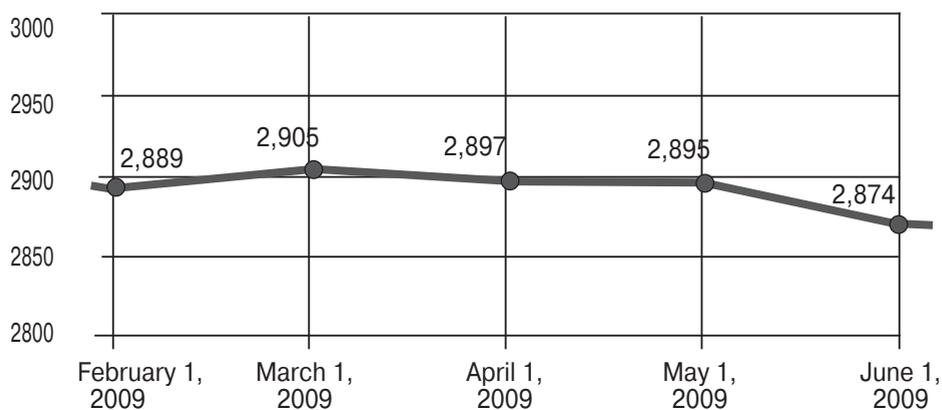


Figure 1. The *iSi* International Security Index (February – June 2009)



- ➔ **Albert Zulkharneev. INTERNATIONAL SECURITY INDEX – SPRING IS BACK.**
- ➔ **Yury Fedorov. A VIEW BY A RUSSIAN LIBERAL: “THINKING ABOUT THE UNTHINKABLE, OR WHY HERMAN KAHN WAS RIGHT.”**
- ➔ **Dmitry Evstafiev. A VIEW BY A RUSSIAN CONSERVATIVE: “WAITING FOR HOPE.”**
- ➔ **Konstantin Eggert, Andrey Kortunov, Abdulaziz Sager, Yevgeny Satanovsky, and William Potter. COMMENTS BY MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERT GROUP**



After sharp downward trend in summer/fall 2008, the index has moved into the stable zone of 2,900 in the first months of 2009. This indicator is 20–30 points lower than in spring 2008 and this could be accounted for by the economic crisis. Meanwhile, the level of military, political and terrorist threats in the world has returned to the same figure as a year ago. On February 1 it was 2,889; on March 1 – 2,905; on April 1 – 2,897; on May 1 – 2,895; on June 1 – 2,874.

In spring 2009 the impact of strategic and nuclear security increased. Intensification of the U.S.-Russian dialogue and the emergence of the nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia had a positive effect. However, it was deteriorated by the increased tensions around North Korea and aggravating situation in nuclear-weapon Pakistan.

Another reason for the decrease in *iSi* is the deteriorating situation in Sudan, Middle East, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The issues in this region are interconnected and require complex solutions.

And here allies, partners and even adversaries of the United States are waiting for the American decisions. Despite the economic crisis and weakening of the only superpower, the world still expect from this country and its new administration some fresh initiatives and solutions related to various issues – from strategic arms to global economic crisis, Afghanistan, Iran, or Europe. The U.S. proposals are cautiously supported, are rejected with fury, or are creatively incorporated into one's own political positions. Believe it or not, but even the declaration of the Obama plans has mostly a positive impact on the index.

- The **world economy** lives in the conditions of crisis. After repelling the first blows of it, the governments and corporations continue to correct their development plans. Most of the participants of the G-20 summit in April did not comply with their own commitments undertaken in November 2008 in Washington (e.g. on protectionism). The parties have different positions on the need and ways of reforming the global financial system. France and Germany, as well as Russia, China and other nations stand for stricter regulation of the financial market, while the United States and the U.K. are against such approach.

In February-March the differences between Western and Eastern members of the EU grew. They concern the terms of financial assistance to individual members and the cuts in expenditure. The governments of Hungary, Latvia and the Czech Republic had to resign.

There is an ongoing debate on the tax safe-havens – Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Monaco, Hong Kong (China) and other exotic zones are under pressure.

Nonetheless, the G-20 summit in London in April managed to take some common decisions. In the next 18 months the governments will spend \$5 trillion on solving economic problems, including the increase in the IMF resources; the money will be allocated to the most suffering nations; the struggle against off-shores will continue; the control of financial markets will be tightened, etc.

- **Strategic stability and nuclear security.** On March 21, 2009, the Treaty on NWFZ in Central Asia entered into force. The territory, surrounded by nuclear-weapon Russia and China, by *de facto* nuclear-weapon India and Pakistan, by such difficult neighbors as North Korea and Iran, will have a ban on production, acquisition and deployment of nuclear weapons, their components and other nuclear explosive devices.

Another positive factor is the intensification of the U.S.-Russian negotiations – from the Lavrov-Clinton meeting in Geneva in March to the Obama-Medvedev summit in April in London. Two statements were issued. The first one in a shorter form revives the agenda mentioned a year ago in the Putin-Bush *Strategic Framework Declaration*, which did not help to save the relations from decline. The agenda, as usual, will be based on strategic stability and security matters. The second statement urges the parties to agree on reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms before the expiration of the START I Treaty in December 2009.

As far as missile defense is concerned, like year ago, the parties stated their differences and discussed possible interaction in this area. However, Washington now slows down the implementation of the project. On March 17 the Czech Government refused to ratify the agreement on deployment of the U.S. radar signed in July 2008. Barack Obama connects the issue of missile defense in Eastern Europe with the solution of the Iranian issue and Moscow's more active pressure on Iran.

- ❑ **Iran** demonstrates that its position is unchanging and proceeds with the testing of new missiles. The United States has changed the tone and is ready for a direct dialogue with Tehran on nuclear matters and on conflict settlement in the Middle East and in Afghanistan. Barack Obama demonstrated his willingness to apply such new approaches in his TV appeal to the Iranians on the eve of Nowruz. On April 8 at the meeting of the *Six*, Tehran was offered direct dialogue with Washington once again. At the same time, while Washington expects positive response from Iran, it does not hesitate to extend sanctions against the regime for another year.

Tehran's relations with some Arab states have also deteriorated. In late February a famous Iranian politician – Ali Akbar Nategh Nouri – claimed for a territory of Bahrain, but soon this position was denounced by the Iranian president. This could be the end of the scandal, but Morocco used it as a pretext to disrupt diplomatic relations with Tehran. This is another proof that Arab-Iranian relations are not smooth.

- ❑ Politico-military tensions around **North Korea** were growing. On March 9–20 the U.S.-South Korean exercises were conducted. In response on March 9 Pyongyang closed the border and communication channels with Seoul and put the army on alert. On March 21 *the hot line* was restored and the border was opened once again.

On March 12 Pyongyang informed the international organization on the launch of the rocket with the satellite in early April. Japan, the United States and South Korea assume that the D.P.R.K tested an ICBM in fact. Despite the international pressure, on April 5 the rocket was launched and this proved the missile capabilities of North Korea. On April 13 the UN Security Council adopted the statement condemning the D.P.R.K, as it violated Resolution 1718 banning any activities with ballistic missiles. Despite the intentions of the parties to continue the work within the framework of the *Six*, Pyongyang declared on April 14 that it would withdraw from the talks on denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and resumed activities at the nuclear complex in Yongbyong. Besides, the D.P.R.K expelled the IAEA inspectors on April 16.

- ❑ **The Middle East.** After the end of the Israeli operation in Gaza the parties got back to the attempts to seek the peaceful solution to the existing problems.

Israel and *Hamas* try to come to a truce, despite the ongoing missile attacks against the Israeli territory and reciprocal bombings of the militants and their infrastructure.

After the February elections in **Israel**, the new government was formed. It is headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, whose position on negotiations with the Palestinians is quite tough. Netanyahu is working out his strategy with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict settlement. At the same time, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman argues that the Annapolis peace process may be abandoned.



The intra-Palestinian and inter-Arab dialogues continue. With the mediation of Egypt the representatives of *Fatah* and *Hamas* look for the conflict resolution between themselves. In March the leaders of Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Kuwait met in Er Riyadh to overcome the differences and elaborate common approach towards regional issues.

**Afghanistan and Pakistan** – the situation in these countries remain one of the key factors for the decrease in *iSi*. The positions of the *Taliban* movement in Afghanistan are strengthening. Barack Obama set forth the new complex solution implying the socio-economic reforms, establishment of the strong Afghani Armed Forces and police. The strategy connects the efforts in Afghanistan and the policy in Pakistan, the major aim of which is to defeat *Al Qaeda*.

Meanwhile, the United States faces some difficulties in the region. In February Kyrgyzstan informed Washington that the *Manas* base would be closed and withdrawn within the next six months. The bargaining is under way, but this undermined the U.S. transit capacity.

Pakistan is at the edge of economic default. It is shaking with political confrontation and large terrorist attacks. In spring NATO facilities and local police fell the victims of the militants and terrorists; the Sri Lanka sports team was attacked; explosions with numerous casualties took place in Rawalpindi, Islamabad, and Chakwal. Political struggle does not stop – March was marked with the clashes between the rally participants (illegal manifestation of Nawaz Sharif supporters) and police. The restoration in power of Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, whose resignation triggered the 2007 political crisis, did not mitigate the tensions.

- ❑ **Africa.** The situation in **Sudan** remains complicated – it was exacerbated by the warrant for arrest issued by the International Criminal Court against President al-Bashir. In response Khartoum suspended the activities of international humanitarian organizations in Darfur. Arab states, the Organization of Islamic Conference, China, and Russia maintained that the ICC decision would deteriorate the situation.

President Joan Bernardo Vieira was killed in **Guinea Bissau**. **Madagascar** survived the coup in March, but the confrontation between the legitimate president (Marc Ravalomanana) and the opposition leader (Andry Rajoelina) continues – the country faces one mass protest after another. The military are highly involved in political struggle. The African Union suspended the membership of Madagascar in this organization due to the unconstitutional change of power in the country.

- ❑ **Europe.** April marked the 60th anniversary of NATO. The summit of the Alliance demonstrated the ability of this organization to keep up with the current situation and to seek new security solutions for its members. Despite the protests of Turkey, NATO elected new Secretary General Anders Rasmussen, ex-prime minister of Denmark. His first visit was to Istanbul to attend the international forum of the Alliance of Civilizations. Relations with Russia are being slowly resumed, despite the spy scandals and fuss around the NATO exercises in Georgia. France is back to the NATO military structures. Albania and Croatia are now full members of the Alliance. NATO is developing a new strategy that would take into account the non-traditional security challenges.

For the first time in the last few years the large terrorist attack occurred in Northern Ireland against the British military base. In April Moldova was destabilized with the manifestations of the anti-Communist opposition, which transformed into pogroms of the government buildings. Chisinau blamed Romania for the riots and introduced the visa regime with this country. The political and economic situation in Ukraine remains unstable either.

