

Russia's UN Security Council Agenda

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Last May 1, Russia assumed the presidency of the United Nations Security Council in accordance with the norms of the alphabetical rotation established by member states.

The UN General Assembly's sixty-third session called on member states to participate more internationally. This is very important for the Russian Federation (RF) because after the Soviet Union disintegrated, the RF said it wanted the UN to have more of an impact on solving recent international conflicts and regulating security.

The Russian government has also emphasized the need for a multi-polar world order, as opposed to the last Bush administration's Project for the New American Century (PNAC) that advocated U.S. unilateralism.¹ Russia's position is that the UN has demonstrated its effectiveness in using political-diplomatic instruments to resolve world conflicts, a view that coincides with Mexico's tradition. This capacity is very important for Russia in the face of regional crises inside its territory, which is why it considers it fundamental that UN efforts be coordinated with regional and sub-regional bodies to bring about peace. The RF systematically participates in favor of preserving the UN's central role in collective peace-keeping and international security efforts.

A second issue on its agenda is its position *vis-à-vis* UN reform, which it considers positive and indispensable for guaranteeing increased effectiveness in preserving its inter-governmental character.

Russia thinks that the Security Council should be more representative, but without affecting its ability to function. The RF has proposed that if no agreement is reached among the proponents of different models for broadening out the Security Council, an intermediate solution would be a limited increase in the number of non-permanent members, who would have longer tenures and could be re-elected.

Another important agreement between Mexico and Russia is their interest in strengthening the UN's central role in



UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon.

David Gray/Reuters

coordinating the fight against drug trafficking in the following ways:

1. Toughening up international control over traffic in the precursors of synthetic drugs.
2. Ending the use of the internet for drug trafficking.
3. Creating an optimal international system for fighting drug trafficking that will be able to respond appropriately to emerging challenges. For Russia, the case of Afghanistan needs urgent attention because it is the world's leading opium producer (93 percent). This is why the RF has proposed creating a UN-coordinated supervisory body with the participation of Afghanistan's neighboring states.

In the Middle East, Russia underlines the importance of renewing the Palestine-Israeli dialogue to come to a favorable agreement. It is for the creation of an independent, sovereign Palestinian state that will be able to make peace and establish security with the state of Israel.

One particularly burning issue for the RF are the so-called "frozen conflicts" of the former Soviet Union. The Russian position is that they should not be politicized; the position of the GUAM group (Georgia, the Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) is the opposite. Mexico, for its part, has maintained its traditional policy favoring dialogue for resolving these delicate conflicts.

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While Russia presides over the Security Council, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon must prepare a report to the council that must include proposals for renewing the UN observation mission in Georgia and Abkhazia, in accordance with SC Resolution 1866, passed February 13, 2009.² The resolution stipulates that by June 15, 2009, the secretary general must propose the legal format for the UN mission in those areas of the Caucasus. After Georgia's August 2008 attack on South Ossetia and Russia's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia's independence, the UN observers' mission in Georgia officially changed its name to the "UN Mission" without specifying a geographical area.

This conflict is central to Russia's agenda because Ossetian civilians and Russian peacekeepers were wounded or killed during the Georgian government's attack on Tskhinvali, South Ossetia's capital, at midnight August 7, 2008.

Nevertheless, Georgia's Ministry of Foreign Relations denied that the Russian peacekeeping forces had been attacked. Then, the Georgian high command announced that there would be no peace talks, and Georgia began an attack on the government and the Republic of South Ossetia.³ In response, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin labeled the massacre genocide and went to the North Ossetia capital, Vladikavkaz, to organize aid to the South Ossetian refugees.⁴ Putin also called into question whether South Ossetia could be legally reintegrated into Georgia after the attack, thereby paving the way toward recognizing it—as well as Abkhazia—as an independent republic.

The conflict had been "frozen" since the disintegration of the USSR and the 1992 Ossetian war of resistance and was rekindled after Georgia applied for entry to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) at its last summit in Bucharest in April 2008, where member nations stated that both the Ukraine and Georgia may be admitted. The conflict broke out when Georgian President Mijail Saakashvili decided to attack South Ossetia, setting off the massacre mentioned above.

After consulting Russia's National Security Council, the Kremlin decided to intervene militarily. According to the Stratfor Center, the precedent of Kosovo's independence proved that Russia had no diplomatic clout in Europe at all. Being forced to retreat from South Ossetia, a border territory where it had troops stationed, would be the latest in a series of humiliations.⁵ But this time, Russia's answer was unequivocal: it not only rejected Georgia's offensive against South Ossetia, but attacked Georgian military objectives

built with NATO assistance in the city of Gori and other key points in Georgia like the port of Poti, to prevent weapons deliveries to the Georgian government.

