RUSSIA'S OVERTURES INTO GEORGIA: SIGNS OF A NEW COLD WAR?

By

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Recently, David Miliband, the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, speaking in Kiev, stated that Russia was "more isolated, less trusted and less respected" as a result of its actions in Georgia.[i] Mr. Miliband placed the onus for avoiding a new Cold War firmly on President Dmitry Medvedev of Russia. "The Russian President says he is not afraid of a new Cold War. We don't want a new Cold War. He has a big responsibility not to start one," he said.[ii]

The chorus of disgruntled voices also included that of Nicolas Sarkozy, the French President, Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Germany's foreign minister and Bernard Kouchner, the French foreign minister. In a joint statement, further marking the isolation of Russia from what is usually the G8, the US, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan said that Moscow's "excessive use of military force in Georgia and its

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continued occupation of parts of Georgia" violated Tbilisi's sovereignty.[iii] "We call unanimously on the Russian government to implement in full the six-point peace plan brokered by President Sarkozy on behalf of the EU, in particular to withdraw its forces behind the pre-conflict lines," the G7 said.[iv] Russia's recent overtures into Georgia have also been compared by spokesmen of various European governments to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in the year 1968. In fact, parallels go far beyond the seemingly anarchic scenario that has wrecked Georgia. The year 2008 also happens to be the 40th anniversary of the crushing of the Prague Spring Movement. President Dmitry Medvedev of Russia has recently termed the Western interference into the Georgian incident as the beginning of a new Cold War. He has stated it clearly without mincing words that Russia is not afraid of anything including the prospect of a Cold War.[v] On September 1, 2008, an emergency meeting was held of the Council of the European Union at Brussels, where it was clearly stated in the communiqué[vi] that followed several issues that needed to be explored in order to bring the conflict to a standstill.

Thus, the belligerent attitudes that have straddled both sides of the world are now fuelling fears that a new Cold War is in the making. In order to understand the gravity of the situation as well as to minutely analyse the consequences that may emerge from this ongoing conflict, retrospection is needed and an in depth study into the genesis of the crisis is of utmost importance.

The Problem of South Ossetia and Abkhazia

Both breakaway republics of Georgia - Abkhazia and South Ossetia - are striving for a future that is independent of Georgia, but each has a very different history.

This particular section wishes to illustrate the divergent, yet synchronised history of both these republics.

Abkhazia

Early history

Between 9th and 6th centuries BC, the territory of modern Abkhazia became a part of the ancient Georgian kingdom of Colchis (Kolkha), which was absorbed in 63 BC into the Kingdom of Egrisi. Greek traders established ports along the Black Sea shoreline. One of those ports, Dioscurias, eventually developed into modern Sukhumi, Abkhazia's traditional capital.[vii]

The Roman Empire conquered Egrisi in the 1st century AD and ruled it until the 4th century, following which it regained a measure of independence, but remained within the Byzantine Empire's sphere of influence. Abkhazia was made an autonomous principality of the Byzantine Empire in the 7th century — a status it retained until the 9th century, when it was united with the province of Imereti and became known as the Abkhazian Kingdom. In 9th–10th centuries the Georgian kings tried to unify all the Georgian provinces and in 1001 King Bagrat III Bagrationi became the first king of the unified Georgian Kingdom.[viii]

In the 16th century, after the break-up of the united Georgian Kingdom, the area was conquered by the Ottoman Empire, during this time some Abkhazians converted to Islam. The Ottomans were pushed out by the Georgians, who established an autonomous Principality of Abkhazia, ruled by the Shervashidze dynasty.[ix]

Abkhazia within the Russian Empire and Soviet Union

The expansion of the Russian Empire into the Caucasus region led to small-scale but regular conflicts between Russian colonists and the indigenous Caucasian tribes. Eventually the Caucasian War erupted, which ended with Russian conquest of the North and Western Caucasus. Various Georgian principalities were annexed to the empire between 1801 and 1864. The Russians acquired possession of Abhkazia in a piecemeal fashion between 1829 and 1842; but their power was not firmly established until 1864, when they managed to abolish the local principality which was still under Shervashidze rule. Large numbers of Muslim Abkhazians — said to have constituted as much as 60% of the Abkhazian population — emigrated to the Ottoman Empire between 1864 and 1878 together with other Muslim population of Caucasus in the process known as Muhajirism.[x]

