

## **“Luckily, We Have Virtually No Enemies in the World Today”**

*Andrei Denisov,*

*First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*

*Armen Oganesyan, Editor-in-chief of International Affairs: Andrei Ivanovich, if we take a look at the present-day world, we will see that many countries, which have for decades been enjoying the fruit of political and economic stability, have now slipped into a dramatic, turbulent zone of their existence. This is happening in different states across the world, even on different continents. What, in your view, is the internal connection between these events?*

**Andrei Denisov:** This is not an easy question. I tend to favor that philosophical school which posits the existence of a cause and effect connection in all societal phenomena. So what happens on the global scale, what happens worldwide is sometimes a period of rather high instability, a period of change, when a new architecture is created, including the architecture of international relations. It is not easy to live during such periods.

Nevertheless, the mission of diplomats and politicians is to minimize the negative consequences of this instability and as far as possible create conditions for a new round of development. This is precisely how development proceeds – sporadically, by leaps.

History, at least recent history shows that periods of stability, of relatively calm, stable, steady and dynamic development (there are exceptions but I am talking about general trends) were rather short-lived while periods of instability were much longer and more painful.

Indeed the current period of instability, which started with a global financial and economic crisis, has been dragging on a bit too long but nevertheless let's be optimists. Or, without slipping into excessive pessimism, better put it this way: The situation on the global scale as a whole is under control and there are prerequisites for overcoming the crisis.

*Q: Let's move from the economic to the political crisis. A listener from Moscow has asked you to explain why President Dmitry Medvedev signed off on a decree on sanctions against Libya several weeks ago while the relevant UN Security Council resolution was passed in the spring.*

*A:* You know, these are purely procedural matters. Indeed, Resolution 1973 on Libya was passed on March 17 – that is to say, quite some time ago.

However, it needs to be understood that the UN Security Council resolution is a direct effect document and is therefore subject to immediate implementation. So the day the resolution was passed we, as well as all other UN member states, started acting on it without delay, naturally on the understanding that norms of international law take precedence over norms of national law.

Nevertheless, a new norm of international law is to be introduced into our national legislation. And this is done through a presidential decree.

As a general rule, it takes a month, one and a half months, maybe two months to complete interagency coordination as in some form or other there are matters relating to different executive agencies. This interagency coordination was completed and the decree was signed. However, let me repeat, it has been in force since the day the resolution was passed, and it is binding on us, so there is no contradiction here.

*Q: Russia abstained from the vote at the UN – it voted neither for nor against the resolution. What was the reason for this position?*

*A:* Resolution 1973 was passed quite expeditiously. And it retained some of the wording that was unacceptable to us during the drafting stage. That was why we did not support the resolution – we abstained. Had we voted against it, being a permanent member of the UN Security Council, we could have blocked its passage.

We did not do that: It was our calculated and conscious choice. At the same time, then as now, we note that it still has wording that is open to loose, unduly flexible, nonspecific interpretation.

Members of the so-called Contact Group, mainly Western countries, take advantage of these nonspecific, loose provisions. Contradictions in the wording of some of its paragraphs, for example, allow for action that we consider wrong, so we regularly raise this issue at the Security Council.

Indeed, the resolution prohibits the supply of arms and military equipment to both sides. No one is supplying heavy weaponry to rebels in Benghazi. Nevertheless, there are semi-secret military deliveries, and we know about that.

*Q: A question from a St. Petersburg listener: "Does Moscow have accurate, non-politicized information from Syria amid an ongoing propaganda war? And, what conclusions can be made on its basis? Are our friends from abroad exerting pressure on us to make the conclusions that they need?"*

We have repeatedly been urging the Syrian leadership to exercise caution and circumspection in choosing particular methods of dealing with public disturbances.

*A:* I would like to assure our listeners that we have complete, exhaustive and absolutely reliable information on what is going on in Syria. The situation there is extremely difficult and complex and does not lend itself to unequivocal interpretation.

Nevertheless, on the whole there is an emerging trend involving a very high degree of internal instability and attempts by the government to suppress mass disturbances that not simply mark a surge in, so to speak, democratic demands by the broad masses of the people but also a revolt by those forces that are consciously seeking to destabilize and overthrow the regime.

I would say that like any pressing international issue, it is debated heatedly and sometimes passionately and emotionally, including at the UN Security Council. Security Council member states differ in their assessment of what is going on. Our position is well known. We are calling for a ceasefire and nationwide dialogue. Our call is addressed to both parties. This is perhaps the most important thing.