**Albert Zulkharneev**



## THINKING ABOUT THE UNTHINKABLE, OR WHY HERMAN KAHN WAS RIGHT

The review of November 2008 – January 2009 reached the conclusion that the transformation of the international system, which had been looming on the horizon for several years, has finally begun to come about.<sup>1</sup> Events of the first quarter of 2009 have borne this out. Leading Western powers are coming to the realization that the key economic and political problems require new approaches. NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said on March 11, 2009, “What we need are more visionary policies within our institutions and greater coherency between those institutions. I believe that for all of us, there is now a major opportunity to realign our approach to security to the new realities.”<sup>2</sup> NATO’s anniversary summit at the beginning of April 2009 gave the go-ahead for the development of a new strategy for the alliance. America’s idea of pushing the *reset* button in relations with Russia (and not just Russia) is an important element of Washington’s new foreign policy, but there are other components to it as well.

Part of the reason for all this is the global economic crisis. The *world after crisis* will be very different from the world as we know it now. And although the shape of this new world is still hard to discern and a subject of much debate, wise politicians are already assessing the various turns world affairs might take, and pondering the ways of adapting strategic doctrines to new reality. That, however, is a task for a fairly distant future. Far more pressing is the fact that the conventional approaches developed over the past decade and a half for dealing with the key problems in international affairs, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Russia, North Korea and the Iranian nuclear issue, are failing to deliver. This has forced the Western powers to start reviewing and reassessing their ideas and strategies. The resulting debate will eventually lead to the emergence of a fairly clear set of policies the Western powers will pursue on the international arena. This consensus among the Western elite will probably come in the form of shared views rather than some formal doctrines.

### UNITED STATES: NEW FOREIGN POLICY IDEAS

The emerging shifts in U.S. foreign policy are the key driver of change on the international arena. The Obama administration has inherited a very difficult foreign policy situation from its predecessor. The United States is mired in nearly hopeless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Efforts to stop the Iranian nuclear program are failing. The political instability in Pakistan is threatening to degenerate into total chaos and a collapse of the state, which could result in Pakistani nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands. America’s European allies, primarily France and Germany, saw the previous American administration’s foreign policy as the main reason for the global economic and political malaise. Russia’s invasion of Georgia and Moscow’s constant saber-rattling have added to the already long list of headaches.

Given all this, America’s decisionmakers have probably reached the conclusion that the existing policies need to be revised. America’s military, political and economic effort is now focused on Iraq and Afghanistan. There is no solution in sight for these problems, not in the short term anyway. But the geopolitical significance of the two countries is not as large as it seems. They only serve to draw America’s and NATO’s resources from the really important issues such as the Iranian nuclear threat, Europe’s energy security, and mass migration from poor countries to the United States and Europe, which could lead to ethnic tensions, etc.

As of late March 2009, Washington has not yet formulated a detailed foreign policy program. But some of its key elements are fairly clear. Vice President Joe Biden outlined them in his speech at the Munich security conference on February 7, 2009. The new administration in the White House believes that the key challenges and threats to national and global security lie in the spread of weapons of mass destruction and dangerous diseases; a growing gap between rich and poor; ethnic animosities and *failed states*; a rapidly warming planet and uncertain sup-



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plies of energy, food, water; and “the challenge to freedom and security from radical fundamentalism.” In order to tackle these threats and challenges, Washington intends to cut extreme poverty in half by 2015; eliminate the *global education deficit*, cancel the debt of the world’s poorest countries; launch a new *green revolution*; and “advance democracy not through its imposition by force from the outside, but by working with moderates in government and civil society to build the institutions that will protect freedom.”

All these bullet points are not very original and, on the whole, not very interesting. They repeat almost word for word the ideas that have long been circulating in the Western liberal circles. The ideas themselves are not in question. All these *new threats and challenges*, as they’ve come to be termed, are a real danger. The question is, how exactly the United States, alone or in partnership with its allies, is going to close the gap between the world’s rich and poor, eliminate extreme poverty or fight global warming, if it really exists.

More interesting are the vice president’s ideas about America’s relations with its allies. The current administration is going to listen carefully and work together with them. But America’s partners should have no illusions that the United States alone will shoulder the whole burden of resolving the shared problems and neutralizing the shared threats.

“The threats we face have no respect for borders. No single country, no matter how powerful, can best meet them alone. We believe that international alliances and organizations do not diminish America’s power – they help us advance our collective security, economic interests and values. So we will engage. We will listen. We will consult. America needs the world, just as I believe the world needs America. But we say to our friends that the alliances, treaties and international organizations we build must be credible and they must be effective. That requires a common commitment not only to live by the rules, but to enforce them. ... America will do more, but America will ask for more from our partners.”<sup>3</sup>

And, finally, the most interesting changes in America’s new foreign policy include its willingness to hold direct talks with Iran, the order by President Obama to hold a strategic review of America’s policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, “to make sure that our goals are clear and achievable,”<sup>4</sup> and the idea of pressing the *reset* button in relations with Russia. The question is, what the current American policymakers mean by all that, given the reputation for tough pragmatic realism they have earned themselves over their many years in politics.

## AMERICAN CHALLENGE AND IRANIAN RESPONSE

It was during the election campaign that Barack Obama first said he was willing to hold direct dialogue with the Iranian leaders. This statement was severely criticized by those who believe, rightly or wrongly, that talking with Tehran is, a) pointless, and b) immoral. Nevertheless, right after his inauguration, the new American president repeated his already famous words: “If countries like Iran are willing to unclench their fist, they will find an extended hand from us.”<sup>5</sup> Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has clearly indicated that Iran will be offered a real opportunity to normalize its relations with the international community. In March 2009, Barack Obama congratulated Iran on the Persian New Year and said he was ready to use diplomatic means to settle the existing serious differences between the United States and Iran. That was a direct invitation to dialogue without any preconditions, aimed at reaching a mutually acceptable solution.

That attempt was entirely logical. If Tehran were to be persuaded to abandon its nuclear weapons program and stop supporting Islamic terrorist organizations, primarily *Hamas* and *Hezbollah*, the strategic situation in the Middle East would change very radically. Iran could expect generous economic aid, expand and modernize its oil and gas industry and, most importantly, turn itself from a source of tension into a factor of stability in the region. The question is whether Tehran is ready to strike a deal with the United States.

The Iranian answer was not long in coming. In January 2009, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said that the United States must “apologize for all its crimes against the Iranian nation.” The list of the



**Abdulaziz Sager (Saudi Arabia),** Chairman of the Gulf Research Center – by e-mail from **Dubai**: "The growing concern about the Iranian interference in domestic conflicts is exacerbated by the Tehran statements that call into question the legitimacy of the Gulf monarchies and contain territorial claims to the neighboring states – this undermines regional stability and security. Iran demonstrates no willingness to seek compromises on the nuclear program and this is a tough position of its current leadership. Another negative factor is instability in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Yemen, which paves the way towards increasing extremism. New U.S. administration, at least, put an end to the destructive policy of George W. Bush. At the same time, there are fewer actions than declarations. The pressure of the U.S. administration on the new Benjamin Netanyahu government will demonstrate the U.S. course in the Middle East."

crimes included America's efforts to stop the Iranian nuclear program. The Iranian leader also demanded that the United States end its military presence in various parts of the globe, which he described as interference in the internal affairs of other countries. In March 2009, Ayatollah Khamenei, the Iranian supreme leader and the true ruler of Iran, said he saw no real change in American policy towards his country.<sup>6</sup> Khamenei's ally Hossein Shariatmadari, the editor-in-chief of the Iranian newspaper *Kayhan*, formulated the position of the Iranian ruling elite in the following way: "In order to establish any U.S.-Iran ties, one of them must change its principles and its way of thinking; Iran will never do this. Hence, it is America that must change, and must view its international relations in a new light."<sup>7</sup>

In other words, Iran responded to the American offer by setting out its preconditions for talks, including the demand for the United States to stop working against the Iranian efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. That makes the talks themselves quite pointless. Essentially, the Iranians responded to the proposal of

"*unclenching their fists*" with an unambiguous, high-handed and insulting rebuff. That was only to be expected from the Iranian theocracy, and not just because of its manifest megalomania. Tehran takes any attempts to defuse the confrontation, find a compromise and achieve a political solution as a sign of weakness and an invitation to new bellicose gestures. Such behavior is typical for ideologically driven authoritarian regimes.

The only area where the Iranian interests coincide with the interests of the civilized countries is preventing the victory of the *Taliban* in Afghanistan. In the Islamic world, the fanatical Sunni Islamists of the *Taliban* are the natural competitors of the equally fanatical Shia leadership of Iran. That is why the Iranian leaders have no objections against the American military effort to contain the *Taliban*. And that is probably why Tehran agreed to take part in the UN conference on Afghanistan held in early April 2009 in the Netherlands.

Of course, Tehran's response to the American proposal was not limited to arrogant declarations. Far more dangerous is Iran's progress in creating longer-range ballistic missiles, a progress that only recently seemed almost entirely unlikely. According to Russian experts, by the end of 2008 the Iranian rocket engineers managed to increase the range of the Shahab 3 missile to 2,000 km, and its payload to 1.3 tons. It is believed that in order to deliver a primitive nuclear warhead Iran could one day acquire, a missile should be able to carry a payload of 400–900 kg.<sup>8</sup> On February 2, 2009, the Iranians launched Safir 2, a two-stage space rocket which put a satellite into orbit. Iran's ability to build two-stage rockets is fundamentally important because single-stage rockets can never go beyond a certain fairly short range. A transition to two-stage configuration increases the combat range of the rocket to several thousand kilometers. That means that a substantial part of the European continent, including almost the entire south of Russia, is within range of the Iranian missiles, which could soon be equipped with nuclear warheads.

Washington's offer of unconditional talks with Iran, albeit unexpected, was hardly a sign of political naivety. In a way, it was a challenge to the Iranian regime, and a test of its sincerity. If



Iran's reason for trying to acquire nuclear weapons is just to protect itself from an attack by the United States (no other country could pose a real threat to Iran in the foreseeable future) then the American offer was a chance for Tehran to remove this threat by political means. At the very least, the Iranian leadership could try to obtain a more or less reliable security guarantee from the United States. But it seems that normalizing relations with the leading Western nations is not part of the Iranian establishment's plans. That establishment is driven by its fanatical aspiration to spread the Iranian order around the globe. Witness the recent statement by one of the top Iranian religious leaders, Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami: "Globalization will happen only after the coming of the Mahdi. ... There will not be a house left in the world to which Islam does not come."<sup>9</sup>

But if Iran refuses to *unclench its fist* and rejects America's extended hand, the United States will have the full moral and political right to take tough measures. Whether those measures will come in the shape of tougher sanctions, including a full-blown economic blockade, or even military action is hard to predict right now. But what is clear is that the more progress the ruling Iranian regime makes towards acquiring nuclear weapons, the more likely the use of military force against Iran becomes. Clearly, Washington is doing everything it can to avoid having to launch military action against Iran. The military, political and economic consequences of such action would be unpredictable. What is quite predictable though is the consequences of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons: Tehran's expansionism, fuelled by Islamic fundamentalism and dreams of restoring the Persian empire will be backed by a nuclear arsenal. Containing a nuclear Iran would be much more difficult, or even impossible. As a result, the United States and Israel, for whom the Iranian nuclear weapons would be an existential threat, could simply be left with no choice but to take military action.

