Russia-U.S.: Expanding the Interface of Mutual Expectations and Opportunities

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International Affairs: Sergey Alekseevich, one “hot” news topic today is the G8 Summit in Lough Erne. Has the G8 been able to reaffirm that it remains a forum for the discussion of global geopolitical issues and is committed to the fulfillment of its obligations aimed at resolving social problems?

S. Ryabkov: I can describe the ongoing developments in the G8 as economic renaissance. When the G20 was being established it was suggested that the function of chief coordinator of international economy, including trade processes and decisions, will go to that group. Of course the importance of the G20 cannot be underestimated but the G8 has still preserved a certain economic niche.

The question concerns the social component. I believe that the topics the G8 is working on, including the Deauville Partnership (the social component of stabilization in the Middle East), as well as taxation and transparency of different sectors have a definitive social dimension. Of course everything cannot be reduced to that but there is no getting away from the fact that this subject matter is present in the G8’s activity. That responds to our interests, and we support it.

Q: Naturally, economic issues are directly linked to social issues. In Sweden, Britain and other European countries, mass unemployment and migration problems are a cause of social tension. If we single out the issue of unemployment, whose responsibility is it? How is it addressed at international forums?

A: I believe that this is the area of responsibility of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as of regional structures, such as the
European Union, where some truly serious problems exist, especially in countries that are experiencing financial budget-related problems. But the G8 does not stand aside from the issue.

Understandably, the creation of new jobs, the provision of more employment opportunities and the efforts to ensure sustained economic growth – all of that is part of the G8 leaders’ concern. Russia, which holds the G20 rotating presidency this year, has made employment and sustained growth one of the key topics of its presidency. I am sure that we will take into account the results of the Lough Erne Summit when the documents of the G20 St. Petersburg Summit are finalized.

**Q:** Yes, that will be all the more interesting given that the G8 includes countries with diverse unemployment patterns. The United States has effectively minimized it to a pre-crisis level. The situation in Europe is totally different. A month ago, Eurobarometer released statistics pointing to the opposite record – very high unemployment in recent years.

**A:** However, there is also a big disparity country by country.

**Q:** Do you believe that Russia needs to bring strategic issues of energy regulation back to the agenda, since the decisions made within the framework of the St. Petersburg plan of action have been left effectively on paper?

**A:** I would not agree that those decisions remained on paper. They have not been forgotten: They are present in some form or another when those issues are discussed at different international forums.

Significant changes on world markets have taken place since the G8 St. Petersburg Summit in 2006, including the trade in commodities that are of primary importance for us: natural gas, liquefied national gas, other types of hydrocarbon raw materials, agricultural produce, etc.

We would like to see a correct, reliable, reasonable, and carefully calculated balance of interests to be ensured between suppliers and buyers. There can be no buyers’ dictate in that area, just as it would probably be wrong to speak about suppliers’ dictate.

Next year, when Russia again assumes the G8 rotating presidency, we will without a doubt revisit this issue on a new level. In July, a summit of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum will take place in Moscow. There is something to discuss there: how to assess the consequences of the devel-
development in the “shale gas revolution” in the United States, what are the changes in demand in various segments of that market. The structure of supply has also changed. All of that is very important.

Nevertheless, the St. Petersburg decisions (again I am talking about the 2006 G8 Summit) concerning the stability of this key segment of the global economy are entirely relevant to date. We will continue working in accordance with those concepts, the decisions that were made at the time.

Q: It is noteworthy that when the candidacy of Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz was discussed in the U.S. Senate some rather unusual geopolitical tasks were set before him, such as, for example, not only addressing the future of shale gas in America but also proposing technology for shale gas production in China, which has 50% more reserves than the U.S. There have been some difficult negotiations on the subject with Europe. Would it be right to say that for all the disparity and diversity of interests we are approaching some decisions in the energy sphere that could harmonize the situation?

A: As for Mr. Moniz’s confirmation as U.S. energy secretary, it would be very important for us to set up a direct channel for dialogue, exchanges of opinion with the new head of that leading subdivision of the U.S. administration. We have plenty of points of convergence and areas for joint work – from the exchange of experience in the development of shelf hydrocarbons deposits to nuclear energy.

We would not like the energy sphere, the sphere of energy security in terms of demand and supply to turn into a bargaining chip in a geopolitical game. These matters should be tackled by experts, those who understand what this is all about. It is difficult for me to speak about this because I am not an expert but nevertheless I will dare make a few points here.

The shale gas fracking technique is not incontrovertible in terms of environmental impact, the demand for water resources required for that,
and insofar as concerns the quick depletion of deposits. The yield rate at such deposits is a difficult question. The yield often declines quickly. It is not my business here to make forecasts or say what should be planned and what investment is required in that sector.

