

US foreign policy

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Is change possible? Crise Georgie/Russie

The US political arena: is a change in the course of American foreign policy possible?

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Yes we can! The country wants change. That is the slogan which won the hearts and minds of Democratic Party voters in the primaries across the nation, leading to the emergence of the Junior Senator from Illinois, Barack Obama, as the Party's nominee.

In the essay which follows I will explore a number of closely interrelated issues: Where has foreign policy fit in the evolving US presidential campaign of 2008? What has been the perceived and actual position on foreign affairs of the candidate who made "change" his cause in the primaries, Barack Obama? Is there a bipartisan foreign policy position, a 'mainstream' in US politics today? What may we expect from the incoming administration in January 2009? The recent events in the Russian-Georgian conflict will be used as an acid test to prove many of the fundamental points that will be set out here. I will conclude with an exploration of what would constitute genuine change if that were on the agenda and how such change might be brought about.

As we know, all politics is domestic and the severe crisis in US credit markets, the marked downturn in the real economy overtook foreign affairs in the Presidential primaries this past spring until the Russian-Georgian conflict in August restored security issues and specifically the possibility of a new Cold War with Russia to a place of preeminence in the Presidential race.

As regards the purely domestic dimension of policy, Mr Obama represents a significant change from the incumbent Bush Administration in a host of social issues, ranging from abolishing tax privileges for the very wealthy, establishing a national health insurance program for the vast majority of the working population, extending still greater and more effective assistance to homeowners facing foreclosure, using tariff and non-tariff means to afford American workers greater protection of their jobs and pump-priming the ailing US economy in line with traditional Democratic Party economic theory

However, Senator Obama initially distanced himself from other Democratic Party presidential candidates precisely in the area of foreign affairs, tapping into the widespread and growing public disapproval of the war in Iraq and presenting himself as the only candidate among the front-runners who had opposed the invasion from the very beginning. In taking this position, he had only one rival, the Congressman from Ohio Dennis Kucinich, whose condemnation of the Iraq War formed part of a wide critique of US foreign and domestic policy. But by his repeated calls for the impeachment of President Bush and Vice President Cheney, in the face of opposition from the party leadership who wanted to keep their eye focused on the electoral campaign and not alienate a substantial part of the population, and by his known position of pacifism, Kucinich marginalized himself. In the early primaries, he garnered less than 1% of the Democratic vote and was forced to drop out of the campaign.

Meanwhile, Obama called for early U.S. withdrawal of combat troops even as the Bush Administration, with the vocal support of Republican front-runner Senator McCain, was implementing its “surge” policy to overwhelm the ongoing bloody insurrection in Iraq. He called for direct dialogue with Iran over its nuclear program at a time when the Administration was loudly pursuing confrontation as a justification for possible US or Israeli strikes. These were unquestionably unorthodox positions.

In this context, it may come as a surprise to learn that as early as in March 2008, the Junior Senator from Illinois was identified by journalists in the know as actually representing conventional wisdom in foreign policy on most issues. [*Preston Keres, “Obama Tends Toward Mainstream on Foreign Policy,” *The Washington Post*, March 3, 2008].

Though Obama’s team of foreign policy advisors was said to be ‘eclectic’ and to include personalities with no experience of working in the nation’s capital, *Post* reporter Preston Keres concluded that “most of the policies outlined in his speeches, in the briefing papers issued by his campaign and in the answers he gave to questions submitted by *The Washington Post* fall well within the mainstream of Democratic and moderate Republican thinking.”

In the spring of 2008, one of the most visible and influential of the outsiders drawn into the campaign who was working in his Senate office already in 2005-2006 was Samantha Powers,

the Pulitzer Prize winning author of a book on genocide that Obama read and held in high esteem. Before striking gold with her book, Powers was a widely published journalist who covered an assortment of flash points in the developing world, including the wars in the former Yugoslavia. She held a professorship at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, of which she was founding director, within the John F. Kennedy School of Government. Highly opinionated and highly outspoken, she nonetheless lacked diplomatic experience. This was her undoing. Powers was forced to resign from the Senator’s team after calling Hilary Clinton a ‘monster’ during an interview while on tour for the Obama campaign in the U.K. and her native Ireland.