## **AFGHANISTAN: MISSION IMPOSSIBLE**

Afghanistan is one of the key foreign policy challenges to the United States and NATO, along with Iran. After almost eight years of combat operations in that country, the objectives set out by the members of the international coalition fighting in Afghanistan have not been achieved. The secret bases of *Al Qaeda* on both sides of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistani are still operational. The *Taliban* has reared its head again, albeit in a slightly different form. Armed *Taliban* groups have lately been active in 17 out of the 34 provinces of the country, mainly in the south. Another piece of bad news is the appearance of *Taliban* fighters in Kabul itself. Although the capital is heavily guarded by Afghan security forces and foreign troops, several terrorist acts have been committed there in the past few months. The country is still suffering from extreme poverty, despite all the foreign aid being sent there. Hamid Karzai's administration is deeply corrupt and ineffectual, causing growing popular discontent. Russian and foreign analysts say a certain military and political balance has settled in the country, whereby several big cities and key roads are controlled by the central government and international coalition troops, whereas in rural regions the real power is in the hands of tribal leaders, warlords and gangs. In the south of Afghanistan, American and British troops regularly clash with *Taliban* fighters and drug gangs. The northern regions, populated mainly by the Uzbeks and Tajiks, are ruled by the local chiefs, many of whom have shady reputations – the most notorious of them being Uzbek general Abdul Rashid Dostum.

Such a state of affairs could potentially carry on indefinitely, which of course is not in the interests of the United States or NATO – hence the interest in new U.S. strategy on Afghanistan announced in late March 2009 by Barack Obama. America's objective is "to destroy *Al Qaeda* in Afghanistan and Pakistan", the president said. To this end, an additional 17,000 U.S. troops will be sent to Afghanistan, including 13,000 combat troops to fight mobile guerilla groups. Among them is the *Striker* brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division of the U.S. Army. In addition to that, Washington plans to increase the size of the Afghan armed forces to 134,000 by 2011, and the size of the local police force to 82,000 people. Several thousand civilian specialists will be dispatched to Afghanistan to teach the latest agricultural techniques to the locals and improve healthcare and education. The political strategy includes involving the so-called moderate *Taliban* in dialogue with the government and drawing them into in a wider political coali-

tion. According to U.S. intelligence, only about 5 percent of the *Taliban* are staunch supporters of *Al Qaeda* – the rest have been drawn into the war against the government and foreign troops by the government’s own mistakes and corruption.<sup>10</sup> Another key element of Washington’s new strategy is involving neighboring countries in Afghan settlement. President Obama has proposed creating a contact group on Afghanistan that would include China, Iran, Russia, and India, as well of the countries of Central Asia and the Persian Gulf.

At first glance, this strategy looks promising. But a closer examination reveals that it is in fact very similar to the Soviet strategy in Afghanistan in the 1980. The Soviet Union also sent civilian specialists and advisers to the country in addition to soldiers, and tried to build relatively wide political coalitions there. The outcome of that strategy is well known. Twenty years on, the central government in Afghanistan is less than enthused about entering a coalition with the *moderate* opposition, because that would deprive it of its monopoly not just on power (which is in any case limited to several big cities) but, most importantly, on the distribution of foreign aid.

Sending more U.S. troops will hardly bring about any radical change in the military and political situation in Afghanistan. The experience of counterinsurgency in the 20th century suggests that there are only two ways of winning a war against the insurgents who enjoy the support of the local population. One is brutal reprisals against the locals, used by the Soviet Union to crush the independence movements in the Baltic republics and Ukraine after World War II. The other way involves shifting the burden of fighting the insurgency on authoritarian local rulers, by making allies of some of the local warlords to crush the rest with maximum brutality. That is how Russia managed to stabilize the situation in Chechnya. But in Afghanistan, there is no leader at this moment capable of consolidating a substantial part of the local elite. And American experts believe that in order to be able to take over the security responsibility from coalition forces, the Afghan army must grow to at least 240,000 people, triple its current size. That will not happen until 2016 at the earliest.<sup>11</sup>

As for the international contact group on Afghanistan, creating such a group and securing wide international participation in it is of course entirely possible. But there is no reason to expect any meaningful efforts from it. Russia, Iran and China would prefer to leave the military and economic burden of fighting the *Taliban* and *Al Qaeda* with the United States. They also realize that the deeper Washington is mired in Afghanistan, the less energy and resources it will have to work against China’s plans in the Far East, Russia’s meddling in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and Iran’s nuclear ambitions.

There are three main avenues for solving the Afghan problem. The first is to support the emergence of a strong central government in Afghanistan, rooted of course in Islam and local traditions but capable, with some help from the outside, of eliminating Islamist terrorist groups and finding some way of coexisting with the tribal and local leaders. That is in fact the avenue now being pursued by the United States and its allies. But the chances of success here are close to zero. The second avenue is increasing foreign military presence to the point where the coalition could eventually destroy the *Taliban* and *Al Qaeda* armed groups and effectively control the entire territory of Afghanistan, as well as the tribal areas of Pakistan. But that would require deploying the entire U.S. armed forces as well as all the NATO armies in Afghanistan, which is out of the question. And finally, the third avenue is pulling Western troops out Afghanistan without achieving a military victory over the *Taliban*.

Right now, this third avenue seems unthinkable. It is thought that such a turn of events would represent a strategic defeat for the United States and especially for NATO, leading to a serious increase of the terror threat. But there is another way of looking at this. First of all, it is important to realize that the military presence of the United States and its allies on the territory of Afghanistan has not led to the elimination of main *Al Qaeda* bases there or in the tribal areas of Pakistan – and there is no guarantee that this objective will be achieved any time soon. So the question is, why carry on with a policy that is failing to deliver? Instead of trying to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan, would it not be better to concentrate on the main task of preventing Islamic militants from spreading into Europe, the United States and the Persian Gulf? To that



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end, strong support should be given to three Central Asian states – Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The governments of these countries, especially the first two, are extremely worried by the threat of terrorist groups from Afghanistan appearing on their territory. Therefore these governments will (a) fight those terrorist groups as hard as they can, and (b) need cooperation with the United States even more than they do now. The main effort, however, should be focused on stabilizing the situation in Pakistan and turning that country into a reliable buffer sealing off the territories controlled by Islamic terrorists from the south and the southeast.

The military and financial resources required for these tasks are far smaller than those needed to continue the war in Afghanistan. And the pullout of Western troops from Afghanistan – indeed, even the very possibility of such a pullout – would prod Iran, China and possibly other countries as well to focus more of their effort on Afghanistan using their clients and agents there. Moscow will have to focus on the problems of Central Asia, which would distract its attention from Ukraine, Georgia, and Central and Eastern Europe. It is quite possible that after an initial period of chaos and a return of the *Taliban* to power, leaders and forces capable of restoring basic order will emerge from among the Afghan elite. Meanwhile, the United States and NATO will be able to focus their efforts on key security problems, especially in the regions directly adjacent to NATO's traditional area of responsibility.

### **THAT TRENDY WORD, *RESET***

After Joe Biden's Munich speech, the word *reset* became part of the political vocabulary. Senior politicians and diplomats in the United States are falling over themselves trying to pronounce it in broken Russian. American experts are often seen in Moscow these days, trying to establish informal contacts with the Russian ruling elite. Meanwhile, Russian diplomats are condescendingly explaining that smart people in Washington have finally realized that Russia has *risen from its knees*, and that America will now take Russia's interests into account. There are other ways of looking at this, of course. This is what Andrey Illarionov, a former Russian presidential adviser on economic policy, had to say on the matter:

"Such behavior by the United States cannot even be described as a retreat. It is not even a *policy of appeasement*, which we are all sadly familiar with after the second Munich agreement of 1938. This is capitulation.... This is a crystal-clear signal to all the democratic and liberal forces in Russia and other former Soviet republics that the United States is withdrawing even its moral support for them in their struggle against the forces of the past, and taking the side of their mortal enemies. This is a clear invitation for the KGB regime in Russia to meddle some more in the former Soviet space and beyond."<sup>12</sup>

Such assessments do not, however, accurately reflect the essence of the new U.S. administration's approach to dealing with Russia. Washington has offered Moscow a deal: in return for real Russian help in ending Iran's nuclear program, the United States could scrap their plans to deploy missile defense in Europe. Under Secretary of State William Burns made the terms of the deal extremely clear during his visit to Moscow in mid-February 2009. "If, through strong diplomacy with Russia and our other partners, we can reduce or eliminate that (Iranian) threat, it obviously shapes the way in which we look at missile defense."<sup>13</sup> The deal could also include the United States not pushing too hard for Ukraine's and Georgia's NATO membership in return for Russian help on Afghanistan. As for the fate of Russian democracy, pragmatists in Washington and other Western capitals have long decided that if the Russian people enjoy living under an authoritarian dictatorship so much, there's no reason to waste time and effort trying to convince them to change their mind. What is really important to the West is not how good or bad the Russian regime is, but whether it is capable of making rational decisions.

One would imagine that Moscow should welcome America's offer with open arms. The U.S. leadership has rightly decided that the *Taliban* is a threat not just for America, but for Afghanistan's own neighbors too, including Russia. If the Taliban is left undefeated, if America quits Afghanistan, Russia's interests in Central Asia and, even more importantly, in the North Caucasus will suffer. The success of the Iranian missile program means that a large part of

Russian territory will be within range of Iranian nuclear missiles. And most importantly, if Moscow agrees to cooperate with Washington on Iran and Afghanistan, the United States will stop pedaling the issue of Russia's aggression against Georgia.

### MOSCOW SAYS "NO"

But as always, Moscow has its own very special approach to world affairs. President Dmitry Medvedev has rejected the very possibility of linking the Iranian issue to the deployment of missile defense in Europe. "I don't think you can just trade one thing for another," he said in a *BBC* interview. "Reports that an offer was made to trade one thing for another are not true. This is not serious talk. But I have no doubt that we'll discuss both issues – missile defense and Iran's nuclear program."<sup>14</sup> And on March 20, 2009, Russian deputy foreign minister Sergey Ryabkov reiterated that Moscow saw no evidence that Iran was trying to build nuclear weapons. "We still believe that there is no evidence at this stage to support the allegations that this program is pursuing military objectives."<sup>15</sup>

 **William C. Potter (U.S.A)**, Director, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies and Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar Professor of Nonproliferation Studies Monterey Institute of International Studies – by e-mail from **Monterey**: "The most positive development of the recent months is the improvement in U.S.-Russian relations, especially in nuclear arms control. Barack Obama's speech in Prague, which denounced the approaches of the George W. Bush administration towards nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, was welcomed in the world and become a good message for the PrepCom of the NPT Review Conference. The efforts of the Obama administration to engage Iran are a litmus test indicating the actual readiness of the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad government to settle the problems with the United States. The presidential elections in Iran in July will determine the future of the Iranian nuclear program and the potential for diplomatic solution."

Claims by the Russian diplomats that Iran is not trying to build nuclear weapons are not convincing. All they prove is that from Moscow's point of view, Iran's nuclear ambitions are not running counter to Russia's own interests. It appears that Russia would prefer to freeze the Iranian nuclear problem in its current state. This way Moscow keeps its leverage on the West by being able to toughen or soften its opposition to economic and political sanctions on Tehran. In addition, the Iranian problem draws America's political and military resources away from the post-Soviet space and neighboring European countries. Russia's *Gazprom*, the largest gas supplier to Europe, benefits from lack of competition from the Iranian gas fields. And in general, the more headaches the U.S. administration has, the better the Russian leadership feels. This stance encourages Tehran to carry on with its nuclear weapons program because the Iranian leaders are convinced that this will go unpunished.