The Russian Revolution of 1917 led to the creation of an independent Georgia (which included Abkhazia) in 1918. In 1921, the Bolshevik Red Army invaded Georgia and ended its short-lived independence. Abkhazia was made a Soviet republic. In 1931, Stalin made it an autonomous republic within Soviet Georgia. Despite its nominal autonomy, it was subjected to strong central rule from central Soviet authorities. Georgian became the official language. Purportedly, Lavrenty Beria encouraged Georgian migration to Abkhazia, and many took up the offer and resettled there. Russians also moved into Abkhazia in great numbers.[xi]

The repression of the Abkhaz was ended after Stalin's death and Beria's execution, and Abkhaz were given a greater role in the governance of the

republic. As in most of the smaller autonomous republics, the Soviet government encouraged the development of culture and particularly of literature. Ethnic quotas were established for certain bureaucratic posts, giving the Abkhaz a degree of political power that was disproportionate to their minority status in the republic. This was interpreted by some as a 'divide and rule' policy whereby local elites were given a share in power in exchange for support for the Soviet regime. In Abkhazia as elsewhere, it led to other ethnic groups - in this case, the Georgians - resenting what they saw as unfair discrimination, thereby stoking ethnic discord in the republic.

War in Abkhazia

The conflict involved a 13-month long Abkhazian war, beginning in August 1992, with Georgian government forces and militia made of ethnic Georgians who lived in Abkhazia on one side and Russian-backed separatist forces made of ethnic Abkhazians, Armenians and Russians who also lived in Abkhazia on the other side. The separatists were supported by the North Caucasian and Cossack militants and (unofficially) by Russian forces stationed in Gudauta. In April–May, 1998, the conflict escalated once again in the Gali District when several hundred Abkhaz forces entered the villages still populated by Georgians to support the separatist-held parliamentary elections. Despite criticism from the opposition, Eduard Shevardnadze, President of Georgia, refused to deploy troops against Abkhazia. A ceasefire was negotiated on May 20. The hostilities resulted in hundreds of casualties from both sides and an additional 20,000 Georgian refugees.[xii]

In September 2001, around 400 Chechen fighters and 80 Georgian guerrillas appeared in the Kodori Valley in extremely controversial conditions. The

Chechen-Georgian paramilitaries advanced as far as Sukhumi, but finally were repelled by Abkhaz and Gudauta based Russian peacekeepers.[xiii]

The Saakashvili Era

The new Georgian government of President Mikheil Saakashvili promised not to use force and to resolve the problem only by diplomacy and political talks.[xiv] Georgia also decried the unlimited issuing of Russian passports in Abkhazia with subsequent payment of retirement pensions and other monetary benefits by Russia, which Georgia considered to be economic support of separatists by the Russian government.[xv]

In May 2006 the Coordinating Council of Georgia's Government and Abkhaz separatists was convened for the first time since 2001.[xvi] In late July the 2006 Kodori crisis erupted, resulting in the establishment of the de jure Government of Abkhazia in Kodori. Currently, the Abkhaz side demands reparations from the Georgian side of $13 billion in US currency for damages in this conflict. The Georgian side dismisses these claims.[xvii] On May 15, 2008 United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution recognising the right of all refugees (including victims of reported "ethnic cleansing") to return to Abkhazia and their property rights. It "regretted" the attempts to alter pre-war demographic composition and called for the "rapid development of a timetable to ensure the prompt voluntary return of all refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes."[xviii]

On August 10, 2008, the war in South Ossetia spread to Abkhazia, where separatist rebels and the Russian air force launched an all-out attack on Georgian forces. Abkhazia's pro-Moscow separatist President Sergei Bagapsh said that his

troops had launched a major "military operation" to force Georgian troops out of the Kodori Gorge, which they still controlled.[xix] As a result of this attack, Georgian troops were driven out of Abkhazia entirely. On August 26, 2008, Russia officially recognized both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.[xx]

South Ossetia

South Ossetia is a region in the South Caucasus, formerly the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Most of it has been de facto independent from Georgia since it declared independence[xxi] as the Republic of South Ossetia early in the 1990s during the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. The capital of the region is Tskhinvali. In the 1920s, Ossetian lands were divided between Russia to the north and Georgia to the south, creating the boundaries of present day North and South Ossetia. With both Georgia and Russia belonging to the Soviet Union, these boundaries meant little at the time. South Ossetia, with a population of 70,000, has close ties to the neighboring region of North Ossetia in Russia and once had the status of an autonomous region within Georgia.[xxii]