We are determined to discuss all those aspects in a calm, professional, expert manner with our Chinese and U.S. partners as well as with those in Western and Eastern Europe who are interested in problems involved in shale gas production and who believe that there are some additional opportunities. However, no one can call into question Russia’s reliability as a time tested supplier of oil and gas resources, proven in the course of decades of activity. This is something I would like to reiterate.

**Q:** It has been learned that the U.S. will adjust the fourth stage of its missile defense plan in Europe and extend the term of its implementation until 2022. Furthermore, apparently the missiles that the U.S. will put on alert duty in Poland will be an old modification. In his message to President V.V. Putin, U.S. President Barack Obama proposed signing a legally binding agreement on transparency with regard to the missile defense issue. Is that so? Is it likely that a Russia-U.S. compromise on missile defense could be achieved?

**A:** As for the proposal to sign a legally binding transparency agreement, the situation is as follows. Transparency is important but it is not enough. We propose signing an agreement not on transparency but on legally binding guarantees that the U.S. system will not be aimed against Russia’s nuclear deterrent forces.

For that agreement to be workable, not just an empty declaration, it should record mutually agreed, well considered military-technical parameters, criteria of ensuring those guarantees.

It is not enough to only have transparency or the transfer of some information about what the U.S. side is planning to do in developing its own missile defense systems.

The proposals that the U.S. side has made on that account are not devoid of substance and are related to the discussions that in recent years have taken place between our countries at different levels. From that perspective, it would be wrong to say that the proposals are purely decorative or not serious enough. I would like to stress that we recognize the seriousness of these proposals but believe that they are insufficient.

As for the fourth stage of the European phased adaptive approach,
indeed, as far as we know, the previous scheme for stationing the SM-3 Block IIB interceptor missile has been abandoned. That missile does not exist yet but its development will continue. Under the decisions that have already been announced, the work is not going to move beyond the R&D stage, and the implementation of Phase 4 is unlikely at least before 2022.

The question is, what happens next. It will not happen before 2022 but what about after that? Whether some new interceptor missile is developed – all of that is so uncertain, unstable, everything is changing. We have noted that there are ideas to develop a universal interceptor warhead to be mounted on various types of missiles. That is to say, the warhead that the U.S. military can use to intercept enemy missiles will be standardized. Presumably, advanced, breakthrough technology will be used, and that will become a significant build-up of the U.S. capabilities in the missile defense field.

Nor can we fail to pay attention to the resumption of discussions on the subject of installing several warheads on one delivery vehicle as part of a program to develop new interception systems.

Q: What is Russia’s reaction to U.S. President Barack Obama’s new proposals about the start of new negotiations on a significant reduction of the Russian and U.S. nuclear arsenals? Will that not lead to an obvious shift in favor of the U.S. which has a highly developed conventional strategic capability?

A: The reaction is normal, calm. What it adds up to is that before discussing whether further nuclear arms cuts are necessary we should, first of all, make some progress in implementing the current START Treaty, signed in 2010 (we are not even half way through here). Second of all, an acceptable missile defense formula needs to be found. Russia adheres to the well-known approach that has been set out repeatedly. I believe that it is quite logical and reasonable.

Furthermore, the way the situation is evolving now the overall state of strategic stability both in the bilateral, Russia-U.S. segment and on the global level is increasingly impacted by factors such as, for example, the prospect of the deployment of space weapons (that is a very serious issue). Also, there is a lack of progress on making the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty truly universal.

We have major subjects for discussion with the Americans in connection with the implementation by Washington of the concept of the so-
called Prompt Global Strike that will be based on nonnuclear strategic systems. There are also some imbalances on conventional weapons.

I am not even saying that we cannot endlessly negotiate the nuclear arms reductions and limitations with the U.S. while a whole number of other countries are expanding their nuclear and missile capabilities. Making disarmament a multilateral process is becoming an increasingly pressing task.

This complex of issues simply cannot but be brought up in the dialogue with the U.S. insofar as concerns the prospects for further cuts of nuclear arsenals. That is the gist of our reaction.

**Q:** Factoring in all of that, would it be right to say that the “nuclear zero” is so far an unattainable ideal, at least in the short term?

**A:** “Nuclear zero” is possible and that was said even by those developing the fundamental Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in the late 1960s.

If you read carefully into Article 6 of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty you will see that it provides for general and complete disarmament – true, without the breakdown into a “nuclear” or “nonnuclear zero.” Consider: At the peak of the Cold War, at the height of confrontation, politicians and diplomats were able not simply to set such a goal in the form of a slogan or political directive but recorded that in a treaty.