Furthermore, in mid-March 2009, a senior official of the Federal Service for Military and Technical Cooperation said that in 2007, Russia signed a contract with Iran worth hundreds of millions of dollars to supply the S-300 SAM systems. Although no missiles have actually been delivered to Iran as yet, the implementation of the contract is "gradually proceeding," and Russia has no plans of cancelling it.<sup>16</sup> If Iran really acquires those missiles, the military balance in the Middle East will shift quite seriously in Iran's favor. According to American estimates, the S-300 missiles of the latest modification are capable of defending against an attack by the Israeli air force, which consists mostly of the *F-15I* and *F-16I* jets. Only the latest American *F-22* fighters are capable of overcoming the S-300 defenses. This means that the chances of a political settlement of the Iranian issue will be reduced even further. It is quite possible that as soon as Iran acquires the S-300 missiles, Israel will be left with no other choice but to launch an air strike on missile launch sites before the missiles are combat ready, as well as on the Iranian nuclear facilities and ballistic missile launchers.



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Russia's response to America's offer of cooperation on Afghanistan was also quite telling. President Medvedev was unambiguous in his speech in Tashkent in January 2009:

"As far as I understand, the new U.S. president considers this issue a top priority. ... We are ready for cooperation on this issue with any nation, including the United States. ... This is the commitment that Russia has undertaken, as well as the commitment to help in the fight against terrorism."<sup>17</sup>

But it has turned out that the Kremlin has a very peculiar understanding of its own commitment to help the United States in fighting terrorism. Only a few days after Medvedev's Tashkent statement, Moscow finally managed to arm-twist Kyrgyz President Bakiev into ordering the withdrawal of the U.S. airbase at *Manas*, the Kyrgyz capital's airport. Speaking in Moscow after a lengthy haggling session to secure a \$2-billion loan, Bakiev said the Americans would be given six months to withdraw. The international coalition in Afghanistan relied on the *Manas* airbase for logistics, troop rotation, etc. This is what Russian Central Asia expert Alexey Malashenko had to say about this decision by Moscow:

"The removal of the U.S. airbase from *Manas* is part of the ongoing strategy to expunge the Americans from this region. But was this step really advantageous right now? First, it has made Moscow look as though it does not want to cooperate on Afghanistan. Second, the price Moscow has had to pay is very high. Third, Bakiev was so reluctant to order the Americans out that it is obvious he did not do it willingly. And fourth, logistics and troop movements will now be done via Uzbekistan or Tajikistan, and it cannot be ruled out that a new airbase will be set up in one of those countries, from where it will be much harder to expunge."<sup>18</sup>

However, right after its success in Kyrgyzstan, Moscow said it would allow non-military land transit from Europe via the Russian territory. The Kremlin's meaning here was obvious: it wanted to demonstrate that it is in control of the situation in Central Asia, and that unless the West wants more problems in Afghanistan, it will have to deal with Moscow.

On future talks with the United States on strategic arms reduction, Russian diplomats are doggedly insisting on obviously unacceptable demands, linking these talks to American plans for missile defense in Europe. Russia also wants any new agreement to cover the breakout potential (the warheads that are in storage as opposed to being actively deployed). The previous analysis already detailed why this approach would be unacceptable even to Russia itself.<sup>19</sup> But most importantly, Moscow surely realizes that it needs a strategic arms control deal more than the United States does. It is no secret that the Russian strategic arsenal is shrinking, and will continue to do so. The Russian defense industry cannot replace all the strategic arms that are being decommissioned as their shelf life expires. The obvious solution would be to try to reach an agreement that would reduce the gap between the United States and Russia by limiting America's strategic arsenals. But Russia continues to pursue its own way, forcing the talks into a deadlock before they even started, to everyone's consternation.

## **À MAUVAIS JEU, BONNE MINE**

The meeting between the American and Russian presidents in London on April 1, 2009 was supposed to dot all the I's in the hectic diplomatic game that was kicked off by comments on pushing the reset button. "After this meeting I am optimistic about the future of our relations," President Medvedev said after the talks with President Obama.<sup>20</sup> The Russian president is apparently following the old French recipe of *making the best of a bad job*,<sup>21</sup> because the documents signed during the meeting give little for optimism.

The only tangible outcome of the talks between the two presidents is the agreement to begin new strategic arms talks. The statement that affect specifies that "the talks will aim to reach a new agreement on strategic arms reduction and limitation."<sup>22</sup> In other words, Russian diplomatic efforts to link strategic arms reduction to missile defense have come to nothing.

The rest of the documents signed during the meeting are fairly vague declarations that do however reflect the differences between the two countries on key issues. This is what the joint statement said on American missile defense plans in Europe: "While acknowledging that dif-

ferences remain over the purposes of deployment of missile defense assets in Europe, we discussed new possibilities for mutual international cooperation in the field of missile defense, taking into account joint assessments of missile challenges and threats, aimed at enhancing the security of our countries, and that of our allies and partners.”<sup>23</sup> Translated from diplomatic language, this means that the two leaders had discussed what could be done in this area (“we discussed new possibilities”), but had not reached any agreement (“differences remain”), and that the United States will take into account the security interests of its allies (including of course the Czech Republic and Poland).

As for Iran, the two presidents “reiterated their commitment to pursue a comprehensive diplomatic solution, including direct diplomacy and through *P5+1* negotiations, and urged Iran to seize this opportunity to address the international community’s concerns.”<sup>24</sup> There is nothing new in this formula, apart from the mention of “direct diplomacy,” which apparently means talks between the United States and Iran. It is well known what Tehran thinks about such talks. And there is no evidence of any shift in Russia’s stance on the Iranian issue.

Finally, the wording of the Russian idea on a legally binding agreement on European security was a fine example of diplomatic lingo. “We discussed our interest in exploring a comprehensive dialogue on strengthening Euro-Atlantic and European security, including existing commitments and President Medvedev’s June 2008 proposals on these issues,” the joint statement said.<sup>25</sup> “Discussing our interest” here is an extremely polite way of saying that the United States is not interested in such dialogue – otherwise, the statement would have mentioned “mutual interest” or something like this.

## THE LOGIC OF ALOGISM, OR THE METHOD IN THIS MADNESS

Moscow obviously has its own understanding of what *resetting* the relations with the United States should mean. As a result, Washington will soon lose interest in the whole *reset* idea, because the Kremlin is unwilling to offer any serious cooperation on Iran, and instead of real help on Afghanistan it is determined to create new problems for the United States in Central Asia.

The easiest explanation for the strange ways of Russia’s foreign policy is the unique nature of the mysterious Russian soul, deeply traumatized by the *greatest catastrophe of the 20th century* (as former President Putin famously described the collapse of the Soviet Union) and the prospect of transition to democracy, deeply inimical to the authorities as well as ordinary Russians, happy as they are to let the government make decisions for them. Nikolay Berdyaev may have been right when he bitterly declared that “There is a dark irrational core in Russian politics and Russian statehood, which defies all theories of political rationalism or any rational explanation. This irrational core is the source of the unforeseen and the unexpected in our politics, and it turns our history into fiction, into some kind of novel. It has lately become especially obvious that at the core of our state policy is not state wisdom and reason but something irrational and fictional.”<sup>26</sup> These words were written almost a hundred years ago, but the part about it being “especially obvious lately” is still true.

However, such explanations fail to take into account some details that do make Russian politics logical, in a twisted kind of way. There is every reason to suggest that Moscow does not actually want to see the Afghan and Iranian problems solved any time soon. The deeper America and the West as a whole get mired there, the less political and military resources they will have left to counter Russia’s meddling in the former Soviet republics and the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. Even more importantly, the Russian elite is not interested in normalizing relations with the West based on any *honest deals*. Western reaction to Russia’s invasion of Georgia has convinced the Russian government that similar action against other countries is unlikely to meet with a tough response. Therefore, Russian politicians and diplomats have come to believe that there is simply no need to make concessions. Speaking at the Moscow Institute of International Affairs in September 2008, only a few days after the recognition of so-called *independence* of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russian Foreign Minister



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Sergey Lavrov cited an extremely dubious statement by A.M. Gorchakov that Western policy “has given Russia full freedom of action,” and the equally dubious remark by F.I. Tyutchev that “it’s Russia’s sworn enemies who have done the most for its greatness.”<sup>27</sup> The meaning of these excursions into history is obvious: Western reaction to the invasion of Georgia has given Russia “freedom of action” and helped it on its way to “greatness”.

In addition, there are many people and many forces in Moscow who want a degree of “controlled confrontation” to exist between Russia and the West, a *mini-version of the Cold War*. That would allow tougher action to be taken against the opposition. Given the worsening crisis, even a weak and incoherent opposition could pose a threat to the regime if the living standards fall below a certain *red line*. Tension in Europe would also give the Russian military a pretext to deploy several dozen *Iskander* missiles at the western borders. The purpose of such a move would not be to neutralize America’s missile defense in Europe. Russian military commanders realize perfectly well that neither the radar in the Czech Republic, nor the handful of interceptor missiles in Poland could pose any real threat to Russia. But Russia’s conventional forces are deteriorating and could not stand up to NATO in any hypothetical conflict, whereas using strategic arms could lead to a thermonuclear catastrophe, which Russia would naturally prefer to avoid. Therefore, the thinking goes, the only available option for strengthening Russia’s military might and putting pressure on Europe is to deploy the *Iskanders*, including nuclear-armed versions, to menace the Eastern and Central European nations, as well as the countries of Northern Europe and the Baltic states.

But the conclusion that Europe has already gotten over Russia’s invasion of Georgia is at the very least premature. Only a few relatively minor figures in Europe still doubt that Moscow has crossed the *red line* and insist on continuing the policy of engagement with Russia. As Bismarck used to say, “stupidity is a gift from God, but never overuse it.” The absence of a tough and tangible reaction so far probably means that the European capitals are still working on formulating a united policy towards Russia. It is also quite possible that European leaders are following Napoleon’s advice: “Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake.”

Nevertheless, the European political elite has already drawn certain conclusions. In March 2009, Ukraine and the European Union signed a declaration on modernizing the Ukrainian gas transit system, under which Kyiv will be given a \$2.5-billion loan. The money will be spent on modernizing some of the pipelines, upgrading the gas pumping stations and two gas storage facilities, and building several gas metering stations. But the key part of the declaration is that the European energy companies are intending to start taking delivery of the Russian gas on Ukraine’s eastern border with Russia, not on the western Ukrainian border, as they do now. In other words, *Gazprom* and the Russian government will no longer be able to link their gas conflicts with Ukraine to the transit of Europe-destined gas via Ukrainian territory. That’s the part of the declaration that has caused a near-hysterical reaction of the Russian leadership, which believes that Russia is losing a powerful instrument of influence on Ukrainian and European politics.