The first major conflict between the sides took place in 1918-1920. It began in a series of uprisings in the Ossetian-inhabited areas of what is now South Ossetia. The uprisings were against the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic, which claimed several thousand lives and left painful memories among the two communities. Following the 1921 Red Army invasion of Georgia, the Soviet Government declared South Ossetia to be an autonomous oblast within the new Transcaucasian Republic in April 1922.[xxiii]

During the Soviet period, South Ossetians were granted a certain degree of autonomy over matters of language and education in their territory. At the same time, however, nationalist groups in Georgia were beginning to accumulate support, leading to renewed South Ossetian-Georgian tensions, which would come to a head in the late 1980s. The South Ossetian Popular Front was created in 1988 as a response to increasing nationalist sentiments in Georgia. By 1989, the Popular Front came to power in South Ossetia and on November 10, 1989, demanded that the "oblast" be made an autonomous "republic." The Georgian Government immediately rejected this decision, leading to protests and demonstrations on both sides. The Georgian leaders did not meet the demands of the South Ossetians and went so far as to ban all regional political parties in September 1990 during parliamentary elections. Soviet leaders approved of unification with North Ossetia, located in Russia, but Georgian leaders did not. A South Ossetian declaration of independence (within the USSR) in September of 1990 was met with a firm negation from the Georgian Government.[xxiv]

The autonomous areas of South Ossetia and Abkhazia added to the problems of Georgia's post-Soviet governments. The first major crisis was in the South Ossetian Autonomous Region. In December 1990, Georgian leader Gamsakhurdia summarily abolished the region's autonomous status within Georgia in response to its longtime efforts to gain independence, and declared a state of emergency in the region. When the South Ossetian regional legislature took its first steps toward secession and union with the North Ossetian Autonomous Republic of Russia, Georgian forces invaded. The resulting conflict lasted throughout 1991, causing thousands of casualties and creating tens of thousands of refugees on both sides of the Georgian-Russian border. Yeltsin mediated a cease-fire in June 1992.[xxv] The June 24, 1992, Sochi Agreement established a cease-fire between the Georgian and South Ossetian forces and

defined both a zone of conflict around the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali and a security corridor along the border of South Ossetian territories.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) agreed to monitor the ceasefire and facilitate negotiations. The OSCE has a mission in Georgia that has sought to promote negotiations between the conflicting parties, and the United Nations has chaired negotiations toward a settlement since 1993. The United States urged the sides to make progress within the U.N. framework in areas such as human rights, civilian policing and the return of internally displaced persons.[xxvi]

The War of 2008

The 2008 South Ossetia War was a land, air and sea war fought between Georgia, on one side, and the separatist regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the Russian Federation, on the other. Ongoing occasional skirmishes escalated to a war early in the morning[xxvii] of 8 August 2008, when Georgia launched a large-scale attack against the break-away region of South Ossetia.[xxviii] This was followed by a large-scale Russian counter-attack into Georgian territory. In five days of fighting, Georgian forces were ousted from both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. A preliminary ceasefire was signed on 14 August - 16 August 2008.[xxix]

The prelude to the conflict began with violent clashes on Wednesday, August 6, 2008 with both sides claiming having been fired upon by the other. The Georgian interior ministry indicated Georgian forces had returned fire only after South Ossetian positions shelled Georgian-controlled villages and accused the South Ossetian side of "trying to create an illusion of serious escalation, an illusion of war."[xxx] South Ossetia denied provoking the conflict.[xxxi]

On 4 August 2008 five battalions of the Russian 58th Army were moved to the vicinity of the Roki Tunnel that links South Ossetia with North Ossetia.[xxxii]
On 7 of August Georgian and Ossetian forces agreed on ceasefire.[xxxiii] In the early hours of 8 August 2008, a massive attack of Georgian troops, armour and air force on a South Ossetian-controlled territory and repeated artillery shelling of the capital, Tskhinvali with multiple rocket launchers began.[xxxiv] AFP, quoting a spokesman of the Georgian Interior Ministry, stated that three Russian Sukhoi Su-24 aircraft had intruded on Georgian airspace, attacking some targets in the Tskhinvali region. On the same day, twelve Russian peacekeepers were killed and nearly 150 injured.[xxxv]

Heavy fighting was reported in Tskhinvali for most of 8 August, with Georgian forces attempting to push Ossetians slowly from the city.[xxxvi] The following day, Russia deployed forces into South Ossetia to remove Georgian forces from South Ossetia. Additionally, Russia targeted Georgia's military infrastructure to reduce Georgia's ability to conduct another incursion. On 22 August, following a negotiated cease-fire between Georgia and Russia, Russia pulled its forces back to Russia and South Ossetia, leaving military contingents disbursed throughout various areas as observation and security posts.

