

**Speaking notes of Russia's
Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov
at the Council on Foreign Relations**

(New York, September 24, 2008)

Dear Mr. President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is always good to talk to the people, who take keen interest in international affairs because they care for their country. I do care for mine. And this seems to me a very sound foundation for our discussion. The more so, that by all accounts we are at a critical stage of transformation of the international system, which makes it extremely important to intensify the relevant international discourse.

Nobody argues today that the world after the end of the Cold War has turned out to be a somewhat more complex place than expected 15 years ago. Understanding it is key to sound domestic and foreign policies. But in a globalizing world it is imperative that international community develop a common vision of our historical era. This objective was put forward by Zbigniew Brzezinski three years ago and now makes part of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, approved by President Dmitry Medvedev this past July.

The lack of this common vision is the single most important source of all the misunderstandings of the past few years between Russia and America. The first thing we need to fix our relationship, the state of which causes profound concern not only in Moscow and

The recent Caucasus crisis, imposed on Russia, United States, Europe and the world by the restless and reckless President of Georgia, will have many repercussions. What is beyond reasonable doubt is that it will have a thunderstorm impact on global affairs. It clears the air on many fundamental issues of our time. Crystallization is the word of choice of Stendahl and of my good friend Secretary Rice, who savaged Russia speaking recently in Washington.

The world changed on September 11, 2001 for all, not only Americans. It gave hope that unity and solidarity would prevail in the face of global threats and challenges. The start was good, including in US-Russia relations. We jointly acted in Afghanistan. But then came Iraq and the arrogance of unilateralism. The hope was dashed. We still wonder why. *The solidarity was privatized after 9/11*

On August 8, 2008 the world underwent another change. It brought to light the harsh reality. It was not only the system of global government, purportedly represented by the West, that didn't work. The European security architecture, presumably NATO-centric, and US-Russia relationship didn't work either. It was a rude awakening, a revelation of the true state of the world as opposed to lots of mythology, illusions and delusions.

This crisis has no added value by itself, with the exception of having finally resolved two "frozen" conflicts in the Caucasus. The blatant attempt to *defreeze* them by the use of force in violation of all existing agreements forced Russia to act on its own, but within bounds of international law, including the right to self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter. Our difficult decision to

circumstances. It had nothing to do with our intentions. When we had to respond to the Georgian “major military operation” (*Secretary Rice*), we meant nothing geopolitical. The geopolitical fall-out was a natural by-product of this situation.

It was a one-time action forced upon us by specific circumstances. According to the polls, our action was supported by 87% of Russian citizens. We don't foresee any similar situation in any other place. It leaves no grounds for the domino-theory talk. Speaking to the *Valdai Club* members on September 12, President Medvedev stated this in no unclear terms. All these utterances in Eastern Europe, sort of queueing for the honour of being next on the *hit list* represent a pure exploitation of the crisis for unseemly political ends, because it seems to pay. We would not oblige.

It seems that this adventure was timed, *inter alia*, to define the Medvedev presidency, to make us militarize and backtrack on modernization. Indeed, we had to respond to the crisis in terms of our policy. President Medvedev emphasized that there is not going to be any change of track both domestically and internationally.

Since I mentioned WWI, I would like to dwell upon the dialectics of the interconnection between the principle of territorial integrity and the right of nations to self-determination. The latter is a long-standing mantra of the American Foreign Policy. It guided US position on the post-War settlement in Europe. That is why I do not think it was a slip of the tongue on Vice-President Cheney's part when he mentioned self-determination among the *noblest ideals in our world*, while speaking recently at the Ambrosetti Forum in Italy.

a necessity, not like a war of choice, and in full conformity with international law.

Democracy in Georgia is no problem for Russia. But with honest and sane people like its former Prime Minister, the late Zurab Zhvania, at the top. It does not do good to democracy to prop up people with authoritarian and thuggish instincts. Maybe they are easier to control. But the events of the past six weeks prove exactly the opposite.