Stratfor also cites Putin's statements to the effect that it had been a strike against Euro-Asian equilibrium that resulted from a complex Georgian calculation that, in addition to being a "murderous provocation," had electoral ramifications since, in the heat of Russia's reaction to Tbilisi, then-candidate John McCain's ratings in the polls rose four points against Obama's.⁶

Another geopolitically important event followed this attack: Poland and the United States signed an accord to set up U.S. anti-missile defense installations on Polish soil at a time when relations between Moscow and Washington were very tense because of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. In response, Russian ambassador to NATO Dmitri Rogozin declared that this accord confirmed that the system was aimed against Russia.⁷ Putin, for his part, stated in the city

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of Sochi that Russia would be forced to make a military response to NATO's deployment of missiles near its borders, since that was yet another step toward scaling up pressure against Russia. In Putin's opinion, references to certain countries as potential dangers—this is the case of North Korea and Iran—are foolish.⁸

European mediation helped resolve the crisis. Immanuel Wallerstein stated that Russia essentially controls Western Europe's gas supply and that it is not by chance that it was President Sarkozy of France, not Condoleezza Rice, who negotiated the truce between Georgia and Russia. Wallerstein continued to say that the truce contains two essential concessions on the part of Georgia: it committed not to use any kind of force against South Ossetia, and the accord contains no reference to Georgian territorial integrity.⁹ However, Russia reacted to this conflict with a strategic vision dubbed the "Medvedev foreign policy doctrine," based on five points, outstanding among which are:

1. Russia recognizes the primacy of the fundamental principles of international law.
2. The world must be multi-polar. Domination is something we cannot allow. We do not accept a world order in which a single country makes all the decisions, even if it is as serious and influential as the United States. A world of this kind is unstable and threatened by conflict.

In his speech about Georgia's attack against South Ossetia, Dmitri Medvedev stated that in the future, "it depends not only on us but also on our friends and partners in the international community. They have a choice."¹⁰ Stratfor's head of geopolitical analysis, George Friedman, thinks that this provides a basis in doctrine for intervening in these countries if Russia perceives an attack on its interests. According to Friedman, when Medvedev states that Russia has a special interest in certain regions, it is referring to the area of the former Soviet Union.

Thus, incursions by third parties to attempt to undermine pro-Russian governments in this region would be considered threats to Russian interests. Therefore, the Georgian conflict would not be an isolated incident, since Medvedev had stated that Russia was immersed in a geopolitical redefinition of the regional and global international system. In short, Russia is restructuring relations in this geographical area that it calls "abroad, but close to home," whose center is Moscow.

On the other hand, the European Union will have neither the military weight nor the determination to confront Russia. What is more, the Europeans are heavily dependent on Russian natural gas, something that will continue in coming years,

while Russia can survive without selling it to them. This means that the European Union is not a substantial factor in the equation, nor does it seem it will become one in the future. **MM**

NOTES

- ¹ Created in 1997, PNAC is an initiative of the New Citizenship Project. Its aim is to promote U.S. world leadership and hegemony through different actions, including war. A large part of its ideas and members are associated with the neoconservative movement, which is why its ranks have included well-known Republicans like former President George W. Bush. *Weekly Standard* editor William Kristol is PNAC president. Its leadership has seven permanent members, plus a group of directors. For more information, see <http://newamericancentury.org/>. [Editor's Note.]
- ² See <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sc9594.doc.htm>. [Editor's Note.]
- ³ "Tskhinvali is closed," declared the Joint Peacekeeping Command Major General Marat Kulakhmetov, August 8, 2008. See www.iraq.mirror.world.ru, p. 3.
- ⁴ "Departamento de Estado: en Georgia recae parte de la responsabilidad," available on line at www.iraqwar.mirror.world.ru, p. 1.
- ⁵ See several articles published on the Stratfor website at http://www.stratfor.com/node/22361/archive/sf_sitrep?page=121, August 10, 2008. Also, John Saxe-Fernández, "El Cáucaso: polvorín estratégico," *La Jornada*, August 28, 2008, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/08/28/index.php?section=opinion&article=028a1eco>.
- ⁶ Vladimir Putin, "Geopolitical Diary: Decision Time in South Ossetia," available on line at www.stratfor.com/geopolitical_diary/geopolitical_diary_decision_time_south_ossetia, August 8, 2008, p. 3.
- ⁷ According to Rogozin, Poland and the United States' signing of the DAM Accord confirms that the anti-missile shield is aimed at Russia. See Russian News and Information Agency, Novosti, September 15, 2008.
- ⁸ Interview with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin broadcast by Al Jazeera television network, September 28, 2008.
- ⁹ Immanuel Wallerstein, "Ajedrez geopolítico: el trasfondo de una mini-guerra en el Cáucaso," *La Jornada* (Mexico City), September 15, 2008, available on line at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/09/13/index.php?section=opinion&article=032a1mun>.
- ¹⁰ The five points, plus Medvedev and Friedman's opinions can be consulted in George Friedman, "The Medvedev Doctrine and American Strategy," September 2, 2008, available on line at http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/medvedev_doctrine_and_american_strategy. [Editor's Note.]

A Prudent Power? China in the UN Security Council

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Two events in the 1970s frame the current importance of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly. In

1971, when what was then called *détente* began, China established relations with the United States and became a member of the UN, occupying the Security Council seat that had been filled by Taiwan since 1949. When Mao Zedong, the historic leader of the Chinese revolution, died in 1976, the Asian giant had already recovered the centuries-old status as a

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