At the same time, the calls on the Syrian president and government to resign, which are occasionally heard from our respected partners, for example, from West European countries, make the opposition think that international public opinion will help them bring down the incumbent government and there will be no need for any negotiations. It turns out that this kind of action only aggravates the situation. This is what makes things difficult.

As for pressure, you know, it is not very easy to pressure us, let alone

China, which is also represented in the Security Council as an independent and influential political force.

No, there is an ongoing debate, sometimes very intense, sometimes with the use of powerful arguments, but this is common practice – that is the way things are at the Security Council. There has never been any complacency there.

We are constantly in touch with the Syrian leadership: President Dmitry Medvedev and Syrian President Bashar Assad have spoken twice on the telephone and there are consultations between our Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Syrian counterpart Walid al Muallem. Stable contacts are maintained at all levels.

We have repeatedly been urging the Syrian leadership to exercise caution and circumspection in choosing particular methods of dealing with public disturbances.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and some specialized UN agencies also are playing a significant role in looking for ways of normalizing the situation.

*Q: Russia rules out the possibility of military intervention in Syria and considers this to be counterproductive and even dangerous. What about the comments in the foreign media to the effect that some third country might intervene in this situation? Is that possible?*

*A:* I am not aware about the intentions by any one country to intervene in Syria militarily. Quite the contrary, all the key international players – the United States, European countries, and Turkey – have announced that there can be no question about any outside intervention in Syria’s internal conflict. Naturally, we adhere to the same position.

*Q: Here is another question from St. Petersburg: “Can you name Russia’s closest allies in the present-day world?”*

*A:* Luckily, we have virtually no enemies in the world today. If we consider the neighboring countries bordering the Russian Federation or adjacent to it, we have smooth, balanced, and stable relations with them.

The only exception – unpleasant to us for well-known reasons – is Georgia. There are problems in relations with its top political leadership but not with the country and definitely not with its people.

As for allies, yes, we do have allies – member states of the Collective

Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a military-political organization. Not long ago an informal CSTO summit took place in Kazakhstan, which made quite an important decision to adjust the organization to contemporary international and regional development specifics.

*Q: Here is a question from Germany: “What do you think about Emperor Alexander III’s famous remark: ‘Russia has only two allies – its army and its navy’?”*

*A:* I think well about it. I will not dare argue with His Majesty Emperor Alexander III. Speaking seriously, it is absolutely correct. Actually, there is nothing to argue about here.

Even by virtue of natural and geographic reasons – Russia’s incredibly extensive territory as a state and extensive communication lines – we absolutely need to have battleworthy armed forces. This applies to all military services – the ground forces, the navy and of course the air force.

Our state leadership, the government of the Russian Federation pays due attention to this matter. We do not encroach on anything. We do not see the direct threat of a major armed conflict, of a war being started against our country – either with conventional weapons or with nuclear weapons.

Nevertheless, the military danger as such still exists. There are also the so-called new challenges and threats. It is impossible to stand up to them single-handedly. And this is precisely why Russia is building a collective security structure, naturally relying on the operational efficiency of its Armed Forces. To repeat, there is nothing to argue about here: This is an absolute imperative.

*Q: A question from our listener in Perm: “The creation of BRICS arouses concern in some countries. Are you aware of resistance to the trends of BRICs development and consolidation?”*

*A:* If only as to all things new. What is BRICS? It is a new form of the pooling of efforts by states with the aim of solving the common problems that they face, a form that is in sync with the times. BRICS is not an international organization. It has no supranational bodies. There is not even a secretariat. It is a kind of an example, one of the first examples, as specialists say, of network diplomacy, when states that have a more or less similar worldview meet to solve or discuss some common problems. This

is what BRICS is all about.

I should stress that it is not an international organization, not a bloc but an example of network diplomacy. It is comprised of large countries with a significant growing economic power that have concurring interests (not necessarily on all positions – on a number of positions) that meet to discuss them. It has no hierarchy: There are no seniors and juniors and there are no leaders and subordinates there. The countries are more or less equal – in sports terms, they are in the same weight category.