There are also other signals suggesting that the European countries are changing their policy on Russia – without making a lot of noise about it. On March 20, 2009, the European Union approved the *Eastern Partnership* program, which aims to strengthen its ties with Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The program includes the creation of a free trade zone with the six former Soviet republics. That will strengthen the geopolitical potential of those republics and help them in their very difficult relations with Russia.

## **A HOPELESS RUSSIA?**

Only a year ago a lot of people were discussing Russia’s seemingly unstoppable transformation into a powerful Eurasian empire menacing Europe and Central Asia. But these days, with the economic crisis in full swing, the more topical question is whether Russia will share the fate of the former Soviet Union. There are a lot of indicators pointing in that direction. Much has been said about the fact that Russia has been affected by the economic crisis much worse that

the developed countries or China. The reason for that is the severe dependence of the Russian economy on oil and gas exports, huge debts racked up by Russian companies, and belated and incompetent government action. But that is only a part of the problem. Another, and possibly an even more significant one, is the degradation of the institutional structure of the Russian economy and society in recent years.

Instead of the weak but functional structures that guaranteed ownership rights and the resolution of business disputes based on the rule of law, the government has created a deeply corrupt *vertical of power* that controls the economy. A.N. Illarionov was quite right when he said this:

“The business climate ... is extremely poor. The main challenge the Russian businesses have been facing in recent years is protecting themselves from various risks such as extortion by corrupt tax officials, attempts by the raiders to take over the business using corrupt judges and loopholes in the law, or endless inspections by various government agencies looking for a payoff. While credit was cheap, there was enough money to cover those risks as well as the running costs and the social care for the employees. But as soon as the credit contraction kicked in, this rickety system collapsed. There’s no court to go to for recourse if your supplier is holding up the deliveries; there’s no competing bank to go to if your own is demanding an [early] repayment of the loan; corrupt officials are extorting huge kickbacks to allow you to stay in business, but there’s no law-enforcement agencies to help you fend them off.”<sup>28</sup>

In other words, the authorities are unable to steer the economy out of the crisis. That raises a number of political questions. The idea being advocated in the democratic circles is that President Medvedev should sack the bankrupt cabinet, which is responsible for the failed economic policies of the past and unable to take effective anti-crisis measures. According to some of the leaders and ideologists of the Russian democratic opposition, that move should be followed by political steps such as fresh elections or even the creation of a new legislative assembly to resolve the issue of government and produce an effective economic policy. In addition to these ideas, a number of media outlets and political figures that had previously avoided any association with the democratic opposition have lately taken to criticizing the authorities. That could be an indication of growing discontent among the political and business elite, especially those that have come under pressure in recent years from the so-called *siloviki*, the faction in the Russian government made up of people with law-enforcement background.

Formally, the president has the right to sack the cabinet. It cannot be ruled out that if the economic situation continues to deteriorate, jeopardizing the political stability in the country, the president will have to do just that, taking personal responsibility for steering Russia out of the economic crisis. But that clearly would not be in his interests. And there is no rational reason for the president to call fresh elections or convene a new legislative assembly. All other considerations aside, this could end for him with the loss of any real power or even his job itself.

Another side of the problem is that the sacking of the cabinet would most likely lead to a serious loss of power by the *siloviki*. It cannot be ruled out that some of the senior representatives of this faction could be prosecuted if their implication in various corrupt dealings comes to light. Even more importantly, the cabinet’s sacking would lead to a serious redistribution of economic and political decisionmaking power between the various government departments and agencies. The top brass, secret services and law-enforcement chiefs would stand to lose the most. That can – and probably will – forestall any attempt to oust the prime minister, because such a move could trigger tough and decisive action by the *siloviki* that goes beyond the boundaries of the acceptable.

Therefore the most likely scenario in Moscow is political deadlock. The cabinet is unlikely to come up with an effective anti-crisis program, whereas the president is unlikely to risk ousting the prime minister. And unless the economy starts to go on the mend, thanks for example to a rather unlikely increase in world energy prices, tension will keep growing both at the seat of the Russian government and in the provinces, fuelled by the continuing struggle over the division of the shrinking financial pie. The ongoing economic crisis is in fact undermining the very found-



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dition of the regime that was built in recent years in Russia. That regime depends on keeping the sundry groupings of the Russian elite loyal by redistributing the flows of financial resources between the various clans that have formed through the merger of economic, bureaucratic, political and law-enforcement factions.

All of this will most likely result in growing separatist sentiment in the Russian provinces. The creation of the *vertical of power* has not eliminated the basis of regional separatism. Power in the provinces belongs to various clans and factions that were formed back in the Soviet times and now control the key economic resources and bureaucratic institutions. These regional clans tend to stick together and try to keep the central government out of their internal conflicts. The Kremlin-appointed governors either hail from these regional clans themselves, or keep the clans' interests high on their list of priorities. If they fail to do that, they soon end up isolated from real life on their patch by their own apparatus.

Since back in the Soviet days, the interaction of the regional and central authorities has been based on a simple formula: the provinces remain loyal to the center in return for financial resources from the federal budget and non-interference in their local provincial affairs. If the central government finds itself unable to satisfy the financial requirements of the regional elites, or, worse, to form a clear and coherent policy that the regional authorities can understand, the growth of separatist sentiment in the regions becomes inevitable. It will be especially obvious in the border regions, which still have a chance of compensating for the reduction in financial support from the center by using external sources, as well as in the powerful regions that can survive without any support from the center – primarily the oil and gas producing northern and Siberian regions.

Growing separatism can of course trigger tough action by the central government, especially the *siloviki*, aimed at severely curtailing the powers of the regional authorities and ousting the key regional leaders. But that would only fuel separatism even further and eventually lead to Russia's disintegration because secession from the federation could well become the only way for the regional elites not only to preserve their status but to survive in the physical sense of the word.

## REMEMBERING HERMAN KAHN

Only a few still remember the books written in the 1960s-1970s by Herman Kahn, an extraordinary and controversial American scientist and writer. His studies focused on the question of whether and how a nuclear war could be won. The general academic community, which lacked Kahn's intellectual mettle, turned a blind eye to such questions, preferring instead to argue that a nuclear war was totally unthinkable. Maybe that is why the title of one of Kahn's books was *Thinking about the Unthinkable*. The book proceeded from the notion that every possible future turn of events should be studied, including those that at present appear impossible and unthinkable. Kahn wrote that history often "has turned out to be more imaginative and perverse than even the most fertile minds would have thought possible. The detailed "outbreak scenario" of World War I would probably be rejected as the plot for a third-rate comedy of errors as simply too outrageous. But the bizarre series of events did occur and brought with it enormous sufferings."<sup>29</sup>

Ignoring the scenarios that now appear *unthinkable* – such as the United States leaving Afghanistan without first defeating the *Taliban*, a new Cold War breaking out, Russia's disintegration, a war against Iran or a sudden and unexpected change of regime in that country leading to a new U.S.-Iranian alliance – does not just make the scientific analysis of the world politics poorer. It could also lead to some very unpleasant consequences for those political leaders who cannot escape the narrow confines of what is seemingly obvious.

**Yury Fedorov**

## Notes

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<sup>22</sup> French: “*faire bonne mine à mauvais jeu*”, i.e. make the best of a bad job.

<sup>23</sup> Joint statement by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and U.S. President Barack Obama on further strategic arms reduction talks, April 1, 2009, London, <http://www.president.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2009/04/214589.shtml> (last visited on April 13, 2009).

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Nikolay Berdyaev, *The Fate of Russia* (Moscow: MGU publishing house, 1990), p 50.

<sup>28</sup> Sergey Lavrov, “World Searching for New Balance,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, September 15, 2008, [http://www.ng.ru/courier/2008-09-15/13\\_balance.html](http://www.ng.ru/courier/2008-09-15/13_balance.html) (last visited on April 13, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Andrey Illarionov, “World Enters New Stage of Crisis,” *New Times*, <http://aillarionov.livejournal.com/73631.html> (last visited on April 13, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Herman Kahn, *Thinking about the Unthinkable in the 1980s* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1984), p. 19.



## WAITING FOR HOPE

People everywhere and forever live in hope. It is hope that leads them to do things that lie beyond the mundane, beyond basic survival. In other words, hope is the factor that ensures development: of a human being, a country, the whole world. The moment hope goes, real development usually stops. Irrespective of whether one likes it or not, in the early 20th century it was the Bolshevik Revolution that gave the world hope. Hope that it is possible to live differently. Not like in Victorian England with its colonial frenzy; not like in Russia *that we have lost*, where not only the majority of the population were illiterate but their children also did not have a chance of ever becoming literate; not like in Germany that was run by the senseless junkerhood which had turned the country into a barracks worse than that created by Arakcheyevshchina.

True, the hope turned out to be false and the individuals who stood at the helm of the October 1917 events in Petrograd were far from ideal. But there was hope, hope that there exists another way of social existence, another way of life; not a better or a worse one but just a different one. That hope justified many things: filth, sweat, blood, humiliation at the hands of one's superiors, which, incidentally, are common in today's Russia too, and even the civil war.

One can argue as to when that hope ended: when the *demon of the revolution*, Leon Trotsky, was expelled from Russia; or when the old *Leninist* guard were destroyed in the 1937 purge; or when Soviet tanks entered Prague in 1968; or when Mikhail Gorbachev was diffidently leaving his office under the accompaniment of jeering from Yeltsin's tipsy gang; or when a mediocre official from the U.S. State Department, Francis Fukuyama, proclaimed the *end of history*. It does not matter. What matters is that that hope died. But a new one was born: the hope that capitalism, which Russia ushered in with so much enthusiasm, will make us happier, richer, brighter. The hope that not only we shall have a life like *they* have but that we shall become *them*. And that hope, too, justified everything: poverty, starving pensioners; criminal wars with bodies found in the woods in spring once snow has receded; oligarchs with their luxurious lifestyles and surprisingly unintelligent faces; the war in Chechnya; *Russia's rise from its knees*, which has strangely not affected everybody but has concentrated on (socialite) Ksenia Sobchak, who has come to symbolize Russia's modern statehood.

The above was true not just for Russia: the whole world was in a state of new hope summed up by a *Pet Shop Boys* song "Go West". Both, Europeans and Americans, were hoping that the new world would become a safer, more comfortable and prosperous place for all of them. The Europeans were making the most of the expansion of the *European family*, while the Americans were enjoying their *solitude at the peak of power*. It should be said that they were fully entitled to that: no matter how we may feel about them but it was the U.S.A that in the late 1980s gave the world the hope that it is possible to live in a world of absolute harmony and consumer prosperity, a hope that had been driving the world until recently.

Now that hope is dead too, although it had lasted far less than its predecessor, draped in the red calico of revolution flags, a mere 20 years. It died because it had turned out that capitalism, as an economic system, had not become much cleverer over the past 100 years; that the capitalist world is in a complete economic and social dead-end; that the celebrated European *social state* is no more than a propaganda myth; that although Soviet propaganda officials clearly lied to us about socialism, what they were saying about capitalism was true. In other words, humankind has found itself in a strategic dead-end, which the current crisis has mercilessly revealed by exposing first the senseless nature of modern economy, then the inadequacy and inefficiency of social systems and now by gradually approaching political institutions, too.