On August 10, 2008, the war in South Ossetia spread to Abkhazia, where separatist rebels and the Russian air force launched an all-out attack on Georgian forces. Abkhazia's pro-Moscow separatist President Sergei Bagapsh said that his troops had launched a major “military operation” to force Georgian troops out of the Kodori Gorge, which they still controlled.[xxxvii] As a result of this attack, Georgian troops were driven out of Abkhazia entirely. On August 26, 2008, Russia officially recognized both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.[xxxviii]

A new "Cold War" or a new "Cold Peace"?

The Russian invasion of Georgia on August 8 has raised questions about the future of Washington's relations with Moscow, the strategic ambitions of the Medvedev-Putin regime, and the future of NATO enlargement in the Black Sea region. It has also raised the question as to whether these volatile events in the Caucasus will lead to a new "Cold War" or a new "Cold Peace". Does it herald the coming of a new era of open East-West confrontation or will it graduate towards suppressed hostilities that may flare up from time to time? Who is primarily at fault? Is it the imperialistic ambitions of a new America straddling a unipolar world or is it the Great Russian bear which has woken up from its decade old hibernation? How much is NATO responsible for this dénouement? And what role does a new emerging China play in this war of words? This section of the article will focus on the vignettes that are a part of this complex game of world politics. It will further attempt to delve deep into the geopolitical ambitions of the region taking into account the volatile ambitions of the ethnic groups that dot the wintry landscape of the Caucasus.

By the time President Vladimir Putin prepared to host the summit of the G-8 (the group of eight highly industrialized nations) in St. Petersburg in July 2006, it was no longer a closely guarded a secret that relations between Russia and the West had begun to fray. After more than a decade of talk about Russia's "integration" into the West and a "strategic partnership" between Moscow and Washington, U.S. and European officials were publicly voicing their concern over Russia's domestic political situation and its relations with the former Soviet republics. In a May 4, 2006, speech in Lithuania, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney accused the

Kremlin of “unfairly restricting citizens' rights” and using its energy resources as “tools of intimidation and blackmail.”[xxxix]

The West deserved some of the blame for the shift in Russian foreign policy. The sudden collapse of Soviet power and the speed of German reunification took the United States and Europe by surprise. European governments, led by France, responded by transforming the European Community into a more tightly knit European Union (EU), while deferring the question of what to do about Eastern Europe and Russia. Washington, meanwhile, focused on managing the ever-weakening Soviet Union and rejoicing in its victory in the Cold War, neglecting to define a strategy for post-Soviet Russia. President George H. W. Bush's “new world order,” articulated when the Soviet Union still existed, asked only that the Soviets stop their meddling around the globe. Only later did policymakers start thinking about organizing a true post-Cold War order, and when they did, their approach to handling post-Soviet Russia almost guaranteed failure.[xl]

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989, Western governments created a multitude of partnerships with their former communist adversaries in an effort to project their values and influence beyond the ruins of the wall. They hoped that some countries would quickly join Europe, now “whole and free,” while others would gravitate toward it more slowly. The conflict in the Balkans dampened this early enthusiasm and demonstrated the United States' aloofness and Europe's weakness in the face of the forces released by the end of the superpower confrontation.[xli]

Washington's crucial error lay in its propensity to treat post-Soviet Russia as a defeated enemy. The United States and the West did win the Cold War, but victory for one side does not necessarily mean defeat for the other. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Russian President Boris Yeltsin, and their advisers believed

that they had all joined the United States' side as victors in the Cold War. They gradually concluded that communism was bad for the Soviet Union, and especially Russia. In their view, they did not need outside pressure in order to act in their country's best interest.[xlii]

Despite numerous opportunities for strategic cooperation over the past 17 years, Washington's diplomatic behavior has left the unmistakable impression that making Russia a strategic partner has never been a major priority. The administrations of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush assumed that when they needed Russian cooperation, they could secure it without special effort or accommodation. The Clinton administration in particular appeared to view Russia like postwar Germany or Japan -- as a country that could be forced to follow U.S. policies and would eventually learn to like them. They seemed to forget that Russia had not been occupied by U.S. soldiers or devastated by atomic bombs. Russia was transformed, not defeated. This profoundly shaped its responses to the United States.[xliii]

Misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the end of the Cold War have been significant factors in fueling misguided U.S. policies toward Russia. Although Washington played an important role in hastening the fall of the Soviet empire, reformers in Moscow deserve far more credit than they generally receive. Gorbachev’s dramatic reduction of Soviet subsidies for states in the Eastern bloc, his withdrawal of support for old-line Warsaw Pact regimes, and perestroika created totally new political dynamics in Eastern Europe and led to the largely peaceful disintegration of various communist regimes and the weakening of Moscow's influence in the region. Ronald Reagan contributed to this process by increasing the pressure on the Kremlin, but it was Gorbachev, not the White House, who ended the Soviet empire.[xliv]

The Reagan and first Bush administrations understood the dangers of a crumbling superpower and managed the Soviet Union's decline with an impressive combination of empathy and toughness. They treated Gorbachev respectfully but without making substantive concessions at the expense of U.S. interests. When the first Bush administration rejected Soviet appeals not to launch an attack against Saddam Hussein after Iraq invaded Kuwait, the White House worked hard to pay proper heed to Gorbachev. As a result, the United States was able to simultaneously defeat Saddam and maintain close cooperation with the Soviet Union, largely on Washington's terms.[xlv]

Despite his focus on domestic issues during the campaign, Clinton came into office with a desire to help Russia. The administration arranged significant financial assistance for Moscow, primarily through the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As late as 1996, Clinton was so eager to praise Yeltsin that he even compared Yeltsin's decision to use military force against separatists in Chechnya to Abraham Lincoln's leadership in the American Civil War.[xlvi]

The Clinton administration's greatest failure was its decision to take advantage of Russia's weakness. The administration tried to get as much as possible for the United States politically, economically, and in terms of security in Europe and the former Soviet Union before Russia recovered from the tumultuous transition. Former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott has also revealed that U.S. officials even exploited Yeltsin's excessive drinking during face-to-face negotiations. Many Russians believed that the Clinton administration was doing the same with Russia writ large.[xlvii]

Other aspects of the Clinton administration's foreign policy further heightened Russia's resentment. NATO expansion -- especially the first wave, which involved the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland -- was not a big problem in and of itself. Most Russians were prepared to accept NATO enlargement as an

unhappy but unthreatening development -- until the 1999 Kosovo crisis. When NATO went to war against Serbia, despite strong Russian objections and without approval from the UN Security Council, the Russian elite and the Russian people quickly came to the conclusion that they had been profoundly misled and that NATO remained directed against them.[xlviii]

In late 1999, Putin, then prime minister, made a major overture to the United States just after ordering troops into Chechnya. He was troubled by Chechen connections with al Qaeda and the fact that Taliban-run Afghanistan was the only country to have established diplomatic relations with Chechnya. Motivated by these security interests, Putin suggested that Moscow and Washington cooperate against al Qaeda and the Taliban. This initiative came after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the 1998 bombing of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, by which time the Clinton administration had more than enough information to understand the mortal danger the United States faced from Islamic fundamentalists.[xlix]

But Clinton and his advisers, frustrated with Russian defiance in the Balkans and the removal of reformers from key posts in Moscow, ignored this overture. Thus they sought to cement the results of the Soviet Union's disintegration by bringing as many post-Soviet states as possible under Washington's wing. They pressed Georgia to participate in building the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, running from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean and bypassing Russia. They encouraged Georgia's opportunistic president, Eduard Shevardnadze, to seek NATO membership and urged U.S. embassies in Central Asia to work against Russian influence in the region. Finally, they dismissed Putin's call for U.S.-Russian counterterrorist collaboration as desperate neo-imperialism and an attempt to reestablish Russia's waning influence in Central Asia.

