

International Affairs

A Russian Journal of World Politics,
Diplomacy and International Relations

FROM THE DESK OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER

No. 6, 2009. Pages 1-10.

DIPLOMACY TODAY: SUBJECT AND METHOD

Sergei Lavrov,
Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation

The lecture was delivered on 17 September 2009 at the meeting dedicated to the 55th anniversary of the *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'* (International Affairs) journal held in the Grand Mansion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

Today I would like to speak about the fundamental issues of contemporary diplomacy—its subject and method. Ours is the time of sweeping transformations which call for profound comprehension, otherwise the diplomacy of any state might lose its contacts with reality and, therefore, its efficiency of a foreign policy instrument. The examples are too recent to be neglected.

This discussion is much more needed than ever before; our contacts with partners, including our Western partners, have convinced us that an objective process of convergence is underway all over the world. Limited so far to the realm of ideas it is gradually trickling into the sphere of practical policies. The Democratic Administration that came to power in the United States under the slogan of changes accelerated the process. Recently perceived as a confrontational idea and an attempt at “shaking the foundations” the subject of changes in the global political landscape is moving to the center of international discussions. The echoes of the metaphysical idea of the world as a fossilized structure, however, can still be heard.

The recent International Conference “The Modern State and Global Security” at which President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev spoke provided ample evidence of the above. The highly impressive attendance and profound discussions suggest that the modern state is not withering away; it remains the main instrument of harmonization of social and individual interests at home and serves the central link of international relations which can still be described as mainly interstate relations despite the variety of other subjects of international communication.

This has put Zbigniew Brzezinski's recent contribution to the Foreign Affairs subtitled "Toward a Global Security Web" into the limelight; its author is essentially in agreement with our thesis of network diplomacy reflected in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation.

The subject of international relations is radically changing; it can no longer be described as dynastic and cabinet policies centered at territorial division of the world and markets and prewar coalitions. Today diplomacy is dealing with the fundamental issues of nations' lives ranging from security in its contemporary, global, interpretation to prosperity and new jobs.

The global challenges and threats have moved to the fore which means that all states should pool forces to effectively oppose them. Created by international terrorism, organized transborder crime, drug trafficking, illegal migration, global poverty and climate changes rather than belligerent states they require new instruments, very much different from the national armies' numerical strength and fire power.

One feels that Mr. Brzezinski was quite right when he wrote that today neither belligerent fanaticism of the nationalist states prone to territorial expansion nor the ideologies claiming universality could be described as the main threats to the world. We have been saying this for several years now — we do hope that we have been heard at last.

The methods employed in international relations are changing accordingly. There are no hierarchical combinations which reached its peak in the form of the bipolar world of the Cold War era. Today, we should practice multi-vector network diplomacy conducive to flexible cooperation among groups of states for the sake of harmonizing identical interests. Today, we are not engaged — or, at least, should not be engaged — in the struggle against any state or in the containment policy. Time has come to apply collective efforts to promote concrete interests of the international community as a whole or of groups of states.

There is an opinion, shared by Zbigniew Brzezinski that the 500-year-long Western domination in world politics, economics and finances is coming to an end. This completes a stage of globalization inspired by Western ideas and Western practices and suggests the question: How will it affect the subject and method of diplomacy? The polycentric international system that is taking shape before our eyes will be inevitably affected by various world perceptions and value systems. The world is heterogeneous; it can be described as culturally and civilizationally varied which means that a wider circle of states should seek a common denominator for their cooperation.

We should be fully aware of the fact that modern conflicts and crises cannot be resolved by force. This means that all states, no matter how "difficult" they might look should be involved rather than isolated through sanctions and other pressure forms. The high degree of interdependence, a product of globalization Western style, makes violence (either wars or revolutions in which the previous epochs, the 20th century in the first place, abounded) a costly solution. We should concentrate at the political and diplomatic, that is non-destructive, methods.

