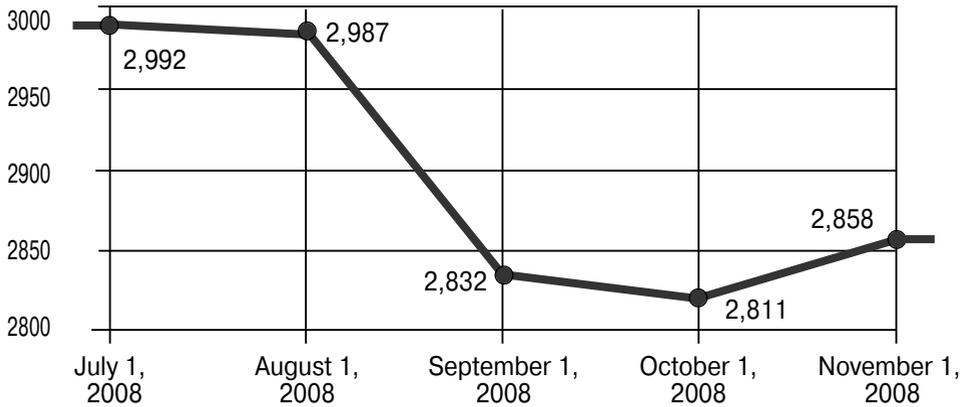


Figure 1. The *iSi* International Security Index (July–November 2008)



- ➔ **Albert Zulkharneev. INTERNATIONAL SECURITY INDEX – THE YEAR OF DECLINE.**
- ➔ **Yury Fedorov. A VIEW BY A RUSSIAN LIBERAL: “BLACK AUGUST, OR THE RETURN OF HISTORY.”**
- ➔ **Dmitry Evstafiev. A VIEW BY A RUSSIAN CONSERVATIVE: “WAITING FOR THE DAWN OF MULTIPOLAR WORLD.”**
- ➔ **Konstantin Eggert, Dayan Jayatilleka, Zhiye Ji, Andrey Kortunov, William Potter, Abdulaziz Sager, and Yevgeny Satanovsky. COMMENTS BY MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERT GROUP**





## THE *iSi* INDEX IN JULY–NOVEMBER 2008: INTERNATIONAL SECURITY INDEX (*ISI*) – THE YEAR OF DECLINE

Our readers, who follow the dynamics of the International Security Index (*iSi*) since its first publication in 2006, know that each indicator is a sum of two elements.

The first one is a basic value of the index – once a year it fixes the changes in the character of key global security challenges (military, political, terrorist, economic, man-made, technological, and natural). In the ideal world, where there is no threat for life, health and welfare of a human being, such basic value is equal to 4, 210 points. In 2007 our assessment showed that this indicator was 3,209 points, i.e. the world was from its ideal model. In September 2008 the new basic value was calculated – 3,195.<sup>1</sup> When we calculate the monthly index in 2008–2009 we will add the second element (reflecting the current monthly developments) to this basic indicator.

The decrease in the basic value of *iSi* is accounted for by a number of factors. First of all, it is domestic political instability in Pakistan, a *de facto* nuclear weapon state. The country also faces negative trends at the border with Afghanistan, where Islamists groupings are based and continue to fight against the U.S. military. The safety and security, as well as control of the Pakistani nuclear arsenal can be called into question, there are more reasons to apprehend potential confrontation with India – another unrecognized nuclear weapon state. The second factor is the growing threat of sharp tensions among great powers. Developments in Kosovo, Tibet, Myanmar, South Caucasus, deployment of the U.S. missile defense elements in Eastern Europe without negotiations on strategic arms limitation and reduction, increasing rivalry in other regions – all these are only a few events demonstrating grave differences among the United States, Russia, China, Japan, and other leading actors. The third factor is risk for nuclear nonproliferation regime and the danger of enforcement action against Iran and North Korea. The fourth factor is the peril of world financial crisis and its negative impact on manufacture, including deterioration in the area of food and energy production.

In June–October 2008 the situation aggravated and the index went down – from 2,992 on July 1 to 2,811 on October 1. This is the lowest mark since July 2006. On November 1 the index was 2,858.

- **South Caucasus – Russia – West.** One of the principal reasons for the *iSi* decline is the escalation of the conflict in the South Caucasus, the culminating point of which was the military clash between Russia and Georgia on August 8–12, 2008. The political outcome of this crisis is the recognition of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia (August 26) and the crisis in relations with the West. The force solution of the local conflicts could not have a significant effect on global security, if it was not for a number of circumstances. Firstly, the large-scale hostilities with numerous casualties after 16 years of truce indicated the failure of Georgia, Russia, the United States and other players to resolve the frozen conflict with peaceful means and modern diplomacy. Hence, the capacity of those countries to bear responsibility for the rest of the world, for global and regional security is dubious. Secondly, it was the first armed clash between Russia and a former Soviet republic – this made nervous other countries of the CIS, above all those involved in conflicts, led to substantial aggravation of Russia-Ukraine relations, might exacerbate the problems of the Black Sea Fleet and the situation in Crimea. Thirdly, the crisis in relations between Russia and consolidated West has a destabilizing effect on global security and threatens joint efforts in key areas of international cooperation – strengthening of strategic stability and nonproliferation regime, war on terror, search of common solutions to global economic challenges.

Developments in the South Caucasus boosted the signature of the agreement on missile defense deployment in Poland (adopted on August 20), resulted in the suspension of the Russia-EU negotiations on partnership with Russia, led to George Bush's decision to call back the 123 Agreement with Russia from the Congress, etc.

However, peacemaking efforts of the EU under the French presidency assisted in signing the six principles of conflict resolution on August 12 and elaboration of additional measures on

September 8. Besides, Russia's ability to keep the situation in the Caucasus under control, overall willingness of Russia and the West to avoid further tensions helped to prevent the spillover of the conflict and keep the window of opportunities open for overcoming the crisis.

- ❑ **North Korea.** In summer 2008 the world witnessed some progress in the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue. On June 26 the D.P.R.K representatives submitted to China (as a chairman of the *Six*) the list of nuclear programs and materials. In response the United States promised to lift the economic sanctions and exclude North Korea from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism. Nonetheless, on August 26 Pyongyang suspended the decommissioning of nuclear facilities referring to the non-compliance with commitments on the part of the United States.
- ❑ **Iran.** The dialogue with Iran concerning its nuclear program goes on without any significant success. On June 14 EU foreign policy spokesman Javier **Solana** submitted to the Iranian leaders an incentives package – the proposals of the *six*, which might be implemented in exchange for abandoning the uranium enrichment. Iran rejected those demands and did not give any specific answer. The EU declared new sanctions. In September IAEA Director General Mohamed **ElBaradei** reported the increase in the number of centrifuges and the lack of progress in the areas of major concern.
- ❑ **Pakistan.** The resignation of Pakistani President Pervez **Musharraf** on August 18 and the collapse of the ruling coalition in the parliament marked the new stage of power struggle in this *de facto* nuclear weapon state. On September 6 Co-Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party Asif Ali **Zardari** was elected President. Domestic political strife continues as the situation at the border with Afghanistan is deteriorating and terrorist activities intensify.
- ❑ **Middle East.** On June 19 the truce came into force in the Gaza Sector. It was signed by Israel and *Hamas* with the mediation of Egypt and was repeatedly breached afterwards. Turkey keeps trying to commence the dialogue between Israel and Syria. On July 11 after forty days of negotiations the government of national unity was formed in Lebanon, and on July 27 President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud **Abbas** declared the resumption of the intra-Palestinian dialogue. The new platform for the Middle East peace process and for solving the contradictions between the North and the South could be the *Union for the Mediterranean* set up at the July summit in Paris by countries of the Mediterranean region and the EU.
- ❑ **Africa.** All summer the world witnessed political confrontation in Zimbabwe between the opposition (headed by Morgan **Tsvangirai**) and reelected President Robert **Mugabe**. Political struggle occurred at the background of severe economic crisis and unprecedented inflation. The outcome of the elections is not recognized by Western states. However, in September the parties managed to agree on the establishment of the coalition government. Armed clashes between the separatists and the central government in the Democratic Republic of Congo resumed. The situation in Nigeria deteriorated. Inter-tribe tensions remain in Kenya. The pirates are active in Somalia – on September 20 they seized a Ukrainian ship with 33 *T-72* tanks and other material on board.
- ❑ **U.S. elections.** The election campaign in the United States also affects the international security. Economic and political difficulties led to the use of tough foreign policy rhetoric by the Republican candidate and its opposite number. Uncertainty about the change of the administration has a global dimension – everyone expects something new in the foreign policymaking.
- ❑ **World financial crisis.** The crisis reached the new stage in September-October. After the collapse of *Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc* on September 15 the world markets went down. The governments of the EU, Japan, China, Russia and other countries had to undertake extraordinary measures to support their financial systems and to mitigate the impact of the crisis on production. 



**Albert Zulkharneev**

## Note

<sup>1</sup> While calculating the basic value of *iSi* PIR research group together with external experts consider the possibility of such threats as global nuclear warfare, large-scale conventional conflict between nuclear weapon states, sharp tensions among great powers, large terrorist attack, etc. They also take into account economic, environmental, technological security factors. All global and regional factors are indicated in the methodology of calculation presented at the PIR Center Website (<http://isi.pircenter.org>). The same page reflects the monthly changes in *iSi* and the comments by the International Expert Group.

The review of the basic value in September 2008 was undertaken by the PIR Center research fellows and the International Expert Group (INEG) – Dayan Jayatileka, Gennady Evstafiev, Andrey Zagorsky, Abdulaziz Sager, Vladimir Orlov, Yevgeny Petelin, Alexander Saveliev, Zhiye Ji, and Konstantin Eggert.



## BLACK AUGUST, OR THE RETURN OF HISTORY

### BLACK AUGUST, OR THE RETURN OF HISTORY

The summer and early autumn of 2008 brought a whole raft of extremely important events. The most significant of those were probably the growing instability on the world financial markets, the nearing change of administration in the United States, and Russia's invasion of Georgia. All that was happening against the usual background of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, political instability in Pakistan and Iran's steady progress towards acquiring nuclear weapons. Pundits are offering three ways of looking at these events.