In other words, the symbolic and at the same time the tragic nature of today's world is that having got rid of alternatives (unless you count a bunch of *antiglobalist* clowns a real alternative), the world has lost hope. Therefore there is no point in development. This is not the end of history, this is the end of development. The end of history will come a bit later. However, this is not the end of international relations either and it would be very interesting to see how the key players will be trying to achieve their goals in the face of strategic pointlessness.

## ON OIL, RESOURCES, AND MILITARY MIGHT

It has been a long time since the world has seen such energetic and tough maneuvering, and at times open confrontation between different forces, in the fight for control over the transportation of hydrocarbon resources. Moreover, never, at least not in the last 100 years, has such maneuvering taken place at a time of economic crises, when it would seem that demand for energy raw materials should fall. Suffice it to say that the number of alternatives to the *Nabucco* pipeline project, which is itself an *alternative*, has exceeded all imaginable limits. There is clearly not enough oil and gas in the world to fill all the declared pipeline projects with.

This is unlikely to be driven just by expectations of a new rise in oil and gas prices. It is extremely unlikely that in the foreseeable future oil and gas prices could reach the ethereal and, let's be frank, much removed from the economic reality figures that had economists mesmerized. The thing is that all the strategic calculations of leading world politicians (what makes a leading world politician different from a politico is that they are engaged in politics, not business disguised as politics, and calculate their steps for at least 15 years ahead) have in recent years been based on the expectation that postindustrial society will be able to make a breakthrough in development, that a new technological cycle will emerge, accompanied by a new technology platform in energy generation that will be free from, or at least less dependent on, hydrocarbons. Indeed, from the political point of view, for industrial nations (the United States, EU countries, Japan, and even some new industrial economies) hydrocarbons are rather inconvenient. Not only because of the long-standing, albeit ambiguous, practice of using oil and gas as a weapon, but also because of a whole range of immanent problems related to the global turnover of hydrocarbons (production becoming more expensive and complex, the never-ending problems of transportation, a high level of political risks and other commonly known things). It is of course unlikely that world politicians were considering the global future, in which oil is declared a totally useless substance, still they must have been thinking along similar lines.

That is why the United States, and Europe too, with persistence that could have been put to better use, were destabilizing the Middle East (we all understand that the concept of the *wider*



*Middle East* is a concept of a permanent war in the region for some 15 years at least), were quarrelling with Russia, were laughing at Moscow's attempts to stake its claim for control over the Arctic zone, although one has to admit that at times Russian politicians did indeed look liked clowns.

However, suddenly it turned out that there is no sign of a new technological platform in the energy sector, that a new technological cycle had not emerged (while all the *steam* had gone into the *hooter* of financial speculations which must have burnt all the money that was meant to be used to create that new technological cycle). Now the world's leading industrial nations are facing the need to once again deal with the issue of providing their economies with the banal and boring conventional hydrocarbons. It would seem that all this is totally unrelated to issues of international security. But it is not. In fact already now the situation appears to be most acute.

Firstly, the era of a struggle over resources, even if for the time being things do not go beyond transport corridors (it is obvious that it is always easier and cheaper to have one's hand on the valve rather than try and control oil wells in marshes and deserts), will be unfolding on territories where the legitimacy of the relevant states is dubious, to say the least, and where there are many political, and not only political, forces that may see an armed conflict as a benefit for themselves. That benefit, unfortunate as it is, may consist in that they expect to be paid for their readiness to end violence. Incidentally, this is not about Ukraine. This is primarily about the Mediterranean and what lies *to the east of the Suez*, in the old British imperial terms.

Secondly, one can spend a lot of time arguing about whether the era of a struggle over resources has already begun or what we are seeing now are just its first outlines but one thing is obvious: when we are talking about a struggle for resources, we are inevitably talking about control over territory, that is about the ability of a country or a coalition to ensure the friendly nature of territory which houses a transport corridor, in our case a pipeline. No matter what is being said at international forums, the most real and effective way of exercising control over territory is through military force, moreover not just any military force but specifically infantry that is capable of seizing, occupying and controlling a specific territory for as long as it is told to.

Lastly, the problem—strange as it may seem—consists in that the era of a struggle over resources is coming at a time when the United States is in a relative (or possibly an absolute) decline. This decline will inevitably affect the U.S. military potential, already considerably undermined by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which in the long-term have been a failure. One can sneer and gloat over it, but the sad truth is that the main deterrent in the modern system of international relations has disappeared, especially as regards those regional players that do not have access to nuclear weapons. The area on which Somali pirates are operating and which is expanding like an oil slick, is an indicator that many in the world now think that *anything goes*. A mere couple of years ago they would have been easily put in their place, for reasons of prestige if nothing else, whereas now this reign of sea outlaws, reminiscent of buccaneers' golden age, is beginning to claim a global role for itself.

As for Russia's position in the context of the above, one is forced to arrive at a disheartening conclusion: while congratulating ourselves on our ability to accumulate petrodollars, we have—as has happened more than once in our history—missed the beginning of a new era and less than any other large geopolitical player are ready for its trials and tribulations. Which is a shame, for we did have time at our disposal, but we squandered it.

## **RUSSIA AND THE UNITED STATES: RESET OR RESPITE**

The word *reset* has entered the vocabulary of international relations thanks to State Secretary Hillary Clinton. A *reset* is a wonderful thing, particularly since the heavy touch, at times bordering on hysteria, of the Republican administration's policy has long since become tedious for many people. However, one should consider whether we and the Americans have the same understanding of the term *reset* and what exactly our U.S. partners mean when they are talk-

ing of a *new strategy* towards Russia, and not only when they are talking at the official level but also when they are talking at a level close, and in fact affiliated, to the official one. Here there is good news and not so good news, but let's take one thing at a time.

Firstly, and this is good news, it is acknowledged that Russia is not a crumbling state with half a dozen *mothballed* aircraft, but a serious partner, which is capable—if it chooses to—of making the United States' life very hard indeed, that is, plainly speaking, turning the United States into radioactive ashes. Incidentally, it is only with partners like these that the United States has any dealings because it recognizes only force (not necessarily military) and respects only those partners who have self-respect. Which justifies, despite all its downsides and seeming pointlessness, Russia's recent military *activism*. Yet it is clear that long-range bombers' flights to the New World are no longer enough for a future constructive dialogue with Washington. To further encourage a constructive approach from Washington, more serious and tougher steps are needed.

Secondly, which is not bad news either, it has been recognized—albeit reluctantly—that Russia has a certain influence on the world economy and finance. Of course we are still relegated to a stool at those *gatherings* where issues of economic development are discussed. Yet in the back of Western politicians' and strategists' minds an understanding is beginning to form that Russia is no longer the Soviet Union of the 1991 variety, whose main economic function was to consume humanitarian aid. In other words, Russia is beginning to be recognized for a serious geoeconomic player. And all that despite its complete lack of diversification in industry, trade, and transport corridors. So what would happen if we were at least to imitate movement in that direction?

Thirdly, which is also encouraging, it has turned out that the United States is ready to listen to Russia's concerns regarding post-Soviet countries and to postpone Georgia's and Ukraine's accession to NATO. Of course, this is far from readiness to recognize Russia's interests. This is so far just readiness to recognize Russia's right to having its own interests. Yet, one should be grateful for what one has.

All the above is directly related to issues of military security. For the more realistic the U.S. views of Russia and the world surrounding Russia are, the less likely unjustifiably clumsy decisions that the United States may take are. Yet, there are several quite simple questions that need to be answered before we can proceed to jubilation over a *new beginning*. Allow me to list the easiest of them:

- ❑ How will the United States prove to Russia its commitment to partnership? It is clear that the United States' reputation and trust in the United States (irrespective of which party runs the White House) in Russia are currently at their lowest point ever. After all the tricks and failed promises, Moscow does not and will never trust the Americans, especially if the United States does not go beyond verbal obligations. Perhaps it is worth signing (and then ratifying at a special ceremony) a legally binding document similar to the "Basic Principles of Relations between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" signed in Moscow on May 29, 1972?
- ❑ A key issue that is expected to demonstrate a *reset in relations* is currently believed to be the issue of strategic arms cuts. It is in our U.S. friends' interests to exchange their hypothetical missile defense system in Europe, creating which in a time of a global crisis appears doubtful, for real Russian strategic missiles. In any event, the issue of strategic forces is objectively not the most difficult, to say the least, in bilateral relations. Perhaps a *reset* should begin with something more substantial? For example, with the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty, where the United States could exercise its status of a NATO leader to its heart's content, while Russia—of course with U.S. support—could confirm its status of a leading element in the European balance of forces?
- ❑ What will the format of *renewed partnership* be like? Russian-U.S. relations over the past 20 years have seen many things but one thing is clear: emphasis on the two lead-



ers' personal relationship in the current situation cannot and will not work. In the U.S. interpretation, the bulk of the functional weight should be carried by bodies like *the Gore-Chernomyrdin commission* or *councils of wise men*. However, one is led to think that these options derive not from the real requirements of foreign policy but from infighting inside the U.S. administration.

- ❑ Is the United States ready and capable of *bringing back to their senses* some of its allies that have in effect provoked a geopolitical clash with Russia? Of course, the report on the future of Russian-U.S. relations that the best minds of U.S. *Kremlinology* have submitted for the consideration of Barack Obama's administration contains a bitter statement of the fact that in future one should refrain from giving third countries, primarily former Soviet Union states, an opportunity to play on differences between Russia and the United States. A statement of fact is a good thing, however in practice things will be more complicated. That is why, to begin with, the United States should make its system of ally obligations in the post-Soviet space transparent. Perhaps Washington should publish all (all!) agreements and protocols that George Bush Jr's administration has signed with former-Soviet-Union countries? They are sure to contain much that will be of interest both to the U.S. public and the Congress.
- ❑ Finally, what is to be done with the long-standing problems in economic cooperation? This is not so much about the WTO, whose future—given the current crisis—is more than vague. We could start with the dreary issue of the *Jackson-Vanik* amendment, which was first adopted in order to make the U.S.S.R agree to the right of Jews to emigrate freely but is for some reason now being used to expand the export of U.S. poultry into Russia. Perhaps, to begin with, to prove its good intentions, the United States could abolish this already becoming ludicrous rudiment of *the Cold War* without tying this issue up to anything else?

So what remains after the new U.S. initiatives have been studied? Despite some encouraging wording, one ends up with a rather amusing picture, which however is very far removed from the interpretation we are being offered from across the ocean. The United States wants new relations with Russia in order to get a *peaceful respite* since the amount of domestic and foreign problems it is facing is such that they cannot be resolved soon. Moreover, a whole set of problems cannot be resolved without Russia's participation. The question is whether Russia—even given the consequences of the world financial crisis—should give the United States this *peaceful respite*? After all, the United States is trying to retain, freeze the current state of affairs, where it has a considerable qualitative and territorial advantage. The United States is trying to preserve a favorable state of affairs in the post-Soviet space, particularly to achieve orange revolutions in Georgia and especially Ukraine. Also, the United States has not yet given up its *right* to set up and finance radical opposition in Russia. At least we have not heard any penitential statements to that effect.