In addition to summits, the meetings of leaders of these countries, where issues related to international peace, security, and the struggle against new threats, such as terrorism and drug trafficking are discussed in an absolutely open environment, there are also ministerial meetings. Finance ministers meet ahead of major events on issues related to the regulation of the global financial system to synchronize their positions – again, quite openly so. A meeting of agriculture ministers is being planned to discuss the food problem. Countries with a large population such as China and India are confronted with serious problems here. At the same time, Brazil has emerged as one of the world's leading food suppliers. In recent years, including this year, Russia has been advancing to front line positions in this market. We do have something to discuss. And we – i.e., the BRICS countries – have nothing to hide.

We cooperate at the United Nations. Incidentally, now is a very interesting period, when apart from two permanent members of the Security Council, China and Russia, there are three countries as non-permanent members – India, South Africa and Brazil. In other words, BRICS as a whole is represented in the Security Council. And this benefits the Council's day-to-day work.

*Q: "Is the approach to the events in Syria not indicative of a split within BRICS?" our listener asks. "After all, there were recent reports about a joint demarche by Indian, South African and Brazilian missions while China and Russia stayed away from that."*

*A:* No, it is quite obvious that there are absolutely no contradictions here. As I said earlier, we are a little different. China and Russia are permanent members of the Security Council while South Africa, Brazil and India are non-permanent members. To some degree, they have more flexibility in that capacity. So when they come up with some initiatives it is a priori assumed that they represent a broader range of countries than those in the

“group of five.” We work together very closely indeed.

For example, when the recent statement by the UN Security Council chairman on Syria – an official document coordinated by all countries – was discussed and adopted it was initiated by these three countries. They also took on a mediation function. Their representatives went to Damascus in search of some measures to build bridges between the conflicting parties. This is an extremely positive and responsible role. So there is absolutely no contradiction here.

We are not the same of course, but we have sufficiently similar world-views.

*Q: There is an ongoing debate about the viability of the system of international relations that was established by the Yalta Agreements. A listener from Simferopol asks how solid the Yalta principles for the postwar world are.*

*A: You know, solid does not mean rigid, ossified or frozen. The world is changing. What is the Yalta system? The Yalta system is an array of certain principles. Needless to say, these principles can be refined somewhat but basically they remain immutable.*

Let’s take, for example, the principle of the inviolability of the postwar borders in Europe. It was developed and recorded in the 1975 Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe that was signed in Helsinki – the well-known Helsinki Final Act.

Nevertheless, starting from the second half of the 1980s we can see the borders changing. If a change in borders occurs at the will of the people, as for example, in the case of the division of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia, it does not come into conflict with the principle of their inviolability.

*Q: But this does not apply to Kosovo?*

*A: No, it does not. This is precisely why we, as well as quite a broad circle of countries, do not recognize Kosovo as an independent entity, still considering it a part of Serbia. This is a serious problem in international law. It also applies to the Nagorny Karabakh settlement, the Dniester problem, and Northern Cyprus. Unfortunately, not just one, and not two such problems exist in Europe.*

It needs to be said that the world is changing, and the system is chang-

ing. But some unshakable foundations remain, and everyone is interested in that. No one intends to deliberately erode the principle of the inviolability of the European borders: That would open the Pandora box.

*Q: The next question is about the UN: “What does Moscow think about the fact that instead of working in accordance with its Charter, Article 1 of which says: ‘The purpose of the United Nations is to maintain international peace and security,’ the UN nevertheless becomes involved in everything, including the working out of a protocol for a meeting with extraterrestrial civilizations? The purposes under its Charter are moving into the background,” our listener says. “Perhaps it is time to reform the UN?”*

**A:** There are serious things and there are simply some odd, amusing things. Those extraterrestrial civilizations are one of them. Indeed, UN specialized agencies include the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs that deals with some extremely serious matters related to the development of legal principles for the use of outer space by different states.

There is a large number of very serious matters that – believe me – are rather far removed from extraterrestrials. Not so long ago – just in fun – it was suggested that if aliens appeared on Earth the best partner for dialog with them can only be the UN due to its universal nature. So some special representative for contacts with extraterrestrial civilization needs to be appointed. To repeat, that is just for fun.

There are initiatives involving some feel-good ideas, wishes. For example, Bhutan, a small Asian country, recently submitted a draft resolution on happiness.

There is the Millennium Development Goals program, formulated in UN documents. Its principal goals include eradicating extreme poverty, achieving universal primary education, combating diseases and resolving the food problem. Bhutan has proposed including happiness as one of the goals in this program. We take a restrained view of such exercises, understanding that they are not serious enough.