### COLD WAR OR INTERNATIONAL ANARCHY?

Many believe that the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, which has been dubbed *the five-day war*, was the first *hot* battle of the second Cold War. The Kremlin appears to share this view. The prospect of another bout of nuclear brinkmanship, which was the essence of the Cold War, does not seem to scare the Russian leadership. «Nothings scare s us, including the prospect of a new Cold War,» President Medvedev openly said right after recognizing the independence of two breakaway Georgian territories. «But we don't want it, of course. In this situation everything depends on our international partners and our partners in the West. If they want to maintain good relations with Russia, they will understand the reasons for our decision, and the situation will be calm. But if they opt for a confrontation—well, we have lived under various conditions, we can manage it.»<sup>1</sup> And «manage it» is what Russia is preparing to do—witness the ostentatious voyages of Russian strategic bombers and warships to Venezuela, the Russian-Belarusian *Stability-2008* military exercise, held on an unprecedented scale, and recent declarations of Russian military diplomats, who like to flavor Vyshinskiy-style invective-laden accusations with the vocabulary of New York riff-raff. [Andrey Vyshinskiy, chief Soviet prosecutor in the 1930s, then a deputy foreign minister in the late Stalin's days, notorious for his ravings against the accused, lack of respect for the presumption of innocence and rudeness to the West – *Ed.*]

Another point of view is that international politics is returning not even to the end of the 1940s, but to the beginning of the last century, some time around 1914. «This is not a new Cold War,» says prominent Russian analyst Dmitry Trenin. «The current international situation is much closer to 1914 than to 1948.»<sup>2</sup> Some of the arguments in favor of this view deserve attention because in the growing confrontation between Russia and the West, ideology is playing a somewhat lesser role than in the second half of the 20th century. This scenario is even less optimistic than the one suggesting the imminence of another Cold War. Suffice is to recall that World War I brought to power the Bolsheviks in Russia and the Nazis in Germany, setting off a whole sad train of events.

And then there is the exotic and entirely alarmist theory of a «polar-less world». «Events in the Caucasus have proved beyond doubt the collapse of global integration of Russia and the

West,» says well-known U.S. analyst Nikolay Zlobin, summing up his impressions of the recent meeting with Russian top figures at the Valdai discussion club in September 2008. «The world has entered an era of international disintegration, and we are fast moving from a unipolar world, which had never truly taken shape, towards a world without poles, where there are no dominant centers of power, and the importance of the big nations, including Russia and America, is less than we're used to think. World disintegration is becoming the key feature of a new era and a new world order.»<sup>3</sup>

The predicted disintegration of the world order can well come to pass. The institutions set up to regulate the course of events on the international arena, primarily the United Nations, have once again demonstrated their impotence. The financial crisis, which flared up again in September 2008, is often seen as the harbinger of global economic collapse. The situation in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the Iranian nuclear problem are increasingly highlighting the need for a change, or at least a substantial correction, of Western strategy in regional and local conflict zones. But for now, such a correction does not seem likely. The military option is still considered to be too risky and undesirable – and probably not without reason. But the political options of solving problems in the Third World, the options based on intricate diplomacy, soft power and inceptives rather than sanctions, just do not work. In Europe, which is still unable to ensure its own security without American armed forces, anti-American sentiment is rife. Russian jingoes, the Iranian theocratic elite, North Korea's great leaders, Venezuelan *caudillo* Chavez and others of their ilk, who only a few years ago seemed to have all the gravitas of cartoon baddies, are now on the rise. All this is interpreted at the end of the «unipolar world»- in other words, as an irreversible and radical decline of U.S. power, overstretched by Washington's craving for world domination.

## SYSTEMIC OR TRANSIENT CRISIS?

In the summer and especially autumn of 2008, the media were spouting dramatic reports of the collapse of the «unipolar world». Many politicians, columnists and analysts seem to be positively reveling in their predictions of the fall of the global American empire—which actually exists only in their own imaginations. Those predictions are based on two recent trends. First, according to those opposing the «unipolar world», the ongoing financial crisis is the harbinger of America's imminent economic doom. And second, mired in the hopeless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States is no longer able to play the role of the guarantor of international security—and its capacity to further its interests through military might has turned out to be greatly exaggerated.

The world financial crisis of September 2008 has really put the wind in the sails of those who are expecting, be it with dread or hope, the downfall of the dollar and the collapse of America's economy. It would of course be entirely wrong to underestimate the danger and the possible fallout of the September crisis, as well as the complexity of the measures needed to put things right. But it is equally important to understand whether the crisis is systemic or transient. A systemic crisis stems from inherent flaws of the social system, the kind of flaws that after a period of increasing weakness lead to the system's eventual demise. A classic example of this is the collapse of the socialist experiment. The second kind of crisis can also lead to severe consequences, but its root causes can be fixed without redrawing the existing social order and its economic setup. Capitalism, or rather the Western social-economic system, overcame many transient crises during the 20th century, each time creating new mechanisms to increase the stability of the system and give a new impetus to its development. For example, the Great Depression of the late 1920 – early 1930s led to the introduction of effective market regulation, and the energy crisis spurred the rise of energy-saving technologies.

Ongoing instability in the financial markets will presumably end in a correction, not so much of the regulation mechanisms as of the policy of the key players. The monetary policy in America and some European countries has been too lax this past decade. Cheap credit was ploughed in lucrative but risky assets. Investors were driven not so much by dividend as by the rapid rise in stock prices. This created a bubble—rising demand was inflating stock prices, which further stimulated demand. Banks and financial institutions accumulated too much overvalued assets



on their balance sheets. This undermined the stability of the financial markets, with a squeeze in one area threatening to spill over and destabilize the whole financial system. In 2007, such a squeeze happened in mortgage lending. It was caused by the rapid rise of sub-prime lending, which left the banks with too many illiquid assets on their balance sheets. Many found themselves in a crunch, some went bust. Their shares collapsed, hitting hard other key players who owned their stakes, including investment banks and other financial institutions. The credit crunch spread to the whole financial market. A serious liquidity crisis has required massive cash injections by central banks. An unprecedented rise in oil prices became another source of instability, with crude futures skyrocketing well past any reasonable levels determined by supply and demand, cost of production and transportation, etc. As a result, oil prices began a rapid retreat in July 2008.

In essence, September saw massive write-downs of risky and overvalued assets. This is an extremely painful process, with bankruptcies, currency volatility, massive liquidity injections, etc. It will result in a world economic slowdown, mainly by slowing demand. But in the end, the Western economy will recover. There is absolutely no reason to expect a U.S. default, economic collapse or even any serious weakening of America's economy. It is an extremely powerful and diverse economy, accounting for 22 percent of the world's GDP, with large capital reserves and highly qualified workforce, technologically advanced and capable of reallocating resources very quickly. And most importantly, America is the world's only genuinely innovative economy.

In view of all this, the ideas many in Russia and some other countries like to entertain about ending their «dollar dependence», turning the ruble into a reserve currency and Moscow into a financial center to rival London and New York, sound strange, to say the least. There is simply nothing to replace the dollar with as the world's main reserve currency. And here's what the director of the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ruslan Grinberg has to say:

«Russia, Japan and China hold so many dollars that they worry about the greenback's purchasing power no less than the Americans themselves... And if a country issuing the reserve currency has an interest rate of 2 percent, it just proves that it is a stable and reliable currency. It means that inflation here is around 2 percent, while in the countries ostensibly trying to dump the dollar the inflation is much higher. So all the talk of the weak dollar and strong ruble is simply ridiculous.»<sup>4</sup>

## THE END OF A MILITARY HYPERPOWER?

America's financial troubles require a correction of economic policy, possibly even a serious one – but they don't spell the end of America's economy. In the same way, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan call for a review of some strategic and political doctrines. There's no arguing that having been dragged into the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States are now in an exceptionally difficult situation, somewhat reminiscent of the war in Vietnam 40 years ago. But this is not a sign of a significant weakening of America's military might. Neither Iraq nor Afghanistan is any evidence that the United States is weak militarily. It took America only about two weeks to destroy the *Taliban*, another two weeks to wipe out the Iraqi army, far from the weakest in the world—and with minimum American casualties.

The problem is different: having occupied Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States and the international coalition it leads failed to provide law and order, bring to power a new and effective government and win the so-called «fourth-generation wars» in those countries, also known as «major irregular wars». Those are a combination of elements of civil war, mass disorder, insurgency, ethnic and religious clashes, and armed conflict between various political and criminal groupings vying for power. Experience, including Russia's own experience in Chechnya, shows that an external force can win such a war only by using an internal force as a proxy, supporting it financially, arming it, etc. But it is far from easy to choose an internal force which could stabilize the situation—most often this force will simply install its own dictatorship propped up by the barrel of a gun. Such a choice requires good knowledge of the situation on the ground, and an ability to take advantage of the local political culture.

 William C. **Potter**, Director, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies and Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar Professor of Nonproliferation Studies Monterey Institute of International Studies (U.S.A) – by e-mail from **Monterey**: «Ill-advised actions and rhetoric on the part of all belligerents, as well as shrill voices in Washington and Moscow – reminiscent of the Cold War, have created an atmosphere in which it will be very difficult to restore the kind of trust necessary for the pursuit of important and mutually beneficial nuclear arms control and nonproliferation measures. The decision by the Nuclear Suppliers Group to grant an exemption to India – a non-NPT party in possession of nuclear weapons – is a damaging blow to the nonproliferation regime and almost surely guarantees that the NSG will no longer function effectively as a mechanism for controlling sensitive nuclear exports. Ironically, it may be one of the last vestiges of U.S.-Russian nuclear cooperation.»

The effectiveness of regular occupation troops in fourth-generation wars is minimal. This is a well-known paradox of the current strategic situation. Technologically superior forces can easily crush an opposing force that is one or two generations behind. They can destroy the command centers, communication networks, and other key elements of the enemy's military and economic infrastructure. But they are next to useless in fighting insurgency in third-world countries, especially if the insurgents have the support of the local population and can take cover in inaccessible mountainous regions or jungles. And in urban environment, the fight against terrorists and armed insurgents requires police and security forces rather than an army, with an extensive network of agents in the communities that supply the insurgents with fighters, funds, resources, propaganda support, etc.

In other words, America's serious mistakes in Iraq and Afghanistan were not so much military as political, made well after the main stage of the military operation was over. In Iraq, the United States did not stop at removing the top figures of

Saddam's regime and dismantling his security forces. Instead of preserving the key government structures, including the army and the state apparatus, the U.S. administration began building a new state system from scratch, often failing to take into account the local political culture, as well as the nature and the balance of forces vying for power. And Afghanistan, just like some other states still stuck in the feudal era, probably cannot be modernized at all, least of all by foreigners.

Besides, in 2003 Americans chose Iraq, and not Iran as the main target of their military operation. But for all his cruelty and cynicism, Saddam Hussein was not so dangerous for the West as the Iranian regime—which is not just cruel, but also fanatical, ideologically driven and possibly close to acquiring nuclear weapons. As a result, the United States and their allies—plus NATO in the case of Afghanistan—have found themselves bogged down in two complex fourth-generation wars, with no realistic chance of victory, as is now clear. This substantially reduces America's and NATO's room for military and political maneuver, and often severely limits their capacity in other parts of the world, including the traditional NATO zone of responsibility. This means that the United States and NATO are facing the need for a major change of their policy on Iraq and Afghanistan, up to and including the withdrawal of troops. That could lead to the break-up of Iraq into separate Shia, Sunni and Kurdish states. Geopolitically such a construct could well prove more stable than the current amorphous state, torn by internal divisions and rivalry.

