of American foreign policy on key issues suggests a diplomacy that is absolutely nontransparent, which undermines the very foundation of our cooperation.

Once more on the factor of force: When I unsuccessfully tried to have my article published in Foreign Affairs last year, I happened to encounter rather insistent censorship, which was quite a revelation. Forty percent of my text was abridged, but what's most important – all my references to Christianity as the common basis of all the branches of European civilization were cleaned up.

I believe that Christian values retain their significance, especially during times of change, when such qualities are required as humility and readiness for sacrifice. They have a special significance for America as the policy aiming at gaining total control and absolute security is doomed to failure. These things are impossible for people because they belong to God: either under God or instead of God. Fyodor Tyutchev, who was not only a poet and diplomat but also a profound thinker, wrote in the middle of the nineteenth century: "Is the appropriation of divinity not a negation of it?" The Puritan ancestors of Americans rejected the supremacy of Rome and the principle of papal infallibility.

But what's to be done with human infallibility? Is this not what the claim to one's righteousness attests to? Our entire history has taught us humility.

Addressing these problems is not fortuitous also because from the debates in the US presidential campaign it follows that America is on the threshold of major changes – they hover in the air, they are on everyone's mind. All other leading countries, including Russia and the European states, have already entered the process of deep-going changes. America is the last among leading powers that has to take this path. As to Russia, changes were imposed on us by circumstances. The US has for quite a long period of time had the possibility to choose between recognizing the necessity of changes on the basis of sober analysis or to wait until they descend – as a harsh exigency.

The present situation may well indicate that in US history a lengthy cycle is drawing to an end – the one that was commenced by Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. What worries us in Russia most of all is that defense expenditures have been an important element of US economic development for the last 75 years. This partly explains the origins of the Cold War. History indicates that in the past major economic and financial upheavals led to aggressive policy on the international stage.

The defense sector to an ever-increasing extent actually serves the interests of economic and technological development. But when there is insistence on strengthening military might, this leads to scorn for and ultimately to the destruction of the factors of “soft power.”

For example, the invasion of Iraq has had an adverse impact on the moral authority of the US. It appears the national interests of the US and the private interests of American business in Iraq are in a fairly strange dialectical interrelationship. The firms making money there are not interested in the end result of the American enterprise: the very presence of American troops is sufficient for their limited aims. The fact that this situation is conducive to ruining the international standing of and trust in America does not worry them at all. They may even have euro accounts. Is this not an absurdity?

Brent Scowcroft wrote recently that in our time power is represented by the ability of states for collective action. On the whole renouncing militarization will create equal conditions for all players, with America retaining many competitive advantages, which are fair and reflect its objective strong points.

We are not going to wage wars abroad. Our military potential is sufficient to maintain strategic stability, defend our territory and citizens and fulfill our international obligations and commitments. The most important advantage of the international position of Russia is that we have no grand designs – imperial or any other. We are fully satisfied with our position. The only thing we want in our external relations is cooperation on a basis of full equality and mutual benefit.

Concerning isolation and confrontation – In a globalizing world isolation and self-isolation are not a rational choice. True progress can be achieved only through joint efforts and close cooperation. That’s exactly what Russia offers to all our international partners, America in the first place.

Under no circumstances will we let ourselves be drawn into confrontation. We will simply move aside, take up the position of a detached observer and continue to cooperate in a multilateral format if our bilateral relations with this or that country reach the freezing point. Something like this is now taking place in our relations with Britain. But the US is not Britain.

Can we afford or, to be more precise, can the world afford any further alienation between our countries, for which Alexis de Tocqueville predicted a great future? Should it be two separate futures or, perhaps, one common destiny?

I profoundly believe in the latter. Russia is at the initial stage of its transformation. A society can be understood by others only to the extent that it understands itself. Russia is only just beginning to grasp the fundamental tenets of its existence. George Kennan wisely counseled against outside meddling in this very delicate process. Unfortunately, the continuation of the policy of containment and information wars against Russia constitutes just this kind of meddling, affecting our changes in an adverse fashion.

We have unreservedly accepted a socially oriented market economy and representative democracy – the two chief products of our common European civilization. If you take contemporary European society and subtract the European society at the turn of the 19th/20th century from it, the result will be these two fundamental characteristics precisely. It took the whole 20th century, including the two world wars and the cold war, fascism and Nazism, the Popular Fronts, the Rot Front, socialism, communism, and the experience of the Soviet Union,

the western alliance and the eastern bloc, to arrive at them. Between us and Europe/America there is nothing antagonistic anymore, only the differences in approach towards change.