This fully applies to the situation around Iran; its nuclear file has only one solution, viz. all-round negotiations in the regional context. The use of force will be catastrophic for the entire region, already overburdened with conflicts, including the one between Israel and Arabs. Those wishing to build up pressure should first think out their strategies. There is a real chance to start negotiations to restore confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program and draw Iran, on an equal footing, into international economic activities and collective crisis-settlement efforts in the region. It would be wrong to let the chance slip away by insisting on new anti-Iranian sanctions.

The presidential elections in this country confirmed that there is an energetic and dynamic civil society in Iran. This means that Iran should be involved in the talks with the Six and in a direct dialogue with Washington. In his recent article in Project Syndicate Kishore Mahbubani has rightly noted that diplomacy was invented to promote relationships among foes, not among friends.

In his article “Go Russia!” President Medvedev has pointed out that “Russia has always, at all stages of its development, sought to achieve a more equitable world order.” Today, the global system of governance should be modernized “to establish rules of cooperation and dispute settlement, in which priority is given to modern ideas of equality and fairness.” This is how we perceive Russia’s historical role; while rejecting any cooperation not based on sovereign equality and mutual interest we insist by extension that all states should be treated similarly.

We should always bear in mind that these are the principles formulated by mankind throughout its long history. The Peace of Westphalia that drew the line under the religious wars in Europe lent its name to the principles that take the religious and other axiological differences beyond the framework of interstate relations. This was a pragmatic solution that makes the 20th century and the Cold War period in the first place an aberration to be overcome by all means. This is what we have in mind when we talk about de-ideologized international relations.

Network diplomacy can be described as an answer to new realities up to and including “the dispersal of global power.” Whether the “global security web” that Brzezinski has suggested will be formalized (through binding agreements among other things) remains to be seen. In future life might push us in this direction.

So far we should proceed from the fact that network cooperation is effective because it is flexible and non-formalized; it is effective when the states’ concrete interests coincide and serve the moving force.

Indeed, no matter how loudly Aleksandr Kerensky called on to continue the war because, he argued, “it was long ago that the world had become a single family with vehement squabbles but strong family ties” Russia withdrew from the war for the simple reason that it did not fit its interests; it could no longer remain involved. Somebody should have done this; the Provisional Government let others to do this.

I am convinced that today there are no reasons for rigid strategic blocs; survival on the planet has become the common strategic denominator.

The leadership issue is still on the agenda. In fact, a single leader-state would have been hailed had it busy itself with harmonizing the interests of all states on the basis of a common denominator and demonstrated political will and an ability to cope. What is going on in the world looks much more realistic and much more practical. I have in mind collective leadership of the leading states, which can be described as truly representative in geographic and civilizational terms, realized in all sorts of formal and informal multisided mechanisms such as the UN Security Council in the first place as well as G-8, G-20, BRIC, SCO and many other international and regional structures.

Is NATO able to develop into a center of network cooperation in the security sphere? It should first complete its transformation, the vector of which is still unclear. Transformation for the sake of “Western unity” favored by certain forces looks doubtful. There are two aspects of this problem.

First, the future of NATO: it is suggested that the bloc discipline should be tightened by re-wording Art 5 of the Washington Treaty in binding terms up to and including expulsion of recalcitrant members. It is for the NATO members to decide whether this fits the spirit of the time. It should be said, however, that if harmonization of the interests is replaced with more rigid discipline NATO’s partners, of which Russia is one, might be affected by the revived military bloc logic.

Second, the future of the historical West: should it preserve itself by tightening military-political discipline or should it become better adjusted to the rest of world by being involved in regional and sub-regional levels of global development? On 27 August 2007, the International Herald Tribune carried an article by Yukio Hatoyama in which the new prime minister of Japan treated his country’s involvement in regional integration and building up regional collective security structures as a priority as well as a means of preserving its national specifics, an important element of national life.

Regionalization has developed into one of the key trends in international relations; it seems that United Nations’ efficiency will depend, to a great extent, on strong regional institutions ready to shoulder responsibility for their regions in full accord with the UN Charter which will leave it free to address the global issues in the interests of the world community.