## THE OBAMA PHENOMENON

Everyone's attention is now fixed on the upcoming change of U.S. administration. At the end of September 2008, when this review was written, it was hard to predict who would become the next president. But one thing is certain: the 2008 presidential campaign has demonstrated that American society can overcome deep existential crises. Forty years ago, in April 1968, a sniper killed one of the greatest politicians of the 20th century, Martin Luther King. Five years



earlier, King made his famous «I Have a Dream» speech. «I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.»<sup>5</sup>

Back then, in the 1960s, King was thought of as a noble but hopelessly naive dreamer. The United States was then in the throes of one of the deepest crises in its history. The country was bogged down in a hopeless war in Vietnam. Racial discrimination looked like it was there to stay forever, any many feared that racial clashes would lead to the break-up of the country or a civil war. Anyone who thought it possible in 1968 that in 40 years' time a black American from a poor family would be a leading contender for U.S. presidency, would be pronounced insane. But King's dream has come true. American society has managed to eliminate a source of division and confrontation that threatened its very existence, and by doing that it has proved its viability.

However, Obama's background is far from being the most important feature of the 2008 campaign. The rivalry between McCain and Obama for the White House reflects the current stage of the struggle between America's traditionalists and liberals. The traditionalists are mainly conservative. The liberals want change. The paradox is that both are right. The United States cannot abandon its values and ideals, and neither can it stop supporting democratic change abroad. This is a pragmatic strategy, since no democracy can be a threat to the United States. But at the same time, U.S. foreign policy must take into account the rapid change of the economic and political situation in the world. It must adapt to this change, and sometimes look for pragmatic solutions in the spirit of *Realpolitik*, which are often at odds with democratic values and traditional morality.

There is also another side of the Obama phenomenon. Obama has the backing of those at home and abroad who want the United States and its foreign policy to change – but often cannot quite say what exactly that change should be. On the one hand, this helps him in the election race. But on the other, it can become a serious hindrance for him once he's in office—as it would for any politician turned by the circumstances into a figurehead of change. Implementing that change, especially in areas that the elite and the general public hold vital for the country's strategic interests, is an enormously difficult and time-consuming task. This is why today's expectations can give way to disappointment—and the higher the expectations, the deeper the disappointment.

We can hardly expect that a change of administration in the United States will immediately bring a substantial change in U.S. foreign policy. First, a change of administration leads to an automatic replacement of dozens of key figures in the White House, the State Department, the Department of Energy, the Pentagon, the intelligence services and the think tanks that supply the president with information, analysis and policy ideas. Most of the new appointees will need time to settle in, master the arcane but extremely important details of internal bureaucracy and begin productive work. Second, there is the inertia of the state apparatus, key congressional committees and leading corporations, especially the defense contractors, and other elements of Washington's bureaucracy. Third, life itself will dictate the foreign policy agenda of the new American administration. As before, relations with the allies, with China, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and the Middle East will be at the top of the agenda. The one relatively new challenge for the United States is Russia, which is demonstrating readiness for confrontation with America. So it will be at least several months before the general strategy and the details of foreign policy changes have been worked out. In addition, there are certain differences between Obama's and McCain's proposed strategies. Which means that until one or the other is in the White House, it is too early to speak about a new U.S. foreign policy. However, some conclusions about the possible changes can already be drawn.

For Obama, the main foreign policy priority is an immediate beginning of troop withdrawal from Iraq. He believes the United States must seek a political solution to Iraq's problems, including the return of refugees, and put an emphasis on humanitarian rather than military issues. Ending the war in Iraq will allow the United States to focus its attention and military resources on fighting terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to develop and implement a comprehensive global strategy of fighting terrorism and extremism. Another key foreign policy priority for Obama is preventing nuclear proliferation, including proliferation disguised as peaceful

nuclear energy programs, preventing the spread of nuclear materials and technologies, and ensuring the security of existing nuclear stocks. He stresses the importance of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and dismantling North Korea's nuclear program. He also believes it is important to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in Russian and American military strategy and development, and to lower the battle-readiness of strategic nuclear weapons. But in general, apart from troop withdrawal from Iraq, there are no major departures in Obama's program from the current administration's foreign policy.

Unlike Obama, McCain emphasizes the importance of a military victory in Iraq and of the troop increases needed to achieve it. A premature troop withdrawal would bolster Iran's and Al-Qaeda's influence in the region and further destabilize the whole Middle East. McCain's main priority in the field of international security is fighting terrorism and supporting moderate forces in the Islamic world. He also advocates reducing America's dependence on foreign oil, partly so as not to enrich foreign oil cartels and dictators. But the most interesting novelty in McCain's foreign policy is the creation of a worldwide League of Democracies, which is supposed to act wherever and whenever the UN is thwarted by the power of veto held by authoritarian states. The league is supposed to put pressure on the tyrants in Burma, Sudan and Zimbabwe, support struggling democracies such as Ukraine and Serbia, and impose effective sanctions on Iran and North Korea to stop nuclear proliferation.

Both candidates believe that the main problem now is the war in Iraq. That is quite understandable. American servicemen are still dying there, the cost of the war is huge, and there is no victory in sight. According to a recent survey held by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, almost two thirds of Americans support troop withdrawal from Iraq, either immediately or within the next two years.<sup>6</sup>

Troop withdrawal from Iraq would also allow the United States to focus its attention and resources on other foreign and military policy areas – most importantly on Iran, Pakistan and quite possibly the Black Sea region. But there is no reason to expect a radical change in America's Iraq policy in the first few months of any new administration. Significant troop increases or reductions require serious preparation, formal and informal vetting in the Congress, etc.

There is no clarity about America's future policy on Iran. On the one hand, it is no longer in doubt that by building up its uranium enrichment capacity, Tehran is laying the technology foundation of a nuclear weapons program. But on the other hand, there is no readiness in the United States, let alone Europe, for decisive action that can stop the Iranian leadership—including military action. All this is increasing the likelihood of a preventive Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear installations and possibly other military targets. And while the United States can reasonably expect to be able to stay out of such a conflict, it's not clear what European leaders are thinking, given their strong opposition to any military action against Iran.

## THE LANDSCAPE AHEAD OF THE BATTLE

The Russian-Georgian war was one of the key events of the dramatic summer and early autumn of 2008. That war has completely debunked Francis Fukuyama's beautiful but naïve «end of history» theory, which he put forward after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many experts have been drawing parallels with the events of August 1914. In other words, they believe the war will have triggered a chain of events leading to a whole series of conflicts and clashes in and around the post-Soviet space, to a political and military confrontation between Russia and the West, and eventually to a radical change of the strategic landscape in western Eurasia. However, other experts view the conflict as an unpleasant but essentially local incident that has no strategic consequences. For now, there is not enough accurate information to tell who is right. But the general order of events preceding the invasion of Georgia is quite clear, giving a fairly obvious picture of the reasons behind the *five-day war* and its place in world politics.

The foundations of the *five-day war* were laid in the first half of this decade. The Georgian «revolution of roses», followed by the «orange revolution» in Ukraine and the «tulip revolution» in



 Yevgeny **Satanovsky** President of the Institute of the Middle East (**Russia**), by e-mail from **Moscow**: «The crisis in the U.S.-Russian relations after the five-day war in Georgia and the visit of the U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney to the region let Iran off the leash. The change of power in Pakistan, as a result of American policy of democratization, put under the question the existence of this nuclear state.

At the same time, the crisis in the U.S.-Russian relations can cut the knot, bringing in the long-term future the practice of the unilateral action of the United States, which disturbs the stability in the Middle East.

The other positive moment is the position of Turkey, which has become a serious stabilizing factor concerning the Israeli-Syrian, Russo-Georgian and Iranian-American relations in the international arena.»

Kyrgyzstan were watched with extreme irritation and serious concern by the Russian establishment. They demonstrated that serious discontent in post-Soviet countries, combined with a split in the ruling elite can peacefully bring to power a new generation of leaders who pursue independent policies and strive for Western integration, including NATO membership. And although there was no reason to expect a «color revolution» in Russia, the events in Georgia, Ukraine and later Kyrgyzstan showed that post-Soviet regimes, similar in their setup to the one in Russia, were unstable – and that forces born within those regimes could bring about a change of government. This naturally became a serious concern for Moscow. From the middle of the decade, fighting the «orange threat» and preventing NATO's further eastward expansion became the key goals of Russia's policy in former Soviet republics. The Kremlin strived to restore its influence there, which had been undermined by the «color revolutions»—and at the same time to persuade would-be Russian

followers of Yushchenko, Timoshenko and Saakashvili that any attempts to repeat the Kyiv or Tbilisi scenario in Moscow would be fruitless. However, Russia failed to score any great achievements in restoring its dominance in the post-Soviet space. By the summer of 2008, Ukraine's and Georgia's NATO membership, while not imminent, had become a realistic prospect. This seriously undermined the reputation of the top Russian leadership among the establishment, which could not fail to notice that Moscow was failing to achieve its proclaimed foreign policy goals.

The crisis in relations with Ukraine became especially obvious. In the summer of 2008, the problem of the Russian Black Sea fleet, which is stationed in Ukraine, again came to the fore. The Ukrainian leadership made it extremely clear that it will be expecting the fleet to leave its base in Sevastopol (when its lease expires in 2017). The response of the fleet's commanders was astonishing, to say the least. First, they said that the fleet (or at least some of it) will be based in the Syrian port of Tartus. They also promised to bring the number of ships in the fleet to about a hundred – an increase of about 60 percent. Tartus is completely unsuitable for a permanent base. It has virtually no infrastructure, and any ships stationed there rather than at a Black Sea port would be much more vulnerable in the event of a conflict with the United States and NATO. Furthermore, the number of ships in the fleet can only be increased by relocating some ships from other fleets—an idea even more dubious than moving the base to Tartus. In truth those statements were just a reflection of how dazed and confused the Russian military commanders were.

The summer of 2008 saw several other failures of Russia's foreign policy. In June, a pro-Western ruling coalition came to power in Serbia. The Socialist Party, formerly led by Slobodan Milosevic, allied itself with the *For a European Serbia* bloc led by President Boris Tadic. The country proclaimed European Union membership as its main goal. Nationalist parties backed by Moscow suffered a serious defeat. The Russian Foreign Ministry did not seem to have fully realized this. «I don't think that the people of Serbia will want to trade part of their country for promises of European integration,» Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Titov confidently said at the end of July.<sup>7</sup> That statement sounded quite strange against the backdrop of the Serbian cabinet's decision reversing the recall of Serbian ambassadors to 11 EU countries that had recognized Kosovo's independence. The decision was made to «bolster diplomatic efforts» to

 **Andrey Kortunov**, President, New Eurasia Foundation (**Russia**) – by phone from **Moscow**: «There is a certain inertia of the events concerning both politics and reputation, which exceeds the limits. In addition, at this moment it is not clear how to bring together the positions of Russia and the United States, they are now absolutely different and there are no any clear variants for a compromise...I would try to be optimistic and suggest some increase of the ISI, although not very tremendous. The participants of the conflicts have come to the turning point and it is evident that they understood the danger of the future escalation and therefore will do everything to alleviate the consequences of the crisis we observed in summer.»

obtain official EU candidate status by the end of the year.