Senator Obama’s penchant for surrounding himself with fervent defenders of human rights has most recently been seen in his appointment of another Senior Foreign Policy Advisor, Kim Reed, who was taken on to represent the six million expatriate American voters. Reed’s previous service to the Party was the year or so that she served as Chair of the 40-man Democrats Abroad Russia organization. Reed was at that time seconded to the Moscow office of the international, Washington based law firm where she was employed. During her stint in Russia, she established her credentials as a strong defender of the cause of democracy, vehement critic of President Putin and his alleged crackdown on press and other freedoms.

By his choice of aides, Obama has shown he is well within the Democratic Party tradition of Cold Warriors going back to President Jimmy Carter, if not still earlier to JFK and his ‘best and brightest.’ The unfamiliar concept of *Realpolitik* and accommodation with both the Russian and Chinese Communist regimes even as we pursued war on Communist Viet Nam practiced by the reviled former President Richard Nixon and his foreign born intellectual Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, was replaced by populist policies of defending freedom and making aggressors pay the price.

No Presidential candidate is totally his own man. In the days since the Party acknowledged him as the winner of the primaries, he has felt the warm embrace of the Party stalwarts, who have moved into the inner circle of supporters and advisors. Every effort has been made to assure that the campaign goes beyond Obama's core supporters and brings in the female voters who had previously backed Hilary Clinton, the blue collar workers who had backed Edwards as well as a host of other Democratic and Independent voter groups whose enthusiasm and whose ballot on election day may be decisive in a close race. The result has been a lurching towards centrist positions across all policy issues, domestic and foreign.

This movement culminated on August 23 in his selection of the Democrats' most seasoned elected official in foreign policy matters, Senator Joseph Biden, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as his running mate. Biden has a well known track record of backing what is innocently called 'American engagement in the world' even when this means poking Russia in the eye: backing NATO expansion, including early admission of Georgia and the recognition of Kosovo independence.[*Michael R. Gordon, 'A Democratic Leader on Foreign Policy,' *The New York Times*, August 23, 2008]. He voted with the Bush Administration on military intervention in Iraq. And the only significant departure from the Republican course has been his call for greater collaborative action with America's allies. However, he is also on record as opposing any UN veto over America's foreign policy decisions.

Where exactly is the center ground in American politics, the mainstream on foreign affairs? At the start of the primary season, when the issue of Iraq still dominated the news, we had reason to believe that the country was being torn apart by its hawks and its doves.

This question agitated the American foreign policy establishment as it prepared what will be its 'to do' memos for whomever takes over the White House scheduled for publication in the autumn as the authors hope to secure for themselves positions of influence in the new Administration. We may consider one such study which was promoted by The German Marshall Fund at an event in Brussels early in 2008. The exercise is interesting for its demonstration of how unpragmatic and ideologically blinkered the American expert community has become.

At a presentation entitled "Bridging the Foreign Policy Divide" on February 6, 2008, a couple of American think tank experts summarized the findings of a survey of opinion on foreign policy issues conducted across the political spectrum and across the country in an attempt to find common ground. The event was typical of the road-show format in which senior personalities from the intellectual citadels of the homeland – Palo Alto, Cambridge and Washington - come to enlighten those of us abroad who keep abreast of events only via *The Washington Post* online and the *Foreign Affairs* journal.

The authors expressed genuine surprise at uncovering how broadly based are the assumptions on projection of American power abroad, a strong defense and the like. From their words it is clear that the underpinnings of hegemonic policy go totally unchallenged in what is defined as educated American society. And no breath of fresh air could be expected from the Brussels-based attendees of the presentation, the ex-diplomats and intelligence operatives who show up regularly for this kind of closed circle event in a capital that is very heavy on diplomatic corps and NATO functionaries.