Russia is fully committed to its obligations under Article 6 of the CTBT and it has never evaded and will never evade the discussion about the “nuclear zero.” Nevertheless, that cannot be an end in itself, nor can it become an overwhelming goal in its own right. Otherwise we will undermine the foundations of national security.

**Q:** The impression is that there is a kind of an ongoing struggle in America between the proponents of different approaches toward the Syria crisis. How could that impact on the position of President Obama who today seems to be inclined toward a political, not military resolution of the crisis?

**A:** I am not in a position to put even little flags in the discussion field regarding the Syria issue, let alone make any assessments there as to who held what position, where and when, what lines he has crossed or what he has achieved. The subject as such is in a state of continuous development.

We have yet to approach a point where it is possible to say that there
is a broad international understanding, with the participation of the U.S. and other countries, in regard to parameters of an international conference for a political settlement in Syria, which we have been discussing for a long time now, from the very start, and which was addressed by S.V. Lavrov and John Kerry in substance and in much detail in Moscow during the secretary of state’s visit, and then later on, in the course of telephone contacts and personal meetings.

There are still some aspects of that major international crisis on which the Russian and U.S. positions still differ.

**Q:** What are those differences?

**A:** I cannot say that our American partners have a very clear understanding that there is no alternative to persuading the Syrian opposition, first, to send representative delegations authorized to make decisions on their behalf at the settlement conference and, second, to orient these delegations not to use this conference as an instrument for removing Bashar Assad from office.

Meanwhile, we are unable to agree on such an event in a situation where our partners and potential conference participants are trying to impose on the Syrian people decisions from the outside, as well as determine in advance what will happen in the course of the transition process that should be started — i.e., the parameters of which have yet to be defined.

In addition, it is the international makeup of participants. The so-called Geneva I held on June 30, 2012 was a success but we cannot make the next step in the absence of Iranian, Saudi Arabian and Egyptian representation at a new conference. Nevertheless, sadly, our partners are trying to prevent the Iranians from attending, which is wrong considering the influence that Tehran has both on the Syria situation and on the region as a whole.

**Q:** Can some rapprochement of positions be expected? Is the tone changing?

**A:** Tonality is important in everything. Analysis of any text and of any statement, especially on serious matters, as a general rule includes an assessment of the voice modulations or writing specifics involved.

I would like to say that at present there are more chances for finding
a generally acceptable foundation for an approach toward this issue than before. There are also dangers, a risk of falling into some political traps. I will not speak of who sets those traps or how: That is a separate issue subject to analysis in the course of consultations, conversations and negotiations.

However, in the past we did not see such “enthusiasm” among many of the active forces and influential participants in discussions and debates as there is today. There was no “enthusiasm” for anything else – in other words, there was no understanding that it is no longer possible to remain at that “freezing point,” or rather, the point of bloodshed and multiplication of human tragedies. A very serious political impetus is necessary here.

From the point of view of the stormy skies clearing up and the first beams of reason appearing amid those clouds, perhaps something is changing.

**Q:** Recently we have witnessed an active diplomatic exchange between the U.S. and Russia. Put simply, what do the Americans want?

**A:** There have been three one-on-one meetings between our foreign minister and the secretary of state. The latest one this year was on May 27 in Paris, where the main attention was devoted to Syria. There are number of factors in the intensity of meetings.

The Americans want a great deal from us including the continuation of nuclear arms negotiations and deeper cooperation on some regional issues, which is something that we want from them as well. We also want them to ease up on unilateral sanctions, which we consider illegitimate, and to pay more attention to the international balance of interests as a whole and to our interests in particular insofar as concerns, say, the U.S. visa policy. Here we have yet to reach a stage where we have to keep repeating that we need a visa-free regime in the “Carthage must be destroyed” style but maybe we will come to that. We want them to stay out of our internal affairs.

We do not want Russian legal entities and companies to become subject to restrictive measures with regard to access to modern technologies. Despite all of their declarations that times have changed and that such restrictions are past history the Americans continue to use them. We want them to finally understand that the situation has truly changed. However, sadly, our wishes and their wishes do not always coincide: That is one dif-
ficulty in maintaining dialog with the Americans. We will seek to expand the interface of mutual expectations and opportunities.

**Q:** Is the Russian-U.S. “war of lists” over now? What is the status of those children who have already been adopted by U.S. families? Does the Russian Embassy monitor their situation? How does the State Department behave on the issue, and do the Americans consider it necessary to normalize the situation on this issue that is so sensitive for the Russians?