In July, Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg signed an agreement to host a radar site for America's future ABM system in Europe with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. «We are extremely saddened by this situation,» Russian president Dmitry Medvedev said in his comments. «We are not happy with this... We are not going to throw hysterics of course, but we will be thinking about our steps in response.»<sup>8</sup> Apparently the Russian Foreign Ministry somehow misheard the president's words about not throwing hysterics. «If the agreement with the United States, which is subject to ratification in the Czech parliament, enters into force, and strategic American ABM system starts to be deployed near our borders, we will have to react by military-technical rather than diplomatic means,»

the ministry said in a statement.<sup>9</sup> Such warnings have been made before, but they have never achieved their purpose.

All this suggests that in the summer of 2008, Russia's foreign policy was facing the prospect of a systemic and strategic defeat. There were two ways out of the hole it had dug itself in. The first was abandoning the old strategic dogmas. But for Russia's political and bureaucratic elite, that meant admitting its own intellectual bankruptcy. The second way was raising the stakes and taking the escalation even further. Russia chose the second way by invading Georgia.

## PREPARATION FOR WAR

The reasons for choosing Georgia as the main target of Russian military pressure are quite clear. The Baltic states, which Moscow loathes no less than it does Georgia, are NATO members, and a conflict with them is very dangerous. Ukraine is too big. Kazakhstan and Belarus are Russia's allies in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Azerbaijan, thanks to Ilham Aliiev's skillful political maneuvering, has been able to maintain good relations with Moscow while at the same time developing strong cooperation with Western countries. That left Tbilisi, whose strategy of integrating with the West and joining NATO as soon as possible was seen as a challenge in Moscow. This is why Russia's political and bureaucratic establishment chose to make an object lesson out of Georgia, for the benefit of all those political circles in post-Soviet countries who dared challenge Russia.

Interestingly, the first symptoms that force could be used against Georgia appeared even before the «revolution of roses». At the beginning of the decade, almost all the residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia who were not ethnic Georgians were given Russian passports. Moscow insisted that its reasons were purely humanitarian—the Abkhaz and South Ossetians did not want to accept Georgian passports, and the documents issued by the breakaway authorities were not recognized anywhere outside those territories. That may have been the genuine reason—but those Russian passports were then used as an excuse to interfere in Georgia's internal affairs. The armed invasion was justified by the need to protect the life, freedom and dignity of Russian passport-holders.

It can be assumed that the strategy of military pressure on Georgia was adopted in the middle of the decade, after the «chechenization» [sic!] of the conflict and after the Kadyrov grouping achieved relative stability in Chechnya. In late 2006 and early 2007, the Russian media report-



ed that the armed forces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia had a combined 140–190 tanks, 170–190 armored combat vehicles and 200–300 pieces of artillery. That meant that in heavy weapons, they had practically achieved numerical parity with Georgia. Those heavy weapons could only have come from Russia. In March 2006, Moscow agreed to shut down the military bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki. The bases were deep inside Georgian territory, and in an armed conflict any Russian servicemen there would turn into hostages. «This is why the rapid withdrawal is not a gesture of reconciliation but largely a necessary precondition for a military solution of the Georgia problem,» Russian military analyst Pavel Felgengauer wrote at the time.<sup>11</sup> The withdrawal of the bases was complete by the end of 2007, well before the deadline – normally the Russian military drag their feet on such withdrawals for as long as they can. At about the same time, Russian officers and generals were appointed to leading positions in the armed and security forces of Abkhazia and especially South Ossetia.

The final decision to prepare a military operation was probably made in early spring 2008. In March, the Russian Foreign Ministry announced a unilateral withdrawal from sanctions against Abkhazia. The sanctions were imposed by the decision of the council of CIS heads of state in January 1996. The step was largely symbolic, since Russia had not been abiding by the sanctions regime anyway. Then came the Kremlin's decision to establish relations between Russian state agencies and the separatist authorities. And in March, Maj. Gen. Vasilii Lunev, a graduate of the most prestigious Russian Academy of General Staff who had held senior posts in the Russian armed forces, was appointed minister of defense of South Ossetia.

In April, regular reports of Russian military build-up in Abkhazia started coming in from the Georgian government. Russian fighters took to shooting down Georgian spy drones gathering information in Abkhazian border regions. Then came the media reports that Russia was preparing a military invasion of Georgian-controlled Upper Kodori gorge, scheduled for May 8 or 9. «We have confidential information that on May 8–9, Russian paratroopers were supposed to enter Upper Kodori,» said Yuliya Latynina, a well-informed source on Caucasian affairs. «That was cancelled after hectic shuttle diplomacy ... on the 7th we had the inauguration. And on May 21, we had the election in Tbilisi. Had a war broken out, the mess would have been such that anything could happen, including such an impossible thing as a victory of the Georgian opposition.»<sup>12</sup>

In June, Russia sent its railway troops to Abkhazia. They began urgent work to repair the railway between Sukhumi and Ochamchira, near the border between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia. The official line was that the railway is vitally important for the rebuilding of the Abkhaz economy. That it may be—but the first use the railway was put to was moving heavy Russian arms to the border with Georgia. And finally, in the second half of July, Russia held a large military exercise, some of it in the areas directly adjacent to the border between Russia and South Ossetia. The exercise involved troops from the North Caucasus military district, units of paratroopers from other military districts, Interior Ministry troops and other agencies. After the exercise, the commanders of the North Caucasus military district spoke of the «high quality of cooperation between the participants of the exercise, and the ability of units and formations rapidly to deploy large groups of forces far from their permanent bases in order to engage large terrorist groups.»<sup>13</sup> Soon after the exercise, a «large group of forces» was deployed in the region of Tskhinvali, which is indeed far from their permanent bases. All this coincided with a rapid deterioration of the situation in South Ossetia, with regular exchanges of fire between Georgian and South Ossetian troops. Both sides used heavy weapons. In this situation, a military conflict was all but inevitable. The key question is, however, who started the conflict.

## **THE FATEFUL NIGHT OF AUGUST 7–8, 2008**

Understanding the legal and political nature of the *five-day war* requires a meticulous reconstruction of events on the night of August 7–8, 2008. The Russian version is that late at night on August 7, a large number of Georgian troops entered South Ossetia. At around 11.30 pm they started massive shelling of Tskhinvali, and seized (or attempted to seize) the commanding high points in the mountains overlooking the city. According to Russian officials, the city was devastated by the shelling, «razed to the ground» in fact, and civilian casualties reached

2,000 on the very first day of the war. Moscow also claims that Georgian forces attacked a Russian peacekeeping battalion, killing 10 peacekeepers.

Georgia offers a completely different version. Tbilisi says that late on August 7, President Saakashvili received human and electronic intelligence about 150 tanks and trucks carrying Russian troops had entered South Ossetia. Upon receiving the report, he ordered an operation to seize Tskhinvali and suppress South Ossetian armed formations. As evidence, Georgia has provided a radio intercept in which South Ossetian military are heard talking about Russian troop movement via the Roksky tunnel. Tbilisi says Russian figures of civilian casualties in Tskhinvali are wildly exaggerated, and that many of those were actually killed not by Georgian shelling but by Russian artillery fire and air strikes after Georgian troops took almost the whole city under their control.

In other words, the time of the first Russian troop movement across the Georgian border, and the number of casualties on the first day of the war are crucially important. If the Russian version is true, Russian action can be justified as legitimate defense of its citizens. But if we accept the Georgian version, Russia has committed an act of armed aggression against a neighboring country, while Georgia merely attempted legitimate self-defense.

The Georgian version appears more plausible. Tbilisi has provided detailed chronology of the events, including the precise time when the Russian troops crossed into Georgian territory, and offered verifiable evidence.

Meanwhile, the Russian authorities are withholding key information. They are saying neither when exactly President Medvedev made the decision to march his troops into Georgia, nor when precisely the Russian troops crossed into Georgia and entered South Ossetia, nor when the Russian troops joined the battle in the area of Tskhinvali, and nor why the Council of Federation approved the president's decision only at the end of August 2008, about two weeks after it was made. Russia has said only this:

«By 8 am (on August 8 – *Y.F.*) fighting was under way in the streets of Tskhinvali between units of the Georgian army and South Ossetian troops. The positions of the Russian peacekeepers were under constant fire by that time. At 8.20–8.30 am the Georgian Air Force raided the peacekeepers' compounds. At about 11 am, Georgian forces seized the Severnyy and Yuzhnyy [Southern and Northern – *Ed.*] compounds. In this difficult situation, when the goals and objectives of the Georgian army became clear and when our peacekeepers started suffering losses, a decision was made to come to the aid of the peacekeepers and Russian citizens living in South Ossetia, who were in fact being killed.»<sup>14</sup>

It can be assumed—though it really is just an assumption—that the decision to send Russian troops to Georgia was made on August 8, some time after 11 am, and troops crossed into Georgia a few hours after that. After the order was formally issued it then needed to reach the commanders of the North Caucasus military district and the 58th Army. The troops then needed to assemble for the march, reach the border and pass through the Roksky tunnel, a bottleneck between North and South Ossetia. All that must have taken quite some time. But the absence of any official information about the precise time when the Russian troops started crossing into Georgian territory suggests that the Russian authorities are hiding something. That is understandable, because any discrepancy between the official and real timing would belie Russia's claims. It is impossible to conceal large troop movements—there are too many witnesses, military records have been kept, etc.

There is also indirect evidence that either the Russian troops were already in South Ossetia on August 7, or that they had started crossing into it much earlier than official Russian reports suggest. On August 3, 2008 [sic!] the *Krasnaya Zvezda* newspaper published an interview with a Russian military officer suggesting that his unit was moved to Tskhinvali on August 7 and joined the battle with Georgian troops on August 8. There is also the report of a South Ossetian news agency transmitted at 1.27 am on August 8:

«A military column, trucks carrying military personnel and armored combat vehicles are moving along Transkam from Alagir towards the border post of Nizhniy Zaramag. The Ossetian armed forces need to hold off the superior enemy forces for only a few more hours.»<sup>15</sup>



The greatly exaggerated figures coming from the Russian government on civilian casualties killed on the first day of the war also raise doubts about the Russian version of events. According to Human Rights Watch data gathered by interviewing doctors of the Tskhinvali city hospital, which is where the bodies of Ossetians killed during the war were brought, as of August 13 the morgue had received 44 bodies. Some 273 people were given medical assistance.<sup>16</sup> In mid-September, Ayvar Bestayev, a surgeon at the Tskhinvali central hospital, told Ossetian radio that 70 dead and 190 wounded were brought to the hospital on the first night of the war—that is, on the very night when according to Russian politicians and diplomats, about 2,000 people were killed. A total of 270 people underwent surgery over the three days presumably since the start of the war. On September 4, 2008 the head of the Russian group of investigators working in South Ossetia said that the group had found the bodies of 134 people in Tskhinvali. On the same day, the South Ossetian prosecutor's office said that 276 had been killed during the war.<sup>18</sup> It did not specify how many of the dead and wounded were civilians, and how many were South Ossetian fighters. Neither did it say where exactly the bodies were found, and crucially, whether they died on the night of August 7–8 or later, during fighting between Georgian forces, South Ossetian militants and Russian servicemen.

### **OUTCOME OF THE WAR AND SETTLEMENT PROSPECTS**

The military outcome of the war was is no doubt after the Russian forces joined the battle with the Georgian army. The Georgians suffered a heavy defeat, mainly because of Russian air superiority. It is also important that the Georgian army had been trained for low-intensity conflicts, not for a battle with the much superior Russian forces.