The projection of American power abroad has been formulated in a remarkably consistent, ideological manner and has been executed with a single-mindedness that knows no equivalent in the post WWII years. Under George W. Bush, the US State Department and Department of Defense have been purged of bureaucratic foot-draggers and nay-sayers and have snapped to attention, implementing the post 9/11 policy of worldwide American hegemony that is justified by the War on Terror and defense of freedom-loving peoples and human rights, its ideological cover.

This hegemony is sold domestically in terms of a 'monopolar' world, the world of a single 'superpower' which is unfettered by the artificial constraints of international institutions, whether they be the International Court of Justice in the Hague or the Kyoto Protocol or the United Nations Security Council, and can perform God's own work of maintaining order and righting wrongs around the globe.

This international force for good does what it deems necessary to thwart rogue regimes and the axes of evil, establishing advanced military bases for logistical support and to secure troubled regions by its very presence. At the same time every effort is applied to diminish and 'contain' potential adversaries, those countries which by their military and or economic strength could be in a position to frustrate the operation of a monopolar world, foremost of which are the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China

Within the foreign policy of the Bush Administration, NATO has been made the American "tool kit," (characterization of Wayne Merry, *The National Interest*, 2003**) for not only dealing in the European and Middle East theaters with tactical emergencies and threats but as the strategic focus, for containing and challenging the Russian Federation. The expansion of NATO, first into Eastern Europe, then the Baltic States and now, potentially, into the Ukraine and Georgia bring US military force and its missile defense system to the very borders of the Russian Federation. This geographical encirclement by an American presence in the backyard of the RF not only compromises that state's security but reduces its prestige among difficult neighbors. Meanwhile these physical realities are dismissed by the US Administration and its supporters as mere Russian perceptions that pose no threat.

An equivalent, matching strategic thrust has been made in the Asia-Pacific Region, where the Bush Administration forged an anti-PRC axis with Prime Ministers Abe of Japan and Howard of Australia, for the analogical purpose of serving notice to its regional neighbors that the USA provided an alternative power right under the nose of the Middle Kingdom. The historic disputes between Taiwan and the PRC and between North and South Korea have been the foci of this pact.

And in Central Asia, beginning with logistical bases agreed upon to provide support to the assault on the Taliban in Afghanistan, the US picked up England's 19th Century Grand Game, competing for influence with China and Russia among the energy rich republics. This military arm was supported by an economic arm, in particular the so-called Nabucco gas pipeline, intended not merely to provide Europe with an alternative source to Russia as key energy supplier, but also to pry these republics away from the Russian political orbit.

An extension in South Asia of this policy of enlisting a grand coalition of the forces of good finds expression in the enhanced client status accorded to Pakistan, where perhaps \$1 billion per month of clandestine CIA money

was channeled to President Musharaff and his cohorts, and a new effort to tame India, the traditional champion of Non-aligned Nations which for decades provisioned itself in Russia, through the agreement on civilian nuclear energy.

In Latin America, the US foreign policy of hegemonism is really nothing new. It has been implemented through commercial agreements and military assistance to client states for the stated purpose of combating terrorism and the drugs cartels. This region has been seen by the outside world as the secure American back yard ever since the Monroe Doctrine was first enunciated and the policy initiatives have been largely traditional.

As regards this projection of force abroad, where has there been a divide between the Left and the Right in American politics? The unequivocal answer is that it has been over the quality of execution, over efficacy, over who can do it better. It is all about 'how' rather than 'why,' over whether allies and friends should be consulted more or less, over the appearance of unilateralism rather than consensual policy initiatives. The objectives themselves go unchallenged.