In effect, the only concession that the Washington is ready to make to Russia is to recognize—on words—its status of a great power and a partner to *the only superpower*. So is this worth giving the United States an opportunity to sort itself out? After all, we ourselves know that Russia is a great power and this no longer needs to be certified by Washington. Generally speaking, should we be giving our U.S. partners an opportunity to freeze the picture till a better time? Ultimately, time is now clearly not on Washington's side and it is quite possible that the U.S. aspiration to improve relations with Russia may well have been caused by the fact that over the past three years Washington has lost all significant battles to Moscow. Perhaps we should better wait for another six months or a year, during which *Obamamania* and the hopes it has inspired will fade somewhat, while Russia will gain *a few extra points*? Perhaps one should wait for not a *reset* but a full-fledged *Brest peace* from the United States?

The word *perezagruzka* (*reset*) was used in the Russian title of one of the "Matrix" movies, the one that was followed by the final part in the trilogy, "The Matrix Revolutions". Could it be that the United States has Russia in mind for that movie?

## MIDDLE EAST DEAD-END: NO RIGHT OF APPEAL

One can spend a long time trying to prove that Israel had the right to carry out the offensive in the Gaza Strip, all the more so since it was protecting its civilian population from insolent *Hamas* rockets. One can accuse Israel of waging a *dirty war*, covering residential areas with phosphorus and taking women and old people hostage, but one should always remember that there can be no such a thing as a *clean war* in the Middle East. One can express regret at the fact that the world's leading powers, the UN, and the European Commission were unable to influence the course of the military operation. All these statements have a large share of truth in them. One can maintain—and that is absolutely true—that the war was started, among other things, in order to raise the approval rating of the *Kadima* party. Yet, this is not the main thing. The main thing is what result Israel, and we all, have received following Operation *Cast Lead* in the Gaza Strip.

 **Yevgeny Satanovsky (Russia)**, *President of the Institute of the Middle East— by e-mail from Moscow*: “The level of security in the world is slightly higher, thanks to the Obama declarations. However, the same factor would aggravate the security situation in the region in the coming months. The right-centrist government in Israel with its tough security program has mitigated the conflict potential between Israel and Iran-sponsored *Hamas* and *Hezbollah* movements. The confrontation between Iran and Israel may aggravate, also probable are new counterterrorist operation of Israel in Gaza, deterioration of situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, and even intensification of *Al Qaeda* activities in Maghreb, above all in Algeria.”

The results are more than surprising: none of the *Hamas* leaders were destroyed and the organization itself is more alive than dead. Incidentally, the process of reconciliation that has begun between *Fatah* and *Hamas* is a clear confirmation of that. Despite complete support from the West, *Fatah*—instead of seeking to restore control over the Gaza Strip—suddenly decided to make peace with *Hamas* and even share its influence on the West Bank with it. The Gaza Strip was not only not cleared of gunmen but at the height of the operation its larger part remained under gunmen's control. But for the certainty that the Israelis were fighting in earnest, one could have suspected Tel Aviv of a conspiracy with *Hamas* to imitate a military conflict in order to improve Ehud Olmert's party's ratings. *Hamas*'s rocket potential was weakened but its full recovery is only a matter of time. Israel's international image has been smashed to pieces, although for Tel Aviv this has never

been an issue. Which is a pity, for Israel has now found itself in a situation which is close to complete geopolitical isolation, not tactical but strategic, which—given the world financial crisis and an objective reduction in the foreign policy capabilities of Tel Aviv's main patron, the United States—can be rather painful. And, most importantly, *Kadima* lost the election anyway.

All that happened when not only the United States had *greenlighted* the operation, but when Arab states (even, I shall venture a guess, Lebanon's *Hezbollah*) were up to a point quite tolerant of Israel's attempts to crack down on the pugnacious *Hamas*, which everybody had got tired of. All that happened after, according to the Israelis themselves, a year of preparations? And when Israel's military superiority was complete?

One could attribute it all to the ineptitude of the then Israeli leadership and personally Ehud Olmert, who decided to do this parting favor to his party. Olmert is no Ariel Sharon in every possible sense, but this is not it. The thing is that we should not be assessing Israel and Israeli society of the end of the first decade of the 21st century through the standards of the mid 20th century. Israel has changed, just as its people have changed. It is still capable of defending itself, and very well too, but is it capable of winning with the same panache as it did 40 years ago? The sooner Tel Aviv starts to ponder this question, the better it will be for everybody, both in the Middle East and beyond. For the repeating cycle of violence in the Middle East, which coincides with peaks of crises in Israeli domestic politics, produces fewer and fewer positive results for Israel and at the same time brings the probability of a large war in the region closer and



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closer. And that would be a truly large war since there are increasingly fewer people in the Middle East who believe in Israel's invincibility.

True, the emergence of the Netanyahu-Lieberman government in Israel is not the best of times for holding talks on achieving a lasting peace in the Middle East. Attempts to pressurize Tel Aviv on this will bring the exactly opposite result. Yet, paradoxical as it may seem, it is exactly because talking with Israel on the political level for the next 18 or 24 months will be pointless, the time is right for experts to try and outline what a system of security in the region should look like.

## NORTH KOREAN BREAKTHROUGH

The hysteria surrounding the attempted launch of the North Korean satellite, on the one hand, looks strange but, on the other, is quite an objective phenomenon. It looks strange because accusations of an attempt to start a third world war—just think of it!—by disguising the launch of a ballistic missile against Japan as a satellite launch are being leveled at a country which, according to the Western press, is in a state of complete social and economic degradation and where people are starving. It seems that the proponents of these views do not even try to understand what they are writing. On the other hand, the hysteria appears logical because it reveals fear generated by the lack of knowledge: after all, the launch was carried out by a country that the rest of the world hardly knows anything about. In particular, it does not know the level of technological development of North Korea, the motives of its political behavior, the alignment of forces in the country's leadership, even taking into account the fact that Kim Jong Il turned out to be alive.

In other words, the situation surrounding the North Korean either satellite or intercontinental ballistic missile exposes the main source of instability in modern international relations: lack of transparency in strategies and military plans. One can join in the criticism of Pyongyang, accusing it of deliberately provoking international tension, which will be true.

 **Konstantin Eggert (Russia)**, employee of the transnational energy company, member of the Royal Institute of International Affairs – by e-mail from the **United States**: “The G-20 summit did not bear any real fruit and it could not. Massive pumping of state money in the United States followed by attacks against the businesses and saving of non-profitable enterprises do not guarantee that the recession will stop. The new U.S. president has no vision of how to preserve popularity and take decisions, which are not popular. The lack of foreign policy experience of Obama raises the potential risk of grave mistakes in this area. The lack of any clear plan of action on supporting the government in Pakistan and the inability of the international community to give a clear response to the ballistic missile launch by Pyongyang make result in serious crises in the future. Only the U.S.-Russian summit gives some reasons for cautious optimism.”

One can accuse the North Korean leadership of failing to adhere to the modern norms of international cooperation, of making North Korea even more closed in recent years. Yet one will have to admit that the North Korean leadership is masterfully and practically faultlessly using the unpredictability of its behavior and the lack of transparency in its policy as an important instrument of ensuring its own survival. But for this lack of transparency, the United States may have long ago decided on a military invasion of the north of the Korean Peninsula the potential consequences of which would have been rather ambiguous. As it is, unstable stability—if you will pardon the pun—on the Korean Peninsula has lasted for more than 50 years already but without a war.

After all, it does not matter if the North Korean satellite has reached orbit or not. It does not even matter if the new North Korean missile can, unless it falls into pieces like it did this time, reach the United States, although it is this that our U.S. partners are finding most displeasing. What matters is that D.P.R.K has

demonstrated its ability to carry out its plans, as Pyongyang wanted, without paying much attention to remonstrations from the great powers. The fact that everybody, including Russia and the United States, spent a lot of time arguing whether the satellite had been put into orbit or not only goes to prove that tales of powerful early-warning systems that are capable of tracking objects as small as a tennis ball are no more than semiscience fiction and harmful at that because they create a dangerous illusion of protection.

Of course, it is too early to be saying that the launch of the North Korean rocket creates a new strategic reality in Northeast Asia and the Pacific region. For that reality to emerge, a missile force of at least a dozen missiles is needed. What has emerged after the North Korean satellite launch, irrespective of whether it was successful or not, is a new feeling of vulnerability shared by all regional players. Incidentally, this is a problem for Russia too because its industrial centers in Siberia and the Urals fall within the *Milky Way's* range.

On the other hand, having watched the North Korean leadership's behavior for the past 15 years, one can assume that Pyongyang will now try and secure as many concessions and economic benefits from the vulnerability generated in the leading powers as it can. After all, North Korea has previous successful experience of exchanging its science and technology breakthroughs, or rather its readiness to give them up, for flour, potatoes, and fuel oil. Now their capabilities have significantly expanded. Incidentally, this has proven itself as quite a profitable foreign policy strategy and there are no grounds to expect that this approach will not work this time.

And, finally, a seemingly strange question. There are two Koreas. One is the world's major exporter of rocket and space technology, which is going to launch its own satellite (the number of countries which are capable of doing it is still less than a dozen), which has nearly created its atomic bomb and nuclear reactor and, most importantly, which is playing a key role in setting key trends not only in issues of regional but global security, too. In other words, it is a political subject in which one *great leader* replaces another. The other Korea is a supplier of average electronics, largely copied from Americans or Japanese models, of reasonably good but cheap cars, and other consumer goods. Politically, it is utterly dependent on and in effect occupied by the United States and its opinion is of hardly any interest to anybody. In other words, it is a political object where each new president considers it his duty to put his predecessor behind bars. As a result, two former presidents are now serving life sentences, a third one is about to be sent to prison, while two more former leaders were killed in palace coups. It would be an insult to ask which Korea is which. The question is: has the *Juche* strategy turned out to be as senseless as it seemed?

## UKRAINE IN DARKNESS

The attitude of Russian and European politicians to developments in Ukraine, which is clearly entering a phase of a collapse of its state system, is causing some concern. None is any longer contesting that Ukraine has turned out to be a classical *failed state*, which is a positive sign in itself, indicating that our Western partners' perception of reality has clearly become more realistic. Yet for some reason nobody is yet viewing events in Ukraine as a military-political issue, which is a shame. For some reason everybody thinks that the collapse of a fairly large state, filled to the brim with military infrastructure, with a large army and still larger *security services*, with a huge military-industrial potential, which includes the ability to produce missile and space weapons and some types of weapons of mass destruction, will proceed as peacefully and calmly as the break-up of the Soviet Union did. Hardly. This is an extremely naïve view that does not take into account three key factors:

- The strength of criminal and oligarchic clans that have their own law-enforcement potentials. Indeed, Ukraine is a unique example of state structure, in effect the only truly oligarchic state where oligarchs have power and law-enforcement potential far greater than that of the state itself. One can venture the guess that this is what Russia would have been like too, had not oligarchs been distanced from power in due course.