World perception which serves the cornerstone of national foreign policy philosophies is extremely important. This explains the gaps between the states’ ideas about the methods to be applied in every specific case even though they are drawing closer together when it comes to the matters of principle. If they fail to meet each other halfway at this level convergence will stall because of the tenacity of corresponding centuries-old attitudes. I have in mind intolerance that breeds penchant for the use of force.

The history of religious wars of the Reformation period was a dress rehearsal of Europe’s 20th century; this confirms what Anna Akhmatova said about Modigliani: the future sheds its shadow long before it enters. In many of his works, including *Old Mortality*, Walter Scott investigated in detail “intolerance and narrow-minded bigotry” of “those who would turn the world upside down” for the sake of their convictions. Like all other apostles of new faiths they badly tolerated those who thought differently and claimed the dominant role for their faith.

When insisting on its exclusiveness the West should not follow the road of “haughty of heart, and confident, as men who believed that the pale of salvation was open for them exclusively; while all other Christians, however slight were the shades of difference of doctrine from their own, were in fact little better than outcasts or reprobates” as Walter Scott put it. This is painfully familiar! The French and the Russian revolutions for that matter were intolerant to the highest degree: “the Revolution... devour in turn each of her children” for the sake of the “purity of faith.” This was our common tragedy and our shared historical heritage which calls for joint efforts to be overcome or “rejected.” We should not underestimate the lessons of European history and the settlement that followed the English Civil War which led the great writer to conclude that decent, sensible and reasonable people should pool their forces. Europe’s historical experience bought at a high cost should be transformed into a wide and unbiased idea of things.

Today, when religion is coming to the fore as a factor of international relations we should go back to our common Christian roots; I do not mean any specific religion but rather the moral principles which de-Christianization threw out “together with the bath water.” The moral relativism (better described as nihilism) is one of the causes of the current global crisis: no normal social functioning is possible if the moral nature of man and a moral law which guides him are rejected. Unbridled consumerism is a direct result of an axiological impasse of “sensual culture” (Pitirim Sorokin’s term). Today, when we all know that there is no return to the past we should pool our efforts for the sake of sustainable post-crisis development; we should lay a common moral foundation that would include the rules of the game binding for all. Time has come to realize that we should move further than simple coexistence of the Cold War era.

We suggest that a European security treaty would be a legally binding document, a set of rules obligatory for all; it should serve a foundation of mutually advantageous relationships in the Euroatlantic region which call for collective efforts in the spirit of cooperation. Such treaty can become an international legal act in the security sphere and a legal framework for the political obligations already shouldered by the OSCE and the Russia-NATO Council.

One gets an impression that Zbigniew Brzezinski’s detailed analysis of Art. 5 of the Washington Treaty caused doubts in some of the NATO members of their security. This means that we need a treaty to provide equal security to all and to add predictability to Euroatlantic policies.

In any case, the situation in the Euroatlantic region provides enough reasons to “harmonize the will of all states” as President Medvedev put it.

I am convinced that the still predominant thinking in the East-West and North-South terms remains the main source of danger. To move forward, we should overcome this inertia; indeed, today none of the regions can claim worldwide domination.

The context created by the current global financial and economic crisis calls for concerted efforts. Today, the G-20 and G-8 summits are actively working on a common agenda. In the conditions when a “responsibility crisis” in one country spreads worldwide

joint efforts are needed to reform the global financial architecture and to transform negative interdependence into positive.

The recent decision of GM to sell Opel to Magna of Canada and Sberbank of Russia breeds hope that de-ideologization has finally reached the sphere of economics and finances. This was globalization imperative; today, when another retreat of globalization has become more or less obvious this approach is a sine qua non of saving jobs and survival in hard times

It is only now that Russia which for twenty years had been seeking new relationships with the West acquired a real chance to overcome the negative dynamics. Russia's stakes are as high as those of our Western partners. President Medvedev has pointed out that Russia's foreign policy should be determined by the country's long-term modernization goals; we expect reciprocity from our Western partners — ours is a strategic stake. There is nothing for us to quarrel over. We have common civilizational roots and common history.