Senior Harvard professor of international affairs Joseph Nye exemplified this in an article in the March-April 2008 issue of Harvard Magazine ["Towards a Liberal Realist Foreign Policy", p. 36]. In the name of liberalism, he dealt out recommendations that in substance as opposed to style scarcely differ from the neoconservative foreign policy of the Bush Administration [see rebuttal "Fixing Foreign Policy" in Letters, Harvard Magazine, May-June 200*].

Push comes to shove in the Congress, particularly in the voting of appropriations bills. Here we find unequivocal evidence of bipartisanship as the Congress, both under its heavy Republican majority of the first six Bush years and most recently under a Democratic majority, has given George W. Bush all the funds he has requested not only for the military actions on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan but for the unending, vastly expensive build-up of American military and diplomatic forces abroad.

In the infamous Senate vote over military intervention in Iraq in 2003 just prior to the American invasion and occupation, only one Senator out of the hundred, the octogenarian Harry Byrd from West Virginia, voted against the motion, saying that it would bring shame upon the nation. Notwithstanding the growing disenchantment with the Iraq war among the public in the years since, the voting opposition to Administration funding bills in support of the war in the Senate, which has picked up such Democratic leading lights as Ted Kennedy, never went beyond a dozen Senators. If we assume that the American democracy is truly functional, this speaks volumes about the national consensus on projection of military might abroad, whatever the consequences to others and to ourselves.

It is a curious irony of fate that at the very time that America's Cold War adversaries have either disintegrated (USSR) or transformed themselves (China) into traditionalist, pragmatic pursuers of the Good Life, the United States has turned into an ideological bastion of human rights and other undying absolutist principles at the expense of and at times in direct contradiction with pragmatic defense of its own interests and in denial of other nations' sovereign interests.

This remarkable change of respective posture in a nation that long prided itself on being matter of fact and rich in common sense has been accompanied by the composition of an ideological mantra that cuts across the usual political divide of Left and Right, to the point where, during the suppression of demonstrations by Buddhist monks in Myanmar or the move against the Dalai Lama's supporters in Lhasa in the run-up to the Olympic Games, you had the likes of Laura Bush and Jane Fonda weeping tears in solidarity.

All of this solicitude is expressed in the name of that Orwellian invention of the past several years, 'the international community,' which, when properly decoded, means the United States and Great Britain, together with any other nation of whatever ranking in the family of nations, however insignificant, corrupt or tainted, that can be cajoled, bullied or bribed into signing on. The 'international community' has now fully supplanted its Cold War antecedent, the 'free world.'

What we have witnessed is the forging of an unholy alliance of the American Right and Left in using a so-called 'values gap' to explain and justify their condemnation of the Russian Federation and other states when there are no specific misdeeds to cite at any given moment.

The 'values gap' points to an alleged contempt for Western democratic and liberal principles. It provides cover for permanent meddling in other nations' domestic affairs in the name of the 'international community,' to the point of forced democratization in the wake of military intervention, as in Iraq. This is an extension of the false logic that democracy breeds peace and so must be actively encouraged. Meanwhile, thanks to this ideological side show, the lessons of World War I are ignored or unlearned.

Rummaging the past for guidelines to the present and future has always been a risky pastime. But if we must do so, let us choose more carefully which past to mine. The Neocons, who have been driving American foreign policy for the last 7 years and have defined the parameters of political discussion, use the period preceding WWII as the only reference. Conveniently it is a period within living memory of at least some of the citizenry. And it fits well with the messianic, ideological cast of mind from the period of the Cold War for which the Neocons are today's standard-bearers. With reference to WWII, we liken the leaders of rogue states to Hitler and his entourage. We liken ethnic conflicts to the Holocaust and genocide. We speak about military intervention as another Sudetenland. And we liken reasonable foreign policy demarches to Chamberlain and appeasement.