Colleagues, let’s get serious. The UN is quite a large organization. The UN is an organization of countries and it is an intergovernmental organization. Not individual diplomats, not individual figures are involved in its activities, but governments, governmental delegation that comprise the UN’s supreme body – the General Assembly.

There is the UN Security Council with five permanent members and

10 non-permanent members that are rotated every two years. They adopt resolutions and other legally binding documents.

In addition, there is a diversified network of the so-called specialized UN agencies, all sorts of offices and departments. There is a very extensive UN Development Program with a huge budget. There is the well-known UN Children’s Fund. There are tens of UN organizations.

Each of them pursues its own mission. There is, for example, the UN Forum on Forests. There is the UN Environment Program. There are UN economic commissions. Believe me, all of these organizations do other things than contacts with extraterrestrial organizations.

Incidentally, Tajikistan has been playing a leading role in pursuing the issue of the shortage of freshwater and organizing all sorts of activities in the search for ways of addressing the situation. It is a relatively small country that has nevertheless found a subject that is really important for it, and it is successfully promoting it. This shows that not only big but also small countries can play a weighty role at the UN.

The UN is a bulky organization with a multibillion budget that is not always used effectively. This is bureaucracy, sometimes artificially created, that sometimes becomes simply unacceptable. The UN is not always in sync with the times. All of this is true. So reform of the UN is a kind of a permanent task but it should apply to the extensive UN system as a whole.

**Q:** *Andrei Ivanovich, does Russia favor an enlargement of the Security Council?*

**A:** This problem contains some contradictions. Of course, the Security Council can be enlarged but only through consensus or if the overwhelming majority of UN member states accept such a step. This is our position.

Furthermore, the question arises, why enlarge the Security Council – for representation purposes or in order to make it more efficient, better equipped to take into account different views, opinions, and approaches.

We, as well as the United States and China, are ready to agree to an

**What is needed is dialog and cooperation in the assessment of threats and then the next step is cooperation in countering these potential threats.**

enlargement of the Security Council but so that it preserves its capacity to work. At present it has 15 members. If the number is “in the low twenties” (the British formula) that will broaden and diversify the array of states represented in the Security Council but at the same time this will not impair its efficiency and its decision making ability.

There is yet another specific. The UN Security Council consists of states – permanent or non-permanent Security Council members. The question arises, if enlarge it, in what category? Enlarge the number of permanent states or keep the historically evolved nucleus and expand the Security Council with non-permanent members, which will allow a larger number of states to pass through the Security Council. This is also a subject of discussion.

*Q: Next question: “How realistic is it to prevent the stationing of U.S. missile defense elements along our borders? The statements that this is directed against Iranian missiles are confusing. Who are they addressed to?”*

*A:* In talking about the threat from Iran the Americans are seeking to convince not so much us as themselves. They have set the task for America’s absolute domination in the world. This is part of American national political psychology: America must be stronger than any adversary, and it must be an absolute, self-sufficient force. And there are certain prerequisites for that – at least from the military point of view.

However, the way we see it is that they definitely do not always play a determining role in the modern world. Look at how America with all of its colossal military might has gotten stuck in Afghanistan. The same goes for Iraq.

We believe that a missile defense system should be built on the realities of the present-day world, on a collective basis so as not to violate what we regard as the fundamental principle – the principle of common security, when the security of one country is not ensured at the expense of the security of another country.

For our part, we are not against any missile defense system; we also have similar facilities but security is only possible when it is general and comprehensive. And as a country that is in dialog with the United States on missile defense issues we should not feel a threat coming from the deployment of this system.

This is, in fact, precisely the problem. And this is why we are seeking to reach agreement with the Americans on joint threat assessment proce-

ture. Maybe there are threats but they should be approached seriously, from a historical and long term perspective. Say, there are no missile weapons in a particular country today but they might appear in a decade. This also needs to be taken into account.

In short, what is needed is dialog and cooperation in the assessment of threats and then the next step is cooperation in countering these potential threats. This applies both to current threats and threats that may arise tomorrow. To this end, in joining a kind of an alliance we should assume binding obligations the essence of which is very simple – do nothing that might be perceived by your partner as a threat.

Indeed, things are not easy here. But dialog is ongoing and consultations continue, above all between us and the Americans as the main countries that can realistically, not least on the technical, technological level, put in place a missile defense system. After all, not all countries in the world are able to do that.

So when we talk and hear about a concept such as a European missile defense system we should realize that it is not a European but a U.S. missile defense system, located on the territory of European countries with the consent of these countries.