Dominique Moisi writes in the latest issue of Foreign Affairs: “The new America that both Americans and the rest of the world need today is nothing more than the old America that has been lost.”

Americans will have to stop “feeling lonely in their might.” I would add that everyone needs the America of Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, an America which is not afraid of change, which is in a position to understand that nothing is given once and for all, and which is open to the world and for free debate.

Debate has already begun in the US presidential race, and it may so happen that this will be the most important achievement of the Americans in recent years. Like other US partners, Russia will always be ready for joint brainstorming. Since, as never before, it is true that in the beginning was the Word.

We wish America success on the road of change. We know that Americans will have to take their own decisions and to make up for lost time. But at the same time we do not underestimate the pain and scale of the changes with which America is confronted at the moment. No one doubts Americans’ ability to cardinaly transform their country even if they have to rethink some truths that they have gotten used to taking for granted.

People in Russia always admired America, even during the Cold War. Unfortunately, the situation is worse now, when nothing essential separates us. The reason, I suspect, is that some people, motivated by considerations of an ideological nature and as a consequence of their prejudices, would like to present Russia as the symbol of everything that goes wrong in America. It has to be admitted that the phenomenon when Russia is used as a scapegoat has been an integral part of our history over the last three centuries. I hope that the American people will not succumb to these provocations, which exploit the modest progress already achieved by Russia and our tradition of independence, which we cherish no less than do the Americans. You can’t have it both ways – demonizing the partner and counting on cooperation with him.

We profoundly deplore the blocking by the US in the UN Security Council and OSCE of the steps directed to support the implementation of the agreements reached by Presidents Medvedev and Sarkozy on August 12 and September 8.

No less deplorable is the sharp rhetoric of the US administration. Perhaps it wouldn’t hurt us to be a little silent and a little indifferent towards each other. Russia will never engage in a rhetorical confrontation and will not allow itself to be drawn into primitive Americanism. We can only welcome the fact that Secretary of State Rice in her speech on September 18 acknowledged the complex character of the contemporary world and such things as network and multidimensional diplomacy and the emancipatory impact of the end of the Cold War on the world. All of these constitute the basic principles of our foreign policy philosophy. Thus, we are beginning to speak the same language. Hopefully this will declare itself at the level of practical politics.

It is paradoxical that Russia now acts as a defender of such traditional principles of America as “live and let live,” “negotiation” and “help the weak” – as we helped the Abkhaz and Ossetians in the face of the chauvinism and imperialism of the Saakashvili regime. I am certain this means that Russia and the United States have much more in common than the biased media try to present. It is only necessary to highlight the elements of this commonality in real life and to

begin creating on this basis a new structure for our relations that would be more impervious to our differences of opinion over insignificant issues. One must not miss the forest for the trees.

Noteworthy is one more aspect of the media campaign relating to the Caucasus crisis. The impression was that the West had begun to believe what was being said for propaganda purposes and when Russia had ended its military operation and arrived at the reasonable agreements for resolving the crisis, many found themselves bewildered.

They must have been shocked to see Russia behave rationally, openly and honestly under very complicated circumstances. So the Russians have some broader designs, including the desire to send a signal whose importance would go beyond the present crisis. This is called becoming “victims of their own propaganda.” The former US secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, wrote that Americans have a tendency to believe their own rhetoric.

Why not take a pause and think it over, not try to judge the situation on its merits and on facts? What’s bad about the initiatives of the European Union and its French presidency for resolving the South Ossetia crisis?

This has helped raise the international role of the European Union a little. It is also useful for shaping the European security and defense policy.

Europeans are America’s friends and allies after all. So why not trust their judgments? In addition, this crisis has given us a very important subject for serious pragmatic cooperation with the European Union. If we continue working together in this de-ideologized vein, much will also become possible in other questions for us.

The new international order – In the past, after the collapse of another imperial order, the international community always strove to agree upon new “rules of the game”, bearing in mind a particular system of collective security. The answer to the collapse of Napoleon’s empire was the Vienna Congress. The system of European collective security invented at it was destroyed by the Crimean War with the subsequent unification of Germany under Prussian rule and by the First World War. The West proved unable to create a comprehensive system of collective security in the interwar period, when the borders of Germany’s eastern neighbors were not guaranteed. The collapse of the Third Reich and the defeat of militarist Japan led to the creation by the international community of the United Nations Organization, based on a polycentric vision of the world, which found its reflection in the principle of unanimity by the permanent members of the Security Council.