But the political and strategic outcome of the war is a different matter. Even those politicians and media outlets in the West that are not normally prone to confrontational tone with Russia, are talking about a «disproportionate» use of force by Moscow. If the justification of ending alleged Georgian atrocities in South Ossetia really was the only objective of the military operation, there would have been no need to push the Georgian forces out of Upper Kodori, install so-called checkpoints deep inside Georgia proper, well outside South Ossetian and Abkhaz territory, bomb not just military but also civilian targets in Georgia, or deploy ships of the Black Sea Fleet off the coast of Abkhazia. The Russian military claim that the purpose of all those steps was to prevent new Georgian attacks against South Ossetia. That explanation does not hold water. First, after August 12 Georgia simply had no practical capability to launch any new attacks against South Ossetia or Abkhazia. And second, even if Tbilisi dared to attack, it could have been thwarted by air strikes alone.

Russia's actions after the signing of the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan on August 12 have been even more contradictory and bewildering. According to the Russian version, this is what the sides agreed:<sup>19</sup>

- No more use of force
- Stop all military action for good
- Free access to humanitarian aid
- Georgian troops return to their places of permanent deployment
- Russian troops to return to pre-conflict positions. Until international mechanisms are put in place, Russian peacekeeping forces take additional security measures.
- Beginning of international talks on ways of ensuring lasting security for South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The key element of the agreement was the withdrawal of Russian forces to pre-conflict positions. This means that Russian troops, apart from the peacekeeping battalion deployed in South Ossetia, should be withdrawn back to Russian territory—while the peacekeeping battalion is allowed to take some additional security measures. The obvious problem with the agreement is the lack of any definition of «additional security measures» or the geography of those measures.

The Medvedev-Sarkozy plan opened up good diplomatic prospects for Russia. On the one hand, Moscow had demonstrated that it had the military capacity and political will to be a dom-

inant force in the post-Soviet space and to defend its interests by all available means, including force. And on the other, Moscow showed that it is a responsible and reasonable player on the international arena.

But the Russian military wasted no time correcting President Medvedev. The Defense Ministry said that it was just a pullback of forces, not a complete withdrawal that Russia had agreed to. That meant that a large part of Russian troops that entered South Ossetia and Abkhazia still remain there. It also turned out that Russian military commanders used the «additional security measures» clause to set up so-called «buffer zones» deep inside Georgia proper. That caused a huge diplomatic scandal. The West took Russia's actions as a slap in the face and started discussing sanctions, some of which could have been quite painful.

The tension was somewhat defused after Medvedev and Sarkozy signed another document, on implementation of the original August 12 plan. The sides confirmed the need to «fully abide by the Medvedev-Sarkozy six-point plan of August 12, 2008.» Taking into account «legally binding guarantees of non-use of force against Abkhazia and South Ossetia,» the sides agreed on the following:<sup>20</sup>

- ❑ All Russian peacekeeping forces to be withdrawn from the five observation posts on the line of Poti-Senaki within seven days;
- ❑ At least 200 EU monitors to be deployed in areas adjacent to South Ossetia and Abkhazia by October 1, 2008; the Russian peacekeeping forces to be withdrawn from those areas to pre-conflict positions within 10 days of the deployment of monitors;
- ❑ Georgian troops to return to places of permanent deployment by October 1, 2008;
- ❑ International observers of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia and the OSCE to continue fulfilling their mandate in accordance with the numbers and deployment plan as of August 7, 2008 without prejudice to possible adjustment in the future by the decision of the UN Security Council or the Permanent Council of the OSCE;
- ❑ International discussions under Article 6 of the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan of August 12, 2008 to start on October 15, 2008 in Geneva. Preparatory discussions to start in September. These discussions are to focus on ways of ensuring security and stability in the region, and on solving the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons based on internationally accepted norms and practice of post-war settlement. The sides are to discuss any other issues by mutual consent.

Implementation of this agreement will help to stabilize the situation, because it solves the extremely difficult problem of Russian troop deployment in Georgia proper. But on August 26, 2008 Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It has also signed agreements on friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance with them and announced its intention to build military bases on their territory. This blocks the resolution of all the remaining problems. In violation of the agreement on troop withdrawal to pre-conflict positions, Russian troops remain in South Ossetia (and Abkhazia), where new military bases are to be built. And following Russia's recognition of the two breakaway Georgian territories' independence, Article 6 of the Medvedev-Sarkozy peace plan – on an international discussion on stability and security in the region – becomes pointless.

A return to the pre-August situation, even with some adjustments, could have defused the confrontation between Russia and the West or even put an end to it. But now this confrontation has become very likely, if not inevitable. Russia's decision to launch a military operation against Georgia, made in the summer of 2008, will now determine the course of Russia's history for many years to come. Russia has no chance of winning a confrontation with the West. By turning into an oil state, it is frittering away the high-tech potential built in Soviet times, and rapidly falling behind the United States and the West in science and technology, including military technology. This is at a time when no modern army can function without high-tech weapons, communications, intelligence, and command-and-control systems. Russia is also dependent on imports of food, medicines and hi-tech consumer goods from Europe. Western financial institutions hold about half a trillion dollars worth of Russian corporate bonds. Any drop in oil and gas exports will immediately squeeze export revenue and jeopardize vital imports. Enough said.



## CONCLUSIONS

Robert Kagan of the Carnegie Foundation, who published a brilliant study several years ago of the strategic culture differences between the United States and Europe, did not exaggerate when he wrote this about the *five-day war*:

«Historians will come to view August 8, 2008, as a turning point no less significant than November 9, 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell. Russia's attack on sovereign Georgian territory marked the official return of history, indeed to an almost 19th-century style of great-power competition, complete with virulent nationalisms, battles for resources, struggles over spheres of influence and territory, and – even though it shocks our 21st-century sensibilities – the use of military power to obtain geopolitical objectives. Yes, we will continue to have globalization, economic interdependence, the European Union and other efforts to build a more perfect international order. But these will compete with and at times be overwhelmed by the harsh realities of international life that have endured since time immemorial.»<sup>21</sup>

It seems that Kagan is right. The international system really is beginning to return to the strategic paradigms of the 19th century. And that truly is a sad state of affairs, for after the 19th came a century of two world wars, cruel totalitarian regimes, concentration camps, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. 

**Yury Fedorov**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, interview with *Russia Today*, August 26, 2008,

[http://www.president.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/26/2003\\_type82915type82916\\_205778.shtml](http://www.president.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/26/2003_type82915type82916_205778.shtml).

<sup>2</sup> Dmitry Trenin, «Horrible New World», *The New Times*, September 8, 2008, <http://newtimes.ru/magazine/2008/issue082/doc-57895.html>

<sup>3</sup> Nikolay Zlobin, «World Order: Possibilities of Disintegration», *Ekho Moskvyy*, September 16, 2008, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/blog/nzlobin/540835-echo.phtml>.

<sup>4</sup> Mikhail Kalmatskiy, «Getting off the Dollar», *Novyye Izvestiya*, September 22, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> «I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'»

<sup>6</sup> Chicago Council on Global Affairs, *Global Views 2008*, Foreign Policy Report, «Troubled by Loss of Standing in the World, Americans Support Major Policy Changes,» p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Yuliya Petrovskaya, «Potential for Crisis Remains in the Balkans,» *Nezavisimaya Gazeta – Dipkuryer*, July 28, 2008, [http://www.ng.ru/courier/2008-07-28/15\\_serbia.html](http://www.ng.ru/courier/2008-07-28/15_serbia.html).

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.president.kremlin.ru/appears/2008/07/09/1714\\_type63377type63380type82634\\_203927.shtml](http://www.president.kremlin.ru/appears/2008/07/09/1714_type63377type63380type82634_203927.shtml)

<sup>9</sup> Statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the signing of U.S.-Czech agreements on the deployment on the Czech territory of elements of global U.S. ABM system, July 8, 2008, [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/sps/14FC88B0CB5E3568C3257480005DFF8F](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/sps/14FC88B0CB5E3568C3257480005DFF8F)

<sup>10</sup> Oleg Yesinskiy, «New War, Old Scenario,» *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, July 28-August 3, 2006; Anatoly Tsyganok, «Eurasian Tinderbox,» *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, February 8, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Pavel Felgengauer, «The agents are already forgotten», *Novaya Gazeta*, October 9, 2006, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/data/2006/77/15.html>

<sup>12</sup> Yuliya Latynina, *Ekho Moskvyy*, May 31, 2008, <http://www.echo.msk.ru /programs/code/517706-echo.phtml>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.mil.ru/info/1069/details/index.shtml?id=49146>

<sup>14</sup> Statement by Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Col.-Gen. Anatoly Nogovitsin for the media on August 9, 2008, <http://www.mil.ru/info/1069/details/index.shtml?id=49318>

<sup>15</sup> Report by Ossetian radio and TV on August 8, 2008 on the website <http://www.osradio.ru>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/13/georgia>

<sup>17</sup> <http://osradio.ru/news/genocid//12841.html>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.rambler.ru/news/events/russiageorgia/13379592.html>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.president.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2008/08/206308.shtml>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.president.kremlin.ru/events/articles/2008/08/205061/206279.shtml>

<sup>21</sup> Robert Kagan, «Putin Makes His Move,» *Washington Post*, August 11, 2008, p. A15.



## A VIEW BY A RUSSIAN CONSERVATIVE: WAITING FOR THE DAWN OF MULTIPOLAR WORLD

### IN PLACE OF INTRODUCTION: THE END OF VIRTUAL REALITY

I must admit right from the start: I was wrong to suggest that Mikhail Saakashvili might not, after all, be mad. I confess I mistook his brief moment of hesitation for sanity. It is true that Saakashvili has turned out to be yet another unhinged American university graduate, whom our American partners picked up – for lack of a better choice, apparently—for the job of Georgian president. Well, they thought he'd be good enough for the hillbillies, as the saying goes. But I would still like to point out, just for the record, that I have always thought recognizing South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence was the only way out of the deadlock in our relations with Georgia. Though it must be said I had little hope that the Russian leadership would actually go for it. But now the «Georgian deadlock» is over, and the «Georgian gambit» is no more. Russia has a lot more freedom of action now in the Caucasus – and not only there. Now it is Russia who decides what the next move is going to be.

And most importantly, the entire intricate web of diplomacy, virtual foreign-policy reality, secret deals and overt provocations, will now break into pieces, like a shop window smashed by a football. It will collapse after coming into contact with the tough reality of military force and clear-cut orders of the Russian president and his generals.

For in the end, Mikhail Saakashvili was merely acting out the lessons he had learnt in the United States. And the main lesson was, don't answer the question, just tell your own tale. And tell his tale he did, to nods of approval from the «civilized community». First, about the democratization of Georgia. Then about peaceful reunification with breakaway provinces. Then about Russian imperialism, which prevents the provinces from reuniting with «Mother Georgia». Then about the rise of the Georgian economy, and the fight with corruption too—much to the amusement of people in the know. His next tale was about how he was going to crush the Russian army. And some time later about what had prevented him from crushing the Russian army. «We could beat them all but they just don't notice us,» goes the song by Andrey Makarevich, a former liberal dissident who now sings at government-sponsored concerts.