In the last three centuries Russia has done a lot for Europe. Under Peter the Great it became part of balanced European policies; later, twice or even three times Russia (very much like *deus ex machina* of the Ancient Greek tragedies) saved Europe which in its madness drove itself into a corner or at the brink of a civilizational catastrophe. More than that: Russia's great literature of the 19th century had forebodings of such catastrophes and warned Europe. Dostoevsky in his *The Possessed* warned not only those resolved to impose happiness on mankind at home but also those in the West practicing notorious "political expediency" in other forms and saying that the aim justifies the means. This is not Russia's fault that the 20th century confirmed what Dostoevsky, Spengler, Sorokin and other thinkers had thought about the historical fate of the West and what they had predicted for it.

We share an experience of willpower free of morals; no wonder Oswald Spengler juxtaposed this Nietzschean tenet to the philosophy of Dostoevsky: "Russian compassion" in which the spirit is dissolved in "fraternal mass." Russia can make its own contribution to the European common stock: many centuries of civilizational and confessional harmony the need for which in Europe will gradually grow up together with the number of migrants from all over the world.

In fact, the very terms "European civilization" and "North Atlantic community" should be extended to include the expanse between Vancouver and Vladivostok, Russia in the first place. This would have resolved the problem the historical West faces in the new context; would have given us all a chance to play a commendable role when dealing with other global partners. Cooperation of the leading players — Russia, Europe and the United States — would have served the foundation of the region's political unity.

We should harmonize our relations and interests; we should draw closer to one another and encourage cultural and economic interpenetration. Those who hope to tie Moscow up to positions agreed upon without it would toil in vain. The crisis of confidence requires concerted efforts at all levels. One can even expect that the political elites of all states will be forced to adjust the national interests to the interests of partners and the world community as a whole.

All tragedies of the 19th and 20th centuries were rooted in the crisis of the European society the traditional foundations of which had been destroyed by numerous revolutions. The world fell victim to what Zbigniew Brzezinski called “the centuries-long civil war within the West.” Only when the Cold War and its geopolitical imperatives hit impasse, it became possible with new technological foundations to create a sustainable and socially-oriented economic and social model with universal suffrage and reliance on the fairly numerous middle class.

The new world order was ripening inside the old, West-oriented world; the eternal dialectics of the process explained the larger part of human history and explains what we can see now; it helps us accept the ideologically uncommitted verdict of history. Indeed, one common permanent crisis of global governance was responsible for the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Soviet Union disintegration, the failure of attempts to use force to resolve current international complications and the present financial and economic upheavals traced down to the time when the lessons of the Great Depression of the turn of the 1930s were forgotten and dismantling of the financial regulatory mechanisms began in 1982. Today, like many times in the past, we should readjust the mechanism of global governance to the new realities so that it would reflect, rather than reject the world’s cultural and civilizational variety.

The old social and cultural order is being replaced with a new, another convergent stage of world development and international relations before our eyes. The new picture of the world will include the best elements created by the West, important for all and tested by time and the current crisis. Other civilizations will make their own, no less important, contributions. This will serve the platform of concerted efforts to restore the manageability of world development.

On the whole, the conditions in which international relations will be de-ideologized and de-militarized and in which they will acquire the principles of tolerance and pluralism, coexistence of various models of social-economic and social development and value systems are ripening.

Not everyone is prepared to embrace this: some are still looking into the past and tend to go on playing the zero-sum game in which some of the players ensured their security and economic interests at the expense of others. We are still aware of the inertia of the “unipolar momentum” and everything related to it up to and including the cavalier treatment of international laws. A European Security Treaty and related negotiations can become another remedy. It is signally important to achieve an agreement that will help us overcome the ideological barriers of the Cold War and explain the world developments in more fundamental and non-confrontational categories.