- ❑ A considerably grown potential for a social explosion. Compared with 1991, the social situation in Ukraine has considerably worsened and, most importantly, many social institutions, which in 1991–1992 still used to function, have now been completely destroyed. Now Ukraine can offer recruits for *private armies*, all the more so since the Ukrainian army, only recently one of the largest in Europe, which is to be switched to *NATO standards*, is clearly in a phase of half-disintegration, perhaps with the exception of individual *Praetorian-Galician* units.
- ❑ The collapse of the very idea of the state as an arbiter, a structure that has *monopoly on blood*, which is very important for the development of any country. In 1991–1992 this idea was still there. Now it is not because those who until recently called themselves *the authorities* or claimed to be the authorities have destroyed this extremely important *metamyth*. Now almost any Ukrainian politician has the moral right to be a *batka*. We all remember too well that, as a rule, political instability in Ukraine manifests itself in two interlinked hypostases: *makhnovshchina* or Polish intervention.

Instead of lulling oneself with pictures—which look like narcotics-induced hallucinations—of how prosperous Ukraine is marching into NATO and the EU and, transferring to the *NATO standards*, is showing to Russia how one should develop relations with the world’s leading powers, it is necessary to already now start thinking about how jointly and in a spirit of partnership to dispose of all that will soon remain of that *beacon of democracy*. Ultimately, it is in nobody’s interest to end up with a wild field in the middle of Europe being roamed by whooping and shooting atamans, who have replaced their machine-gun carts with jeeps, that Ukrainian politicians will very soon turn into. It is obvious that this part of Europe is destined to—in one form or another—become an international protectorate, but certainly not a NATO one.

This territory should be completely demilitarized and deindustrialized because Ukraine’s export policy in the military-technical segment has proven that the country’s leadership is unable to use the military-industrial potential it has inherited from the Soviet Union in a civilized way by getting involved now in *gray*, now in *black* exports of arms (take for example the story with the ship loaded with Ukrainian tanks that was captured by Somali pirates) or by supplying weapons to dictatorial regimes from Saddam Hussein to Mikhail Saakashvili (interestingly, the same types of weapons, the best known of which were the famous *Kolchugas*). It is obvious that Ukrainian arms barons were interested not in ideology but in money but still they ended up pouring water to the windmill of destructive totalitarian forces. Whereas a future as an agrarian and recreational territory would fully meet the hopes and expectations of the majority of its population.

However, in the process of decommissioning the territory that will remain of Ukraine if the current scenario of the development of the political situation there is realized, other and far more complex problems of political and ethnic nature will arise, which one should start to prepare solving already now, taking into account—among other things—*the Kosovo precedent* that will define (whether we like it or not) the nature of international

 **Andrey Kortunov (Russia)**, President, *New Eurasia Foundation* – by phone from **Moscow**: “There is instability in the Russian periphery, for instance, in Georgia and Moldova. A recent gas conflict between Russia and Turkmenistan is an indirect indication of this. It took a harsh form and did not contribute to security in the region. The most positive event is the resumption of consultations on strategic arms reduction between Russia and the United States, as well as the signs from Washington on reviewing the decisions on missile defense and NATO enlargement. Among the key factors is the development of relations with Ukraine, especially bearing in mind the coming presidential elections and the difficult economic situation there. The dynamics of the economic crisis is another important matter. The less stable the financial and economic situation is, the more potential security challenges will occur.”

relations for years to come. For making Ukraine an international protectorate is merely a temporary solution which will make it possible to restore order to this territory and prevent it from becoming a source of threat to European and overall world stability.

## AFGHANISTAN: SOMETIMES THEY COME BACK

News from Afghanistan and the Afghan-Pakistani border area is becoming increasingly alarming. It is not so much that the number of U.S. and NATO servicemen killed in Afghanistan is already times that of the death toll in Iraq. And even not that the *Taliban* have again assumed control over significant segments of Afghanistan's territory, where in effect parallel structures of power are emerging. And it is not, or rather not only, that the Afghan virus is actively spreading into the territory of Pakistan, which only recently was the United States' pillar in the region. The problem is that over the past three to four months all the institutions of power and administration that the United States and NATO spent so much effort in creating have begun to crumble like a house of cards. Hence the *sudden* emergence of a project to replace Hamid Karzai, who only recently was considered a role model, with—one is led to believe—a warlord who, *with fire and sword*, will be able to maintain at least some semblance of stability.

The above throws new light on an idea that has been gaining popularity in the new U.S. administration, to start talking to the *Taliban*. Indeed, while it is possible to agree with the *Taliban* (that suffered a strategic defeat at the hands of the Americans in 2001) from the position of force, the force that may replace the *Taliban* in 18 or at most 24 months' time may turn out to be impossible to have a dialogue with on the same terms.

On the other hand, one could look at the situation in a wider context. It appears that the United States was not ready to *give up on* Pakistan after all. The presence of nuclear weapons, a colossal demographic potential multiplied by a rise in Islamist sentiments, tense relations with neighbors – all the above should prompt Washington to continue trying to preserve at least a semblance of manageability in that country. The task has fallen on Washington because nobody else has so far volunteered to take on this burden.

However, having decided to contain the situation in Pakistan, the United States will be prompted—by the very logic of regional processes—to seek to ensure at least relative stability in Afghanistan, at least in its Sunni (the most belligerent) part. Here too the main burden will fall on Washington. It has not escaped anybody's notice how strangely quiet NATO has gone on *Europeans' wider participation* in the Afghan operation.

There is of course the possibility that the United States may decide to *optimize resources* and focus on saving Pakistan, having *left* Afghanistan to Iran or, possibly, Russia. In theory, this scenario appears quite possible—our U.S. partners are cynical enough—however, given the attending political circumstances, it looks unlikely. Afghanistan is one of those relatively rare situations in which when one link is broken, the whole chain is *broken*. All the more so since Barack Obama has publicly declared his determination to change the situation there for the better. Therefore our U.S. friends will never be able to fully free themselves of responsibility for the situation in Afghanistan.

Yet, instead of gloating over news from the front and adding up the numbers of U.S. and NATO losses in Afghanistan, it would be more constructive to think about what role Russia could play. So far all of Russia's efforts have boiled down to pushing the United States outside of the *Manas* military base. True, Moscow has reasons to suspect that under certain conditions the U.S. base could be used *differently to what it was intended for* and become a serious destabilizing factor in the region. However, one should think about the constructive aspect, too. A failure in Afghanistan and the emergence there of the second edition of the *Taliban* will do the United States only image damage, which in the current situation is unlikely to be seen as a major headache. It is no use crying over spilt milk. What is at stake is the United States' survival as a significant world force and the loss of a country that the majority of Americans will never be able to find on the map and where the United States does not have any vital interests is



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unlikely to provoke a national hysteria. Whereas for Russia a *collapse* in Afghanistan will create a whole number of extremely important and potentially dangerous challenges, in particular relating to stability in Central Asia. After all, nobody is seriously expecting the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to play a truly active part in the processes in the region if things go as far as real fighting.

From that point of view, the issue of a possible format for Russia's participation in the situation in Afghanistan is not an idle one. Although the deployment of Russian troops in Afghanistan is unthinkable, the possibility that Russia may have to render some form of assistance to the Afghan authorities cannot be ruled out. In particular, one should not rule out the possibility that Russia may set up paramilitary units on Afghan territory as part of conducting so-called *civilian operations*, namely, to restore the infrastructure. Russia should already now start putting together terms on which its participation could become possible.

Firstly, the United States should hand over control over the operation to a multinational headquarters that would have the relevant UN mandate. This headquarters can be formed on the basis of NATO structures but with participation of representatives from neutral countries. There should be full transparency of military plans. Not only Russia but the whole international community should be confident that there is no *hidden agenda* in the actions of the multinational coalition.

Secondly, the United States and its satellite nations should be made to bring the humanitarian standard of the operation in Afghanistan in line with the acceptable standard. Russia cannot have anything to do with the strategy of scorched earth and carpet bombings that the United States is pursuing in Afghanistan. If that cannot be done, Russia will have to refrain even from indirect association with the multinational force.

Thirdly, Russia can consider the possibility of its participation in civilian operations in Afghanistan only if there is a process of national reconciliation and creation of a political system that reflects the actual ethnic and political balance of forces. It is necessary to make sure that the political process involves all the political forces, including those abroad, in particular members of the *National-Democratic Party of Afghanistan*, who can play a considerable constructive role in political settlement.

These three criteria can play an important part not only as regards Afghanistan as such but also in a wider context. If the United States and its satellite states in NATO can meet these three criteria, this will mean that they are truly, not only on words, ready for a renewed partnership with Russia, that they can reconsider their previous positions and get rid of previous mistakes.

If not, then it is no use crying for the moon.

## **NEW HOPE, OR OUTLINES OF BIG GAME**

Looking at the events of the last quarter, it becomes clear that there were comparatively many of them but they still lack strategic logic. It is obvious that under the cover of all the talk about the depth of the abyss of the current economic crisis, the leading world powers, primarily the United States, are already beginning to devise the plot of a new *big game*. Moreover, it is this *big game* that is probably seen as a way of overcoming global economic problems. What does it mean? It means, first and foremost, that not all the currently existing significant states will make it to the end of the *big game*.

It would be risky now to get carried away in a discussion of the contents and the tactics of the *big game* and the parties' plans, all the more so since the parties seem to have made up their minds about the strategy but are clearly rather vague on the tactics front. The most that we can be talking about now is the possible outlines of this *big game*:

- This will be a game for supremacy for a certain *transition period*, for a while, until new economic and technological solutions are developed that will make it possible to over-

come the global crisis (there is now no doubt that structurally this crisis will be a long one and that improvements will be short-lived).

- ❑ This will be a game one of whose main components will be big players' desire to prevent nuclear proliferation. This will be due not so much to the big players' humane values but to their unwillingness to complicate an already complex picture.
- ❑ This will be a game in which a key part will—for the first time in the history of the industrial world—belong not only to sea but also to land communications. This is what makes this situation special in terms of the degree of Russia's involvement in it.
- ❑ This will be a game which will, most likely, be based on the strategy of *manageable conflicts* since none of the currently existing geopolitical forces has the potential to be directly involved in more than two conflicts at the same time. Whereas the number of conflicts or potential conflicts will be far greater.
- ❑ This will be a game in which the well-established international institutions (the UN, NATO, the IAEA, ASEAN, the SCO) will play a relatively insignificant part for they are merely a product of international law in its post-war interpretation, which is rapidly being reduced to ashes.

It would be naïve to hope that Russia will be left untouched by this *big game*. The events of the late 20th century left Russia isolated in the northern end of Eurasia but even in that capacity it still has a huge potential in terms of influence on global politics and economy. Yet, in order to take part in this *big game* as a subject rather than an object, that is to have the position not of South Korea but of at least D.P.R.K, some strange stereotypes that have developed in recent years should be revised. One of them is that economy breeds politics. In the modern era, it will be politics that will define, moreover, form economic processes.

We began this discussion with the issue of the lack of global development alternatives and therefore of hope. It would seem that the lack of hope does not have much to do with military-political or security issues. Yet it does and the connection between them is simple: as soon as a system stops developing, there immediately are many those willing to destroy it. One should always remember that *hopelessness* is not when everything is bad. *Hopelessness* is when there is no hope. *The end of history* is not when opposing ideological systems disappear but when social degradation sets in. The winner in the new *big game* will be the one who will give the world a new hope. So perhaps instead of desperately trying to find a place for itself in the *big game* Russia should try and give the world a new hope?

**Dmitry Evstafiev**





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