But none of it matters any more. The Georgian president has become the classic example of the «virtual reality» of modern politics. And this virtual reality, reeking of provincialism and parochialism, has now been destroyed by the «real» reality, if you excuse the repetition. This real reality never went away in the 1990s and the beginning of this century. It was just quietly standing aside, biding its time.

And now its time has come.

### ONCE AGAIN ABOUT THE STRUGGLE FOR RESOURCES

Actually, it isn't Georgia that I meant to start with in my comments about the events of the past three months. The Georgian crisis is important, but ultimately it just an episode in the formation of a new international balance of power. It is just a tactical disturbance, part of some more important global trends. And the main trend is the beginning of the struggle for resources, hotly debated and equally as hotly denied. The denials, however, are just another example of a clash between virtual reality and real life.



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 Abdulaziz **Sager**, Chairman of the Gulf Research Center (**Saudi Arabia**) – by e-mail from **Dubai**: «With the debate over how to proceed on additional steps to stop the Iranian nuclear march being curtailed and taken out of the limelight, Iran continues with its efforts to obtain a nuclear capability. This is likely to result in heightened tensions as Iran will become more adamant about protecting its progress and with Russia and possible China being less likely to support additional steps against Iran through the United Nations. On a positive note has been the situation in Iraq as well as the increased diplomatic activity by the GCC states. On Iraq, the debate over the U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces agreement illustrates a movement towards the withdrawal of the U.S. forces on a measured time-induced scale. While many doubts remain about the actual security situation on the ground as well as about the intention of the current Iraqi government to bring about national reconciliation, this is a movement in the right direction and avoids a sudden withdrawal and the falling into a greater security vacuum.»

It is not when developed economies start fighting for the last tanker of oil that the struggle for resources begins. And not when the price of a barrel hits \$200. It begins wherever and whenever commodity prices start shaping the nature, the speed and the structure of economic growth. And right now, it is commodity prices, and especially energy prices, that determine the nature and speed of economic growth. Only three or five years ago it was all about capital, but now it's energy—and not even hydrocarbons as such. The supply of hydrocarbons on the world market has actually been growing, not shrinking. It is mostly about access to energy resources, about control of those resources, ownership of them and a say in how they are used. In other words, it is about the ability to take control of the most promising oil and gas fields and transport routes.

It is easy to see why control of resources, especially energy—control of as opposed to trade in—is the foundation of any country's stature on the world arena. Possession of resources and effective national control of them are the key instruments of shaping your own future. If you have the resources, you can more actively defend your position and formu-

late a global vision of the future, not just in theory but in practice too.

As for the assurances that struggle for resources is not on the cards, suffice is to recall that the European Union has recently declared the fight against «resource nationalism» as its key task for the foreseeable future. «Resource nationalism» is of course a euphemism for Russia's unwillingness to grant the big multinationals unlimited access to its oil and gas fields and other natural resources. In other words, the goal is to take away our country's ability to shape its own future, and to make us build the kind of future that is in the interests of the West. And it is not just some pundit that the «resource nationalism» idea belongs to. It is the EU's own commissioner for trade, Peter Mandelson—and none has refuted his statement. So what is it if not an admission on the highest political level that Europe is preparing for a decisive struggle with Russia for Russia's own resources? And it is not just the resources in the Arctic that are at stake.

Whether or not Europe has the courage to use force in its struggle with «resource nationalism» remains to be seen. But it is obvious that the use of military force is not being ruled out.

By the way, there is every reason to believe that the ongoing global financial crisis was actually triggered by widespread preparations for the struggle for resources. Those preparations require money—a lot of money, hundreds of billions of dollars. In most countries, not just Russia, the fields developed in the 1960s-1980s are close to depletion. And new investments in energy require real cash, not virtual money. So when large investors and even some sovereign nations started withdrawing their money from the financial markets, it suddenly became clear that a dollar tied up in some derivatives is not the same as a dollar readily available to invest in developing an oil field or building energy infrastructure. A natural discount applies, which is what we are seeing now.

However, it would be a serious mistake to believe that a struggle for resources begins only when commodity prices are high. Far from it—the most interesting things actually happen when

commodity prices are relatively low. For example, the system of U.S. control over the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf was created when crude prices were at the rock bottom, 12 to 17 dollars a barrel. This system has now survived for almost 20 years, and enabled the United States to avoid serious economic problems. And it is when the oil prices were low that the United States attempted to take control of Russian oil by tying up Russian tycoons into various deals and strategic agreements. So cheap oil and gas do not preclude a struggle for resources—on the contrary, they actually encourage it.

We are probably in for a wave of accusations from politicians and analysts (both Western and Russian passport-holders) that Russia's energy policy is coming straight from the Middle Ages. They will say that Russia is seeing a problem where there is none, than in this day and age, oil and gas are increasingly irrelevant. We should realize that all those accusations and remonstrations are just a smoke screen for an impending assault on Russia to grab hold of its resources. And the louder the remonstrations, the more insistent the calls for «resource fairness», the more imminent the assault is.

## ONCE AGAIN ABOUT GEORGIA

A lot has already been said about Georgia since its attack against South Ossetia. Even more has been said about Russia, which is either rising from its knees or terrorizing its neighbors, depending on which version of events you believe. There is no need to repeat what has already been said, but several interesting details still need to be discussed. The most important of which is, what are the consequences of the new geopolitical situation for the United States?

In the end, the big geopolitical project codenamed «Mikhail Saakashvili» was America's. It is quite clear now that the project was big, and «Mikhail Saakashvili» was just a pilot stage of it. The project aimed to create a new system of America's global presence—and not just for containing Russia. The more global objective was building new mechanisms of manipulating politics in other countries. By propping up Mikhail Saakashvili, the United States was demonstrating its ability to make a president out of anyone it wants, anywhere in the world. The only thing that mattered was keeping that president under full control. Essentially, Saakashvili was picked up literally from the street and funded directly from the U.S. budget. Americans made no secret of running Georgia as a puppet state, which did only what Washington told it to do. It was the United States that provoked Georgia's conflict with Russia, by giving orders to that effect to its protégé. It is highly implausible that Saakashvili would have made a decision to start a war in South Ossetia without consultation with Washington, if not a direct order from the White House. Saakashvili being what he is, and his situation being what it is, he would always consult with Washington, even on far more trivial issues.

We will probably never really know who ordered Mikhail Saakashvili to attack a sleeping Tskhinvali, or how the order was issued—although everyone understands that it was U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, giving a direct order on the mobile phone. Few doubts remain however that there was such an order.

So what is the situation now?

For some reason, the United States ordered Saakashvili to trigger an escalation with Russia, knowing full well that in the event of war, the Georgian leader had no chance of winning. Unlike some enthusiastic Russian pundits, America had no illusions about Georgia's «NATO-standard» army. So what was the purpose? It appears that the United States was hoping for what we have once termed as a «Georgian gambit».

The calculation was simple. If the Russian leadership refused to use force to defend its citizens, it would lose face at home, and not just face. It would lose the support of the public and the clear multi-party consensus on foreign policy that Russia has enjoyed in the past several years. The United States and its allies in Russia seemed to have little doubt that Moscow would not react. Maybe that is why on the very first morning after the Georgian aggression some Russian websites carried a shameless article by Stanislav Belkovskiy accusing the Kremlin of betrayal (no doubt written beforehand and approved by Boris Berezovsky). The expectation was that in order



to compensate for their weakness at home, Russia's rulers would have to do what Boris Yeltsin did so well: seek legitimacy in the West, or to be more precise, in the United States.

 Konstantin **Eggert**, Editor-in-chief of the Moscow Bureau, BBC Russian Service (**Russia**) – by e-mail from **Moscow**: «The conflict between Russia and Georgia became the most influential event of the recent months and impacted strongly the situation not only in the post-Soviet area, but also in Europe, as well as deteriorated the relations between Russia and the United States. The investors in Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia have already felt the short-terms consequences. Energy security in the region is under question. The elements of military confrontation between Moscow and NATO, unprecedented since the Cold War, have emerged. Even if the situation stabilizes in the nearest months, but it is far from evident, the long-terms consequences of this conflict are absolutely unpredictable.»

And if Russia, against all expectation, did launch an operation against Georgia, it would end up facing international isolation, compounded by domestic political pressure from the «liberals»—a group of tycoons seeking legitimacy in the West. The Russian leadership would quickly cave in to that pressure and make concessions to the West, in the form of new pro-Western appointments and other steps. Isn't that what we heard during the crisis from the two well-known mouth-pieces of Russia's liberal pro-Western business lobby, the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* newspaper and the *Gazeta.ru* web portal?

So it appears that one of the key objectives of the «Georgian gambit» was to upset the balance of forces within the Russian government, and to ruin the general consensus thanks to which our country has started to restore its international influence and reclaim its superpower status. That was a daring calculation, but not an entirely groundless one, considering all the talk of the new Russian president's liberal proclivities.

It is of course surprising that the United States has proved unable not only to defend one of its staunchest allies, but even to give Russia a decent scare. The Russian fleet especially was beginning to enjoy itself, after valiantly sinking the first decent enemy ship (submarine strikes aside) since the 1917 battle of the Kassar channel during the defense of Moonzund islands. Somewhat surprisingly, America sent a coastguard ship (!) to the Georgian shores, as a warning to the Russian military. But that's not so much an indication of the fact that America has nothing left to scare us with. More likely, the Americans simply had not anticipated having to scare anyone at all.

Even the attempt to trigger a financial crisis in Russia did not look very impressive. Clearly, the fall of the Russian stock market and the flight of capital from our country were artificially induced from Washington. Whoever finds this hard to believe, coming from a conservative, should read a very educational article, almost a political declaration, by Andrey Illarionov, the liberal-anarchist leader of the «comprador party» in the liberal camp (not clear though if there are any other parties in that camp). [Illarionov is a liberal former economic adviser to Mr Putin, now one of the leading critics of the Russian government – *ed.*] Writing for *Gazeta.ru* on 2 October, he hardly even bothered to dissemble about the Washington origins of the Russian stock market crisis—and he should know. But even that unpleasant campaign somehow looked amateurish. It turned out to be ill-prepared politically and financially, and the Russian authorities put a quick end to it, though not before it gave the tycoons quite a scare. And most importantly, that crisis is common cold compared to the full-blown pneumonia that has now gripped the American financial system.

Some are now harping on about the poor state of the Russian army, about how we compensated for the lack of skill with overwhelming numbers, or about Russia's absolute military superiority. But that is what they should have thought of before starting the conflict, not after suffering a humiliating rout. And by the way, it is not the tanks of the 58th Army that the Georgian army started running from—it was just two companies of the *Vostok* battalion, who entered central Tskhinvali on *Gazel* minibuses «borrowed» from the public transport depot in Grozny. As for the state of the army, it has to be said, the army is in no better state than the country as a whole. But whatever the state, it is still winning.

The war in South Ossetia has also revealed several other important facts.