The Cold War with its bipolarity, bloc discipline and the ideologically motivated behavior of states pushed the UN into the background, heavily distorting the functioning of this organization. And only now can the UN system work according to its original purpose. At the same time the last fifteen years have engendered their special dynamics. And although the “unipolar world” existed at the level of mythology, it had varying impact on international relations. Many countries sincerely believed in its reality and jumped onto the unipolar bandwagon politically, morally and in other respects. The task now is to clear up the point that a uniform set of rules exists for all states and that no one can take international law into their own hands.

It is a pity that our American partners are trying to freeze G8 events so as to exert pressure on us with regard to Caucasus affairs. We will never agree to a selective approach towards multilateral cooperation. This would lead to a further undermining of trust between us and to the reduction of existing possibilities for substantive cooperation on issues of mutual concern. Such a scenario would not be our choice.



If we focus on the positive aspects of the present situation, it is noteworthy that the Caucasus crisis has given the US a possibility to reaffirm its commitment to international legality. Our relations could rest on two strong pillars – national interests and international law. It is quite possible that this would serve to start a new friendship bereft of illusions and self-deception. All the rest would follow.

European architecture reform – We have serious problems with NATO. The further eastward expansion of NATO is a problem for us and the entire Euro-Atlantic policy since the new members bring their outdated confrontational ideology into the alliance with them, which gets NATO back into its previous state. These countries were simply too late to join the old NATO. Many things are in the habit of living their own lives; for example, the problem of antimissile defense in Eastern Europe.

The relevant logic presumes that any reappraisal of the situation would signify a loss of trust in oneself – as *The Economist* wrote recently, “to abandon those who backed up these plans and bend in the wind blowing from the east.”

Which is then more important – the symbolism and theatrical effects or the real issues and real interests?

The deployment of elements of a US global missile defense system in Eastern Europe devalues NATO, because these countries assert that otherwise they do not feel secure under the alliance’s protection. How are we to treat NATO then?

The European security architecture did not work during this period of crisis. It was unable to prevent it, although all European states had signed all the relevant international and regional documents envisaging commitments to the nonuse of force and to a peaceful settlement of conflicts and the indivisibility of our common security. This provides one more occasion for looking at the situation in the Euro-Atlantic region anew, where a kind of “glue” is needed for Europe to remain, as Condoleezza Rice said, united, free and peaceful. When I asked her whether this Europe included Russia, Rice said: “The US has always proceeded from this assumption.”

The proposal of President Medvedev to conclude a European Security Treaty could provide a platform for launching a joint overview of the European system and searching for ways to reform it. A considerable part of the European institutions was created during the Cold War. It actually represents a structure consisting of diverse organizations having different memberships. We need a comprehensive framework structure which would not harm any of the existing organizations in the region. One of the key aims could be strengthening international legality in our region on the basis of clearly defined rules to ensure the universal application of the norms of international law. It is obvious that after the Caucasus crisis it will no longer be possible to conduct affairs in Euro-Atlantic politics as if nothing had happened.

All of Europe suffered as a result of the unnecessary Crimean War, which destroyed the system of collective security on the continent, and among other things, “gave complete freedom of action back to us”, as Russia’s then minister of foreign affairs, Aleksandr Gorchakov, wrote in his famous dispatch of August 21, 1856. In the end Western Europe proved unable to restore its equilibrium, including on the World War I fronts, without the participation of Russia. We do not need more freedom of action than provided by international law.

But all members of the Euro-Atlantic community ought to observe the restrictions laid upon them. I would call this mutual restraint.

We sincerely believe that European civilization is not in a state of decline. It can acquire a second wind, including global leadership, but only through joint efforts by Russia, the EU and US. The legitimacy of any system of global governance and of any leadership is to be determined by the effectiveness of the counteraction they provide against the entire spectrum of challenges of our time.

On this ground, it seems, the conditions are emerging for a new moment of Euro-Atlantic convergence. The former US secretaries of state, Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, share this opinion. They wrote in their brilliant article in *The International Herald Tribune* on October 1 that “the fundamental interests of the United States, Europe and Russia are more aligned today, even in the wake of the Georgian crisis, than at any point in recent history.” I fully agree that that opportunity must not be wasted.