However, I would argue that the present world situation much more closely resembles the direct run-up to The Great War, WWI, which was only mildly ideological (the Kaiser as a focus of hatred, Prussian militarism) and was all about economic interests. The hair-triggers put in place before that conflagration were two. Firstly, the formation of opposing alliances that gave *carte blanche* to tiny, volatile emerging client states where extremists could implement their dastardly acts with impunity, looking to the Great Powers to back them up. Secondly, the imperatives of mobilization in an age of great armies, which, once unleashed, led irreversibly to catastrophe. The first strike nuclear option which the United States has reserved to itself effectively inserts a similar doomsday scenario into today's world.

It is remarkable that in the relatively brief period since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States and Europe have also willfully forgotten the concept of MAD, or mutually assured destruction, which may be credited with having kept the peace and a measure of sanity during the decades of Cold War confrontation.

Today the imperative of accommodating the dynamics of change in the world economic and demographic balances by giving greater weight in international institutions to the BRIC countries is totally obscured. Objectively speaking, our present-day preachers of humane values foster the preconditions for worldwide strife.

The American foreign policy establishment's fascination with ideology and high-sounding intellectual constructions side-steps or covers in a fog of words the obvious ongoing worldwide scramble for natural resources – energy, metals – that in the 19th century was openly called empire-building. Apart from some British thinkers relishing the irony of the situation, there are few who identify the present diplomatic dueling between Russia and the U.S. over Central Asia as a resumption of the 19th Century's Great Game.

No one is calling out the corruption of language whereby American friends and protégés such as President Saakashvili in Georgia are celebrated as beacons of democracy and their authoritarian or thuggish misdeeds are hushed up, for the banal but unspoken reason of geographic expediency in finding routes to market for non-Russian controlled energy resources.

It is very sad to note the unholy alliance of the American Left and Right in "advancing democracy" to the detriment of all other foreign policy missions. The American Scholar (Phi Beta Kappa publication), the New York Review of Books [*Sergei Kovalev, 'Tsar Putin,' The New York Review of Books, vol 54, no. 18, Nov 22, 2007], CNN, Fox News: regardless of which side of the aisles they may sit on other issues, all spoke with one voice in slamming Russia; they turned over the microphone to the handful of Putin haters in the months and weeks preceding the Duma and then the presidential elections in Russia of 2007. They did so without informing their viewers or readers about just who the self-proclaimed freedom-fighters are and where they came from.

This bias with respect to Russia is by no means exceptional. Rather, it exemplifies widely used sham intellectual or academic argumentation drawing either uncritically or tendentiously on expert witnesses to the crimes or abuses of the highlighted rogue regime of the day.

There is an overarching tendency of the American foreign policy establishment and the media to present as investigative reporting what is, in fact, nothing more than translations of the publicly available self-criticism of societies otherwise condemned for being muzzled. The dissidents in these societies are given a public dais without their self-interest and bias being exposed to critical examination. It is this kind of skewed intelligence that made possible the launch of the War in Iraq. And though the falseness of the assertions on 'weapons of mass destruction' in Baghdad is now commonly acknowledged even in the USA, the way to market of such deliberately concocted disinformation is not systematically recognized, as though the errors on Iraq were ad hoc and there are no broader lessons to be learned.

In conclusion, the gravest problem facing US foreign policy is not that the country is being rent asunder by its feuding hawks and its doves, but precisely that there is too much consensus, too much stifling of debate in the

name of patriotism for the country's own good. The imperial presidency may come under attack but not the imperialist foreign policy and the establishment inside Washington's Beltway has closed ranks against fresh thinking.

The reaction of the US political elite to the Russian-Georgia war has been an acid test that reveals exactly this consistency of psalm books across the American political congregation of whatever denomination. At the same time it gives the most specific and clearly drawn indications of what degree of change in foreign policy we may see from the incoming Administration in January 2009 whether it be Obama's or McCain's.