When George W. Bush came to power in January 2001, eight months after Putin became president of Russia; his administration faced a new group of relatively unknown Russian officials. Keen to differentiate its policy from Clinton's, the Bush team did not see Russia as a priority; many of its members saw Moscow as corrupt and undemocratic -- and weak. Although this assessment was accurate, the Bush administration lacked the strategic foresight to reach out to Moscow. Bush and Putin did develop good personal chemistry, however. When they first met, at a June 2001 summit in Slovenia, Bush famously vouched for Putin's soul and democratic convictions. The events of September 11, 2001, dramatically changed Washington's attitude toward Moscow and prompted a strong outpouring of emotional support for the United States in Russia. Despite this newfound cooperation, relations remained strained in other areas. Bush's announcement in December 2001 that the United States would withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, one of the last remaining symbols of Russia's former superpower status, further wounded the Kremlin's pride. Likewise, Russian animosity toward NATO only grew after the alliance incorporated the three Baltic states, two of which -- Estonia and Latvia -- had unresolved disputes with Russia relating principally to the treatment of ethnic Russian minorities.[1]

Georgia soon became a battleground. President Mikheil Saakashvili has been seeking to use Western support, particularly from the United States, as his principal tool in reestablishing Georgian sovereignty over the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where Russian-backed separatists have fought for independence from Georgia since the early 1990s. And Saakashvili has not just been demanding the return of the two Georgian enclaves; he has been openly positioning himself as the leading regional advocate of "colour revolutions" and the overthrow of leaders sympathetic to Moscow. He has portrayed himself as a champion of democracy and an eager supporter of U.S. foreign policy, going so far as to send Georgian troops to Iraq in 2004 as part of

the coalition force. The fact that he was elected with 96 percent of the vote -- a suspiciously high number -- along with his control of parliament and Georgian television, has provoked little concern outside the country. Nor has the arbitrary prosecution of business leaders and political rivals. When Zurab Zhvania -- Georgia's popular prime minister and the only remaining political counterweight to Saakashvili -- died in 2005 under mysterious circumstances involving an alleged gas leak, members of his family publicly rejected the government's account of the incident with a clear implication that they believed Saakashvili's regime had been involved.[li]

On September 10, 2008, in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian War, Russia circulated a draft UN Security Council calling resolution for an embargo on arms sales to Georgia, after the United States announced measures to rebuild the South Caucasus country's military.[lii] After presenting the draft Russian UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin said: “the unrestrained militarization of Georgia in recent years, backed by the United States and certain other countries, certainly contributed to the act of aggression committed by [Georgian President Mikheil] Saakashvili against South Ossetia.”[liii] The Russian envoy said the issue of Georgia's demilitarization could be raised at international talks to be held in Geneva on October 15 on Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are now both recognized by Russia as independent countries. Also, Russia formally established diplomatic relations with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov announced that 3,800 service personnel would be sent to each republic to defend against potential attacks from Georgia.[liv]

As a result of the above mentioned events, it has now become quite clear to all and sundry that the erstwhile unipolar world has gradually moved towards and has finally emerged as a sharply fractured bipolar world. On the one hand, there is the looming Russian bear ensuring on carving out a backyard in the Caucasus, and on the other side of the spectrum is an unsure Europe led by an America on

the threshold of a major Presidential election. It would be pertinent at this juncture to explore the varied interests that each player may have in fuelling the volatile situation in the Caucasus and in reaping benefits from the same. It is also important that the gamut of international politics hinging on

Conclusion

With the volatile situation prevailing in the Caucasus, it is difficult to conclude at this point of time whether the emerging world scenario boasts of a new "Cold War" or a new "Cold Peace."

In response to the war, Russia faced strong criticism from the US, the United Kingdom, Poland, France, Germany, Sweden and the Baltic states. In contrast, Italy was more supportive of Russia, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Franco Frattini stating "We cannot create an anti-Russia coalition in Europe, and on this point we are close to Putin's position".[lv] The unilateral recognition by Russia was met by condemnation from NATO, the UN Secretary-General, the OSCE Chairman, the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, Foreign Ministers of the G7, and the government of Ukraine due to alleged violation of Georgia's territorial integrity, and United Nations Security Council resolutions. Russian policy of recognition was supported by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation although the SCO Group didn't back it explicitly.[lvi] Also in response to the war, Viktor Yushchenko, the president of Ukraine, said he intended to negotiate increasing the rent on the Russian naval base at Sevastopol in the Crimea.[lvii]

It is thus, a clear division of interests, ambitions and foreign policy visions. Russia and the West are once more on the brink of a new world order that seems to dangerously veer towards a world that resembles the pre 1991 era of East-West confrontation. Whether an amalgamation of interests is possible or divergent policy options would further fracture relations between the two hemispheres remains to be seen. It would be prudent to conclude by stating that common grounds need to be rediscovered and refurnished in the arena of diplomacy. Russia should no longer be treated as a fallen superpower and the West should be more realistic in envisioning a world that does not go back to the "frosty" days of the Cold War.

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