It appears that military assistance was not a good enough leverage for the US to control the Saakashvili government. In fact, it encouraged an irresponsible and unpredictable regime along the road of adventure.

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We regret that our Western partners responded to the crisis on a purely geopolitical plane, as if the facts and victims of the Georgian aggression didn't count. It was an outright information war. The Western reaction implied that the crisis was about some ultimate geostrategic, if not existential, issue. It, certainly, couldn't stop us for our objectives were much simpler. First of all we protected the highest value, the most sacred of human rights - the right to life and development. Development was a real problem over the past 16 years. It defies solution unless security is guaranteed.

Nevertheless the media campaign was important. It was nasty, full of distortions and outright rigging. It is enough to say that CNN used a *Russia Today* filming of a destroyed Tskhinval to present it as a

course of the hearings on Georgia at Congress on September 9 proves this point. And the true course of events is more and more recognized by responsible observers as the facts which had been concealed are making their way into Western media.

It leads us to a broader issue of how the US Foreign Policy is made. It is already raised in the US. But Russia is entitled to raise it as well. The United States is our most important partner, the present state of our relationship notwithstanding. **We must know, how much control the political leadership exercised over its conduct of foreign policy.** If it is done by midlevel State Department officials, having viceregal powers, we'll have to factor that in our strategy. It seems that mediocre decisions on vital issues were made. **Who did the analysis? Who tried to foresee the consequences? This privatization of US foreign policy in some crucial areas reveals a diplomacy absolutely lacking transparency, which undermines the very foundation of our cooperation.**

Nobody can tell us what a proportionate use of force means. We acted fast, efficiently and proportionately. Only a limited number of targets, all of them military or dual use, were struck in Georgia proper. Our ground forces collected evidence and weapons, destroyed munitions left by the Georgian forces, and ensured security of South Ossetia and Abkhasia. **We didn't move onto Tbilisi and didn't engage in *regime change*, that not being our cup of tea.** We acted with a high level of moderation in an emotionally-charged situation. **All of that inevitably starts also finding its way into Western public**

I say it all for one reason. **We watch very closely the debate in the US predicting that America is on the threshold of drastic change.** It is in the air, on everybody's mind. **All other major nations, including Russia and Europe, are already in the process of profound transformation. America is the last to join the company. As to Russia, the change was imposed upon us by circumstances. The United States for quite some time had this luxury of choosing between accepting the need for change on the basis of sober analysis and waiting for it to come as dire necessity.**

The current situation may well be the case of a long cycle in your history coming to an end, the one that started at the time of New Deal. **What we, in Russia, are most concerned about is the fact that for the past 75 years defense spending has been firmly factored in your economic development.** This partly explains the origins of the Cold War. History shows that in the past major economic and financial upheavals led to aggressive policies abroad.

Defense industry in fact increasingly serves economic and technological ends. **But the insistence upon military might leads to the neglect and ultimately destruction of *soft power*.**

For example, the invasion of Iraq has diminished the US moral authority. There seems to be bizarre dialectics between the national interest of the United States and private interests of American business in Iraq. The firms making money there are not interested in the final outcome. The very presence of US troops is enough for their limited objectives. The fact that the situation destroys America's international

Tocqueville for a great future? Should those be two separate futures or maybe a common one?

I deeply believe in the latter. Russia is at the beginning of the process of reinventing itself. A society can be understood by others only to an extent it understands itself. **Russia is just starting getting conscious of the fundamentals of its existence. George Kennan wisely advised not to meddle in this intimate process from outside.** Unfortunately, the continued policy of containment and media wars constitute such interference, influencing our change in the negative way.

We have accepted without reservations socially oriented market economy and popular democracy, two chief products of our common European civilization. If you take the contemporary European society and extract from it the turn-of-the century European society you will have these two things. It took the entire 20th century, including two World Wars and Cold War, fascism and nazism, popular fronts, Rot Front, socialism, communism, the experience of the Soviet Union, Western alliance and Eastern bloc, to produce them. **There is nothing antagonistic between us and Europe and America any more,** the only problem being different attitudes towards change.