**A:** The situation is being monitored on a continuous, daily basis (that is not an exaggeration) not only by the Russian Embassy in Washington but also by our consulates general in different parts of the United States – from San Francisco to Houston to New York.

Sadly, we still are unable to say that we have a complete picture of the way Russian children live in adoptive American families. It is fragmentary, often scanty, and sometimes that kind of information has to be dragged out the relevant local authorities in the U.S. The State Department could of course show greater persistence and readiness for cooperation here.

P.A. Astakhov, the Russian president’s authorized representative for children’s rights; K.K. Dolgov, the Russian Foreign Ministry’s authorized representative on human rights, democracy and the rule of law; the ministry’s relevant departments and consular services give a very high priority to that. We will continue to monitor the entire range of issues involved in the future.

**Q:** Does that apply mainly to those children who have already been placed with adoptive American families? Do we need to put that monitoring on a new quality level?

**A:** Yes, we need to receive information if a child is in trouble, moreover, in real time, quickly, without any bureaucratic filters, without the necessity of having to check out the level of responsibility of municipal and
state authorities.

It is a complex subject, taking into account America’s government organization. Nevertheless, we simply cannot act any differently for humanitarian considerations, given the interest that exists in Russian society over the fate of our citizens who have ended up in American families. It is one of the issues that will be raised at all levels in the course of upcoming contacts.

**Q:** Is there some federal law in the United States that regulates this sphere?

**A:** Sadly, there is none. A bilateral agreement was signed at one time. However, amid the dramatic developments involving Russian children, tragedies that came one after another, shaking the foundations of the perception of that field of our cooperation with the Americans, the agreement was terminated. It was denounced, and even though at present we formally operate in line with the adoption agreement we mostly rely on the provisions of a bilateral consular convention.

Those are the legal instruments that we still have in our hands. What has happened with the agreement does not in any way exempt the American side from responsibility. We need greater openness, cooperation, and commitment in this area. Otherwise those problems cannot be solved and no barriers can be erected to prevent new tragedies with children adopted from Russia.

**Q:** Broad economic cooperation has always been – and evidently remains a foundation for the strengthening of bilateral ties. What is the situation in that sphere of Russian-U.S. relations today?

**A:** Of course, $32 billion worth of trade turnover last year – that is ridiculous considering the scope not only of the American but also of the Russian economy. This evokes a smile amid the volumes that we have, say, with the Netherlands, Germany, China and other countries that are among Russia’s top seven trading partners.

There are some very significant projects. One cannot ignore the fact that some large-scale agreements have been reached. For example, Rosneft and ExxonMobil – with the prospect of massive capital investment. That is of course part of a long-term plan, but it is important that the two giants have already confirmed their commitment not only to clos-
er collaboration but also to interaction in the investment and production fields.

Boeing and Rostekhnologii are another wonderful example of long-term, stable cooperation, with new jobs that are created in our country as well. Capital investment coming from the U.S. to our machine manufacturing sector, to the consumer segment, to the manufacturing of goods for the Russian market – that is there for all to see. There are also Russian investments in the U.S.

It is within our power to ensure that trade turnover grows at a rate of up to 10% a year. There is a presidential commission where a number of working groups are dealing with economic issues. At present, we have reached a point where we, together with the U.S., are looking to see what could be done to enhance the effectiveness of those structures.

Until the business sector on both sides feels a real need for each other, until it becomes interested in searching for new areas for the application of its efforts there will not be a qualitative change for the better.

Nevertheless, politically, the achievement of that new mutual sense of opportunity and potentiality would be very important because without a reliable economic basis, without broad trade and investment cooperation political ties are more exposed and often lapse. The Russian president has assigned to us as foreign policy agency the task of thoroughly facilitating such collaboration, which is what we are doing today far more intensively than in the past.

Q: Not long ago, Sergey Rogov, director of the Institute for the U.S. and Canadian Studies, published an article entitled “Obama Doctrine: Lord of Two Rings,” suggesting that the U.S. is seeking to create and lead two blocs – one trans-Atlantic and the other Pacific, which should ensure global leadership for the Americans. Is the U.S. plan realistic? What is Russia’s place in the U.S.-Chinese rivalry?

A: I believe that such initiatives from the Obama administration should be treated extremely seriously. Both in the Pacific and trans-Atlantic direction work will proceed (it is already underway) toward further liberalization of investment regimes, the provision of new opportunities for the competitive advantages of economic structures and setups that have evolved in the countries involved in those two major initiatives.

I am convinced that this will be a long-term effort. It is not some kind of task that can be included into a document within the space of a week
or a month, and then one could turn a page and do something else.