For one, it has turned out that the famous «NATO standards» are much overhyped. Western-hailing and Western-fed pundits have long been using those standards to intimidate the impressionable. But in the end, all those standards really are is a set of specifications for infrastructure, logistics, communications, equipment, etc. In and by themselves, they don't make for a combat-ready army. And there's no reason to admit defeat just because of the magic words «NATO standards».

It has also become clear that the «unity» of the «Western world», while not entirely a fiction, cannot really be considered a geopolitical factor. In the end, Vladimir Lenin was probably right when he said that the capitalism would sell the Bolsheviks the rope from which it would eventually hang. It's hard to say about Bolsheviks, but even in this relatively calm geopolitical situation, the need for Russian gas has triumphed over the will to defend «human values» or punish «imperialist Russia». The reaction of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has been especially telling. For all its rabid hostility, this pointless outfit has done everything it could to avoid any accusations of stoking up a confrontation with Russia. Which means that Europe will carry on buying Russian oil and gas—it will just feel «deeply disgusted» about doing so.

So the gambit has turned out to be a losing game, and that is why the United States is so passionately defending Saakashvili—they know they are guilty. That does not mean though that America and the West have nothing left in store for Russia. On the contrary, the United States cannot afford to lose face, especially since compensating for this loss by a flourishing economy is no longer possible. Which means that we should prepare ourselves for a response from our friends abroad.

So now is the time to move on from discussing the current state of America to the current state of Russia.

### «...AND RUSSIA IN BRACKETS»

The late (not only literally, but politically as well) Boris Yeltsin once had a remarkable Freudian slip. Asked about Russia's new name after the Russian Federative Socialist Republic, as part of the Soviet Union, ceased to exist, he said it would be called Russian Federation «and Russia in brackets». This funny slip was really a symbol that Russia was no longer a player on the international arena. Of course, Russia was given a spare little chair to sit at the meetings of the G7. It even growled from time to time at its «Western partners»—but none took it seriously, nor indeed took any notice of it at all. Russia found itself «in brackets», in a system of self-imposed restrictions within which it had no right (nor any real need) to say no to the West.

Busy as we all are with petty political squabbles, we have somehow missed the moment when we got a new country. This country no longer cringes at the least hint of displeasure from Washington. This country is populated by people who are sometimes a bit strange, but who have self-respect. Its businessmen are dressed like their colleagues in the West, or even better—but they still want their state to be strong, for they realize that without a strong state they are nobodies in the West. In this new country, Roman Abramovich is a celebrity rather than an influential business figure. This country respects itself and will demand respect from others. Its elite realizes that being a weakling in this world is «not cool», as the teenagers say. What a remarkable term – not «better» or «worse» but «not cool». A very precise description of a state you can live in, but not without feeling deeply disgusted with oneself.

In other words, Russia has broken free from foreign and domestic policy «brackets». But we need to realize that new geopolitical status brings new responsibilities.

Of course, the situation in Georgia has produced more questions than answers about the future of the international system. What we had was a set of fairly predictable scenarios, which varied in terms of freedom of action they offered the main players—but not by much. What we have now is a far more dynamic system. It poses much more stringent requirements to economic stability (which sad realization is probably why we are hearing steel in the voice of not just Prime Minister Putin but also, increasingly, President Dmitry Medvedev when they talk to big business). This new system requires an entirely different army, whose task will be to keep the Russian warplanes fly-



ing, instead of just trying to keep them from falling down. It requires a different kind of presence on the world markets, a realization that dependence on European markets is becoming a threat to national security, and that innovation is needed for development, not for public relations. In other words, it requires a somewhat different country. And not because we are preparing for a confrontation with the United States on a whole number of issues—but simply because the world has really changed, and we have played a big role in this change.

From this point of view, talking about the need for a new country, several interesting observations can be made.

First and foremost, by showing toughness and proving the inherent superiority of real politics over virtual politics, Russia has demonstrated that it is possible to stand up to the United States. Russia has proved that surrender is not the only way out of a confrontation with the United States. All the previous enemies who were easily defeated by America had in fact given up even before the confrontation began. Russia has already managed to rid itself of the Gorbachev syndrome. Some tycoons (surprisingly, not all of them) and pro-Western lobbyists aside, Russia stood quite calm in the face of threats thundering from the United States and obligingly broadcast by some Russian media outlets. Moscow suddenly refused to surrender, inspired no doubt by the example of Red Army fighter Sukhov, who said that «it would of course be preferable to suffer for a while». [A reference to a popular Soviet movie in which Sukhov, an imaginary protagonist, is asked by a robber baron whether he would like to die quickly or suffer first. Sukhov eventually comes out victorious – *ed.*] And when it did, it turned out that it is possible to stand up to America as an equal, and achieve a draw in this fight if not an outright victory. Russia's example could well prove contagious.

Second, we are being told that after recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russia has found itself in an international isolation, since none of the truly rising powers in the world has taken Russia's side on the barricades. True, Russia probably did expect more countries to support it openly. But its main critics are still the countries whose time is already gone, or will soon be gone. The powers whose time is coming (and I don't mean Hugo Chavez or Daniel Ortega, though even allies like these are not a bad thing to have) are keeping quiet and looking at Russia with great interest. We are talking about Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, South Korea and many other countries. So any notion of Russia's international isolation is ridiculous—what kind of isolation is it when Moscow keeps receiving guests from some rather important countries? Isolation is when the only visitors we have are from the State Department, come to squeeze yet another concession out of their host in the Kremlin. What is important now is to transform this interest in Russia into respect, alliances and as a consequence, geoeconomic dividends. Alas, that's what Russia has traditionally had a problem with in the past 200 years.

Third, despite the hysterical anti-Russian campaign and unprecedented pressure put on the CIS states, none of their leaders have dared voice their disagreement with Moscow. (The only exception is Viktor Yushchenko, who has already made his choice and who has no future, political or otherwise, without Ukrainian territory coming under direct control of NATO troops.) And that is despite the fact that there is none on this planet more scared by what Russia has done than CIS leaders. They realize perfectly well that all the written and unwritten agreements that gave them complete immunity and freedom to do what they will, ceased to exist the moment President Dmitry Medvedev gave the order to cross the border. Those agreements guaranteed their relative prosperity at the expense of Russian resources, and allowed them to be rude to Russia while making overtures to Washington. But everyone is now clear that a new Russia will have none of it. Ilham Aliyev even went as far as explaining this to Dick Cheney. And that is a good sign. The post-Soviet space is beginning to shrug off its long illness. True, there is a couple of terminally ill patients there, but we can deal with it, it could have been much worse.

Fourth. Oh how they do hate us. Suffice is to take a look at the Western press or TV channels—this nearly visceral hatred is almost palpable. The Georgian crisis has finally let everyone cast away their masks and show their true colors. And the financial turmoil that followed has only served to put it all in stark relief. It was quite amusing to read the gloating articles about the Russian financial crisis claiming that «Russia is sinking ever deeper», and that the Russian economic miracle is over. They started saying that at the first sign of problems in the Russian

economy. And all of it was coming from the very same countries which as it turned out were themselves on the brink of a complete catastrophe, the countries which, unlike Russia, were already laboring under the weight of their financial problems. Some were even hopefully suggesting that Russia was about to be wiped out by AIDS. The hatred of Russia is such that it blinds. But at least everyone in Russia now knows what Western politicians and businessmen are hiding behind their smiles, and what their talk of «partnership with Russia» is really worth.

And the moral of this story is, the time is upon us when we just need to be ourselves. We need to stop pretending or trying to get them to like us. We shouldn't try to fit into the situation, we should change that situation to fit us. We should not reconcile ourselves to sad reality—we should change this reality by an unflinching hand.

In other words, we simply need to move forward, and carry a big stick.

## AFGHANISTAN: A ROAD TO NOWHERE

The main problem in Afghanistan is not *Al Qaeda*. Neither is it *Al Qaeda's* alleged decision to «abandon its principles» and start using drug trade in its own interests. It is not even about the fact that with 50,000–60,000 troops on the ground, it is hard to expect any serious military results, what with the nature of the country and its history. There is of course an element of truth in suggestions that more troops would help. And Barak Obama speaks sense when he proposes moving some troops from Iraq to Afghanistan, for in Afghanistan the nature of the war is control of territory. And territory cannot be held by hi-tech weapons or «NATO standards»- this job requires boots on the ground.

But the main problem of the NATO operation in Afghanistan is that it is in some ways strategically pointless—and the past three months have made it quite clear. In other words, there is no obvious answer to the question of what NATO troops are actually doing in Afghanistan. When Soviet troops were there, at least their mission was clear—helping the Afghan people in their transition from feudalism to socialism, bypassing the stage of capitalism. A load of nonsense, that—but at least the objective was clear, a project with not just troops but also economic resources earmarked for it.

The United States and their NATO allies have nothing of the sort in Afghanistan, and never had. Instead of a clear strategic objective, all they have is some mumbling about building a democratic society in Afghanistan. And without a strategic objective, everything NATO does in that country is pointless. While the going was easy and the *Taliban* were sticking to their caves, the strategic vacuum could be filled with optimistic noises about the creation of a new Afghan army—eerily similar to reports seen on Soviet television just 20–25 years



**Dayan Jayatilleka, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations Office at Geneva** – by e-mail from

**Geneva:** «The U.S. air strikes, causing heavy civilian casualties in the Afghan-Pakistani border zones, have made the new Pakistani administration more insecure and undermined the popular base of the Afghan government. The U.S. election campaign will make the U.S. Republicans more aggressive in words and deeds. This will include more air strikes and commando raids into Pakistan, which will inflame tensions in the area, increase tensions in Pakistani society and result in a wider war.»

ago. They could spin their tales about the imminent capture of Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden, the modern versions of Soviet-time warlords Ahmad Shah Massoud and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. They could ignore the growing flood of drugs from Afghanistan. But when the *Taliban* (and who knows, maybe some new power in addition to the *Taliban*) started taking entire territories back under their control, everyone suddenly saw those upbeat tales for what they really were.

Plan A was essentially waiting for some new stable system of government to emerge in Afghanistan under military occupation, a system that would reject radical Islam. That plan has now failed. As for Plan B—well, there was no Plan B. The



invasion of Afghanistan went too smoothly, and the feeling of invincibility among NATO leaders was too strong to bother about any *Plan B*.

The West has yet to grasp what the Soviet Union had grasped towards the end of its presence in Afghanistan—any outside force in that country should view the creation of an effective government as its main task. That government should be ruthlessness to its political opponents, it should be based on a majority, not a minority of population, and make the full use of existing sectarian and religious rivalries. And God help it if it blunders into messing with the traditional way of life in Afghanistan. It took the Soviet Union nearly 10 years and 15,000 casualties to understand all that. NATO and the U.S.A still have a way to go, and who knows how many more of their soldiers—let alone ordinary Afghans—will have to die before they achieve the same realization.

So let us wish our partners a good, and preferably long, journey. They will surely profit from it, and have less time on their hands to make trouble for us in the meantime.