May I quote Dominique Moïsi, who 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”.** You will have to stop **“feeling alone in your power”.** I would add, an America of F.D.Roosevelt and John F.Kennedy, the one that fear no change, the one that is able to

Medvedev-Sarkozy agreements, reached on August 12 and September 8.

We regret harsh rhetoric on the US Administration's part. Maybe, a bit of silence or indifference towards each other would help. We'll never engage in a rhetorical confrontation and primitive anti-Americanism. It is welcome that Secretary Rice in her speech on September 18 admitted a complex nature of our world as well as things like network and multidimensional diplomacy and emancipatory impact of the end of the Cold War on the world. Those are basic tenets of our foreign policy philosophy. Thus, we are starting speaking the same language. Practical things should follow.

Isn't it a paradox, that Russia is now an advocate of such principles of America, as *live and let live, give and take, helping the underdog!* I am sure it means Russia and the US have more in common that it seems at first glance. We only need to discern them in life and start building upon them a new structure that will withstand our differences on minor issues. We have got to see woods beyond trees.

One of the effects of that media campaign is worth mentioning. It seems that in the West they started believing in what was said for propaganda purposes, and when we ceased our operation and reached reasonable agreements on the settlement, those people found themselves at a loss. Russia behaving reasonably, openly and honestly under those extraordinary circumstances must have been a shock. The Russians must have broader designs, including sending a message *beyond* this crisis.

The Cold War with its bipolarity, bloc discipline and ideologically motivated behaviour of States superseded the UN and grossly distorted its functioning. It is only now that the UN system can work according to its original design. At the same time the past 15 years have created a dynamic of its own. Although a unipolar world existed at the level of mythology, it influenced to a varied extent the conduct of international relations. Many nations truly believed it to be a reality, investing in it politically, morally and otherwise. The task now is to make it clear that there is one set of rules for every nation, that no country is allowed to be a *law unto itself*.

It is unfortunate that our American partners try to limit G8 activities to pressure us on Caucasus affairs. We'll never agree to selective approach to multilateral cooperation. It will further erode trust between us, the existing opportunities for substantial cooperation on matters of mutual interest further contracting. But that is not going to be our choice.

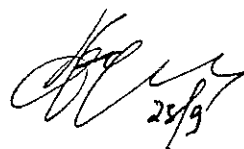
On the positive side, the Caucasus crisis provides the US with an opportunity to recommit itself to international rule of law. Our relationship could rest upon two robust pillars – national interest and international law. It might even look like a beginning of a new friendship void of illusions and delusions. Everything else will come later.

We have serious problems with Nato. Further eastward expansion of Nato is a problem for us and Euro-Atlantic politics because the new members bring with them their outdated confrontational ideology into the Alliance, thus taking it back to its

application of international law. There can be no longer business as usual in Euro-Atlantic affairs after this crisis.

It was all of Europe that suffered in the long run as a result of the *unnecessary* Crimean War which destroyed the collective security system on the continent and, among other things, “gave us back a complete freedom of action”, as Russian Foreign Minister at the time Alexandre Gorchakov put it in his famous cable of August 21, 1856. In the final count, Western Europe couldn't regain its balance without Russia, including on the fronts of WW I. **We don't need more freedom of action than envisaged by international law. But all members of Euro-Atlantic community must abide by those constraints. I would call it mutual restraint.**

We truly believe that the European civilization is not in decline. It could be given another lease of life, including global leadership, but this can only be achieved through joint effort of Russia, EU and US. Legitimacy of any system of global government and any leadership will be determined by their efficiency in confronting the entire gamut of challenges of our time. Conditions, I believe, are getting in place for a new momentum of convergence in the Euro-Atlantic.



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