The United States has colossal volumes of bilateral trade across the Atlantic and the Pacific. The European Union and countries in the Asia Pacific region have extremely powerful foreign economic and foreign trade potentialities and interests in that area, which are clearly defined. It will not be an easy thing to bring all that together, reducing it to a common denominator. Nevertheless, the U.S. has political will for that. I believe that other partners, participants in those processes also see some opportunities for themselves.

As for the subject of geopolitical rivalry between the U.S. and China, which is loved very much by some analysts, I can say that the volume of U.S.-Chinese trade, which has long exceeded $500 billion, and the volume of investment, including investment from China to the U.S., as well as tens of thousands of Chinese students in the U.S., and the unprecedented volumes of purchases of U.S. treasury bonds by China – all of that points to the two countries’ interdependence. Perhaps there is also an element of rivalry there. However, it is wrong to ignore the fact that the U.S. and Chinese economies are already closely connected to each other.

**Q:** The Boston terrorist attack was followed by Russian and U.S. statements to the effect that collaboration between the two countries’ special services in combating terrorist threats would be intensified. Have those statements been followed up with any specific actions on the practical level?

**A:** Yes, they have. Of course, if I speak about them now, that would be at odds with the very logic of such actions and collaboration between our relevant services. I assure you that very intensive work is underway, including in the area of counterterrorism, where there is a significant potential for mutual understanding between Moscow and Washington.

Our collaboration in the past was not bad and now, after what has happened in Boston, political impetuses and the practical need for such collaboration have once again converged at one point, and the work has been invigorated. It is reaching new levels.

**Q:** Are there any negotiations with the Americans on the situation around Afghanistan?

**A:** I would like to say that there is quite a bit of conflicting information
as to the volumes of production and deliveries of Afghan drugs to foreign markets. According to some reports, some fungus destroys all poppies in Afghanistan and according to others, there is no fungus there but just the contrary, there is an opportunity of putting some heroin from “old stocks” on the world market.

It is a problem that poses a threat to peace and stability. We prioritize it in our discussions with the Americans when the agenda includes Afghanistan. We will continue doing that in the future, especially considering the change in the configuration of the American presence in that country, starting next year.

It is very important for us to reach a level of collaboration (not simply of understanding) that would preclude the further intensification of the Afghan drug threat, which directly affects our country’s security.

Afghanistan also involves very many other things. That includes prospects for an international military presence there after 2014. Frankly speaking, we do not completely understand the plans of our American partners in that area or the plans of other NATO countries. There are international formats; there is a contact group on Afghanistan in which we participate on a significant level. There are opportunities to discuss that continuously at the UN, the G8 and in bilateral dialog with the U.S. and the EU. All of that will be used.

Q: After the BRICS Summit in South Africa there was talk to the effect that as of now BRICS will collaborate with Africa more closely. Is that really the case?

A: All countries on the African continent and the leaders of African integration structures and associations related to security are showing interest in that. The leaders of 18 countries were invited to Durban. That was BRICS’ first event in the “outreach” format, and it took place with the participation of African leaders. We will continue working with our African partners. I am confident that the Brazilians will say the same when they take over the BRICS presidency next year.

The so-called Geneva I held on June 30, 2012 was a success but we cannot make the next step in the absence of Iranian, Saudi Arabian and Egyptian representation at a new conference on Syria.
Q: What is the likelihood of new members joining BRICS? What is the view of BRICS current members on that issue?

A: Some time ago, we at BRICS agreed that the association should complete some consolidation process. Some time is needed for further harmonization as partners are collaborating on an increasingly broader range of issues within that association.

It is impossible to move away from declarations of intent, from the declaration of common positions to specific projects, often quite challenging ones, and at the same time work to expand the association. The structure needs to mature first. I believe that will be the focus of our effort in the upcoming period.

Q: In closing, a question about Latin America. The Hugo Chavez era is over. Are the vectors of regional development likely to change? Will Latin America not roll back to the older days of the “Monroe Doctrine”?

A: The role of Hugo Chavez as the political leader in Venezuela and beyond remains quite significant. His legacy to a very large extent remains a basis to rely on for politicians in Venezuela and other countries. However, Chavez’s departure or, say, a change in the political configuration in other countries of the Latin American region in and of itself does not cancel out objective trends.

Latin America, without a doubt, is becoming a more independent and influential international player. Latin America has proved that its economic and social models are effective, not least in countering the global economic crisis. There is less and less poverty and impoverishment in the region. All of that is also in sync with Chavez’s Bolivarian socialism practice. I am confident that Chavez’s legacy will long outlive him both as a personality and as a political leader.