***Q:** What is the European states' position on missile defense?*

***A:*** Viewed from a historical perspective, the position of European countries is on the whole quite constructive because Europe takes care of its comprehensive security. After all, unlike the United States, it is not separated from us by the Atlantic Ocean.

We are also European – we live on the same continent, and we need ultimately to build a common security system. So on the one hand, the Europeans are not particularly inclined to discuss these issues with us, indicating that they are a subject of dialog and discussions with the Americans. On the other hand, of course they would not like this to become a new irritant, which exists in Russian-U.S. relations and would affect the political climate in Europe. In other words, the way we see it, this is not a simple situation for our European partners. But on the whole – let me repeat – the Europeans, the healthy nucleus of continental Europe are playing a positive role in discussions on this subject.

***Q:** Some Russian and foreign media outlets believe that the “reset” in the Russian-U.S. relations has come to an end, noting that only the military*

*departments of the two countries are building up cooperation. Do you agree with this assessment?*

**A:** I am glad that you have taken note of the cooperation between the military departments. Incidentally, let us not forget that military and military-technical cooperation is important not only in and of itself. It has a great political and intellectual importance, a dimension that is linked to trust. The ability to cooperate in the military area reflects one very important thing – the existence of a certain level of trust between the parties, when they no longer look at each other through the sights of the gun but are ready to cooperate.

Indeed, Russian-U.S. ties, including in the military sphere, have invigorated as of late. Thus, American warplanes took part in a recent air show in Russia, for the first time in the past four years. For its part, our military aviation is preparing for joint military exercises on American soil with the use of our aircraft. This is only one small but very telling episode.

Air and land supplies to U.S. troops performing their mission in Afghanistan are sent via our country. This, too, is a very important element in our military cooperation. We regularly exchange military delegations and our warships make port calls. In short, if we look at this sphere alone, everything is all right with the “reset.”

However, the relations between our countries, of course, go very far beyond the bounds of military contacts. After all, the most important thing is politics, relations between our leaders, the ability of our foreign policy agencies – the Russian Foreign Ministry and the U.S. State Department – to maintain a constructive working atmosphere making it possible to deal with any issues, including complex, pressing ones on which we disagree. At least then there is a chance of finding a solution.

*A: A measure of instability was brought into Russian-U.S. relations by the American reaction to the “Magnitsky case.” We have a question from our listener on this subject: “Why is there so much talk about the ‘Magnitsky case’ in the United States? What is the reason for such a strong, sharp reaction from the U.S. leadership to this story? Do such things never happen in the United States?”*

**Q:** Of course they do. Let us be sincere. After all, the Magnitsky story is obviously something atypical. And of course it should be investigated

while persons guilty in the death of the man, even if he is guilty of some financial irregularities, must be punished in any event.

All of this is quite self-evident and this is precisely the point that was emphasized by the Russian president, who has demanded – in rather strong terms – a full investigation and corresponding conclusions to be made. And this is what is in fact being done.

Taking all of the aforementioned into account, the different moves by U.S. lawmakers look dubious, to put it mildly. This evidently comes from excessive arrogance, self-confidence, and the infallibility complex, meaning, we are always right while everybody else can only approach our standard.

There is nothing that can be done here – it is a repeat relapse. But most important, it is perfectly obvious to you and me that the course of the investigation depends entirely on ourselves.

*Q: Andrei Ivanovich, going back to European affairs, I would like to ask you how the negotiating process on the visa regime between Russia and Europe is proceeding.*

*A:* I would like to say that following the signing of a visa facilitation agreement between Russia and the EU member states in 2006, the process of acquiring an entry visa to European countries has been considerably simplified. It is easier to get a visa, the term has been extended and the category of persons who are granted exemptions has been enlarged.

There is a progression of a kind. Say, if a person first goes to an EU country he is issued a single entry visa. Next time, if he has a positive record of relations with Europe, it will be easier for him to receive a double and then a multiple entry visa.

As for a visa-free regime, we have said repeatedly that we are ready for that but our European partners are not. Dialog is ongoing. It is not just a political decision “to go ahead and abolish visas” but quite a wide-ranging and costly program, an array of measures. It involves ensuring reliable border control both on our side and on their side, and the signing of readmission agreements. In short, there are still a number of issues that need to be dealt with. Let us have patience.

*Key words:* period of instability, Libya, UN Security Council, Syria, BRICS, missile defense system, visa-free regime.