### **CHINA: GEOPOLITICAL SUPREMACY OR TOY PANDAS?**

The August crisis that engulfed Georgia and its president has actually turned out a litmus test that produced some interesting results. In terms of economic might, political influence and military power, Russia cannot even begin to compare with China. But it turned out that in the final days of the era of unipolarity, Russia did have something to say to the world. Russia was listened to. Some were listening to it with ill-disguised hatred, some with fear, some with a smirk, and some with hope. But they all listened, and made their conclusions. None listened to China though – for China was keeping silent, or making inconsequential remarks. Only recently it proclaimed an aspiration for strategic parity with the United States. But now, during the biggest crisis for the last 20 years, at a time when the future world order was being shaped, China remained silent.

Some took it for the proverbial wisdom of a Chinese monkey who sat out the fight perched on a hilltop. But others, both in Russia and in the West, were rather surprised. Maybe China simply had nothing to say?

Was its silence inconsequential? Hardly so. It was a natural continuation of the policy China has been pursuing on the world arena for the past 20 years. That policy was a classic case of «chase the leader» economically, and politically, it was an attempt to achieve equality with the United States while at the same time following America's foreign-policy lead. China's strategy

 **Zhiye Ji**, Director of the Institute of Russian Studies (**China**) – by phone from **Beijing**: «The state of the security became worse in the whole world. The first factor is the war in South Ossetia. The war continued five days, but influenced the security in the whole region and in Asia. The second factor is the nuclear programs development in Iran and North Korea. In both cases the negotiations were blocked. The third one is the increase in the number of acts of terrorism, especially in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The fourth circumstance is the political events in Asia, especially in the countries neighboring China: chaos in Thailand, change of power in Pakistan, and change of government in Japan.»

has been to achieve a technological breakthrough on the back of American investment and know-how, build up its economy by serving the American market, and buy American politicians to ensure political backing.

Among the positive factors it is possible to point out the Olympic Games in Beijing, especially the arrival of the leaders of more than 80 countries to the opening ceremony. I do not see any other positive events.

In the end, China has never fought against the U.S.-centric system of international relations—although it did on occasion sing the praises of a multipolar world. China has always fought for its own place in the U.S.-centric system, nothing more. It was of course an honorable place, especially taking into account the

decline of America as the linchpin of the world economy—a decline that is inevitable and obvious to everyone apart from the Russian liberals. But this place, this second place could only exist in the world order formed by Washington, and nowhere else. China has never aspired for the role of an alternative ideological power—and all the talk of commitment to socialism is nothing more than ideological froth. China has not managed—indeed, it has not even tried—to offer the world its own global vision for the 21st century. All it could do was to try in its clumsy way to fend off Western accusations about human rights. It has remained no more than a regional power, never really displaying any global interests or ambitions. In this regard, modern China is a lesser power than even the China of the late Mao Zedong. In those days, the Soviet Union suddenly had to deal with rival China-backed Communist Parties in the Asia-Pacific region. Chinese advisers were hard at work in Africa and the Middle East, and even in Pakistan and Somalia, powerful states in those days, China had strong influence.

But now, when the U.S.-centric system of international relations is obviously beginning to crumble, China is finding itself in a strange situation. On the one hand, everything seems fine and dandy—the economy is growing and the country is becoming stronger. But on the other, in the absence of the U.S.A as the undisputed world leader, during a period of crisis in the U.S.A, this strength is not being converted into higher international stature. Even China's latest victories are somehow beginning to lose their luster. The grandiose triumph at the Olympics has faded from memory all too quickly, and only the latest achievements of Chinese scientists in banned substances are still making the headlines. The first spacewalk of Chinese astronauts with their little flag was overshadowed by the world financial crisis. And against the backdrop of that crisis, economists are no longer enthused about China's economy.

Well, no point in shaming the Chinese Politburo for its weakness and indecisiveness during Georgia's aggression against South Ossetia. We should just be realistic about our Chinese partners. And we should realize that without politics, there can be no economics. Whatever they say in China and whatever their gold-medal haul is, economically the «Great Chinese Project» has no future without the American market, without strategic partnership with America and without America's financial system. Whether that is true only for now, or forever, remains to be seen. I am inclined to believe it is forever. Anyone sucked into the vortex of the American crisis (and modern China will be sucked in, because it depends on the American market, finances and know-how) will never achieve even a shred of geoeconomic or geopolitical freedom. And China has practically run out of time to escape from that vortex.

And the moral of this story is, if you want to become a global power, you need to be able to sacrifice some things—such as the dominance of the American market for soft toys.

### **PAKISTAN: THE END OF THE PROJECT?**

The crisis in Pakistan is probably the second most important recent event, after the war in South Ossetia. Indeed, its long-term strategic significance is probably even greater. After all, it is not every day that we have a nuclear state in the throes of a systemic crisis, compounded by elements of civil war. So as not to repeat what has already been said hundreds of times, let us proceed straight to the conclusions.

First, the crisis in Pakistan is systemic and will not go away any time soon. In addition to political instability, Pakistan is quickly losing economic competitiveness. It has proved unable to answer the challenge of modernization, or create a sensible social system. The situation is further aggravated by elements of urban Islamic terrorism, and by what is essentially political separatism in the tribal areas. In other words, there will be blood—and if the government completely loses control of the situation, there will be lots of it.

Second, the current crisis in Pakistan is largely the handiwork of the Americans, who embarked upon a democracy-building project there at a singularly unfortunate moment in Pakistan's history. The fact that the Americans were deliberate in destabilizing Pakistan is obvious. There is no other explanation for the decision to start building democracy in an Islamic country that is at the peak of radical Islamic activity. That's no way to treat an ally.



Third, President Musharraf was deposed by the Americans (few seem to have any doubts about it) at the very moment when he was trying to improve relations with the neighbors and even conduct some antiterrorist actions in the tribal areas. The Pakistani strongman was not always successful, but the trend was obvious. Pakistan was gradually ceasing to be a destabilizing force. That is why the Americans' move to depose Musharraf seems especially strange, given their constant hysterics about Osama bin Laden.

Let us frankly admit that the very appearance and 60-year existence of Pakistan as it was—a militarized corporate state with a gap between the rich and poor that is monstrous even by post-reform Russian standards—was nothing more than a Western geopolitical project. The Western objective was to create a counterbalance and a regional alternative to India. What we are seeing now is the West abandoning that project. Why the West, or rather the United States, is dumping a project that has survived for 60 years is subject to debate. Maybe America is running out of resources, what with the financial crisis. Or maybe it has just lost interest in Pakistan, as it continues to build strategic partnership with India.

Or quite possibly it is something else entirely. The Pakistan project was instrumental for prodding India into a strategic partnership with America. Dumping that project so rudely just for the sake of friendship with New Delhi is completely uncalled for. And America still had enough resources to keep the regime in Islamabad afloat—all it had to do was turn a blind eye to the Pakistani army's «business» and ignore the financial shenanigans of the Pakistani elite.

That leaves only one other possibility. It wasn't about Pakistan at all. At the center of it all was a more comprehensive global plan hatched in Washington—and it is this plan that we are now seeing in action.

### **IN PLACE OF CONCLUSION: WHO BROKE THE UNIPOLAR WORLD, AND WHY?**

A multipolar world is not a world in which America has declined and no longer claims the status of the only superpower. It is rather a world in which several international players have the power and the responsibility to undertake and fulfill global commitments. With that in mind, we can hardly claim that what is happening now is the dawn of a multipolar world, as dreamt of by the entire progressive humanity and its leader, Yevgeny Primakov. So far, not a single country—neither China, nor the «out-of-brackets» Russia—is ready to undertake global geopolitical and geoeconomic commitments.

What is the world arena today? In Georgia, the United States gave the go-ahead to actions that have led to extreme destabilization not just in the Caucasus, but the entire Black Sea region. A new source of tension has appeared in EU-Russian relations. And once the Americans build their military bases in the Baltic states and Ukraine, any talk of EU-Russian partnership will be confined to underground clubs of ultra-dissidents. In Pakistan, a relatively stable authoritarian regime has been replaced with a very shaky pseudo-democracy—and that's in a country with nuclear weapons! With America's support, Indonesia continues to fall apart, threatening to trigger a huge upheaval in the key Asia-Pacific region. America was probably behind the disturbances in Thailand too, a country that has always been considered America's ally. Even in Latin America, where Hugo Chavez is stirring enough trouble, America has tried to spark an armed conflict around Columbia, whose leadership is totally and tragically dependent on Washington. And let us not forget the destabilization, by proxy of Israel (who else!) in Syria and Lebanon, which is dangerous not just for Israel itself but also for Jordan, a long-standing and loyal ally of Washington that is now turning towards Moscow.

And all that had happened in the space of just three months.

So the answer to the question of who broke the unipolar world is quite obvious. It was the United States. The only remaining question is, why? Why would America break up the very system that it should treasure and protect at all cost?

The answer could be far simpler than we all think. Whatever Hugo Chavez's Russian fans might say, the people who run America are not fools. They feel the coming decline of the «world's only superpower». They understand that it is inevitable. Their previous system of running the

world, a unipolar system, was based on global military supremacy, even monopoly. It is for the sake of this supremacy that they needed periodic bloodlettings such as the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the bombing of Iran and other seemingly pointless exercises. But now they are moving away from that old system towards something far less complicated and expensive. This new system of running the world relies on crises and conflicts.

Let us think, who is getting dumped by the Americans? Where are the new dangerous conflict spots springing up? Georgia, Pakistan, quite possibly Indonesia and even Columbia are in the end nothing more than marginal territories for the United States. America has never had any real interests there. It is the countries that the Americans are having trouble with, to put it mildly (China, India, Turkey, Brazil, Malaysia, even Russia) that have interests in the regions where America is now busily dismantling the system of unipolar commitments. And if in this very moment a group of Muslim fanatics pulls off a terrorist outrage in the United States, the picture will be complete. A unipolar world is largely a matter of psychology—it only exists so long as people believe in it. The virtual reality of the unipolar world will be replaced by the bloody reality of regional conflicts.

America's interests won't really suffer, and its mechanisms of exerting influence will remain intact. And while all their international competitors are preoccupied with «peaceful settlement», our American friends will have the breathing space to restructure their economy and bring up a new political class. The remains of internal opposition will be eradicated under the pretext of the fight against terrorism. Ideally, the Americans would want to sell off their surplus military equipment to other players, to their geopolitical competitors such as China and India, so that they could build a «systems of regional security» that they would not have been able to build on their own.

Let us agree that that is an entirely feasible business plan—especially now that the Americans have proof of China's inability to step out of the shadows and become an independent geopolitical player. And most importantly, this business plan in no way depends on the outcome of the U.S. election. It has already been launched, and only a kamikaze would dare stand in the way of the speeding locomotive. No kamikazes are running in this year's election. This business plan is almost ideal given the ongoing American economic crisis—which is really just a humongous operation to redistribute assets and financial flows.

If the United States manages to pull this geopolitical trick off, we are all in for another 25 years of a new «American age». America's world dominance will be so brutal that the 1990s will look a pinnacle of democracy and humanism in comparison. But if it can't pull it off, we will see what has long been foretold—«the end of history». Of American history. 

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