The initial reaction of the Bush Administration to Georgia's military strike to retake control of the breakaway province of South Ossetia on August 8 and to the Russian counter-strike was moderate. From his remote position at the Beijing Olympic Games, President Bush called upon both sides to stop hostilities and he sought out fellow Olympics attendee Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to discuss ways of resolving the crisis behind closed doors.

However, when the full reality of Russian victory became clear and Russian forces advanced into Georgia proper to force President Saakashvili to sue for peace, the Administration changed its tone, beginning with Vice President Dick Cheney's denunciation of this alleged Russian 'aggression.' Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice then appeared before the press to condemn what was called the 'disproportionate use of force' by the Russians.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced that the United States would not stand idly by while its staunch ally in the Iraq war, democratic Georgia, was being mauled by an adversary. Planeloads of humanitarian assistance would be immediately dispatched to Tbilisi and warships laden with additional provisions would soon set out for the Russian controlled Georgian port of Poti. In order to avoid any misinterpretation of intent that might have dangerous consequences should the US and Russian forces come into direct conflict over the aid mission, Gates told the press flatly that the US was planning no military action against the Russians and would only defend its own property stationed in Georgia if attacked.

By August 11, the entire US political elite and media joined in a wholly one-sided interpretation of the events and deplored Russian actions.

Republican Presidential hopeful John McCain was long before known for his anti-Putin views. One of his noted policy points as a self-styled maverick within his party had been his criticism of the Bush Administration for coddling the Russians. Specifically he was on record calling for the Russians to be expelled from the G8 club of leading industrial democracies. As the New York Times remarks, McCain has maintained very close relations with Georgia's President Saakashvili and his top foreign policy adviser, Randy Scheunemann, formerly worked as a paid lobbyist for the Georgian government [Clifford J. Levy, "Putin Suggests U.S. Provocation in Georgia," *The New York Times*, August 28, 2008]. Now, Senator asked that the G7 convene urgently for the purpose of ejecting the Russians and called upon Secretary Rice to travel to Europe 'to establish a common Euro-Atlantic position aimed at ending the war and supporting the independence of Georgia.' Russia had to be reminded of the 'benefits they enjoy from being part of the civilized world' and the corresponding obligations to show 'respect

for the values, stability and peace of that world.’ This strongly worded, bombastic message, of course, contained only a meager threat to the Russians: to be bounced from the world’s most exclusive and prestigious club.

From his vacation retreat in Hawaii, Senator Obama took one additional day before issuing his own 5-minute statement on developments in the Caucasus. When he did speak, the content and the tone of his message differed very little from his Republican opponent. Notwithstanding his reputation as a skilled debater and rigorous thinker, Obama offhandedly remarked that we could dispense with examination of ‘how this conflict started’ and formulate our judgment based on the present state of affairs on the ground, with the Russians clearly defined as an illegal occupying force in territorial Georgia. He delivered an unqualified condemnation of Russian action which he suggested violated the Olympic spirit of the games now going on in Beijing. He implied this should force reconsideration of last year’s award of host nation status for the 2014 Winter Games. Moreover, as he astutely pointed out, it would be deplorable for Olympic events to be held in Sochi, in such close proximity to the aggression in the Caucasus.

On August 11, *The Washington Post* carried several op-ed page analyses of Georgian-Russian conflict by its heavyweight regular contributors. These were syndicated and brought to a broad public around the world a rabidly anti-Russian interpretation of the events.

Advisor to the McCain campaign, senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Robert Kagan [‘*’Putin Makes His Move’] opened his diatribe with an amazing dismissal of the *causae belli*: ‘The details of who did what to precipitate Russia’s war against Georgia are not very important. Do you recall the precise details of the Sudeten Crisis that led to Nazi Germany’s invasion of Czechoslovakia?’ Behind it all, he insisted, was a resurgent Russia, which used the Ossetian crisis as a pretext for pursuing its grand strategy to fan ‘Russian great power nationalism at home and to expand Russia’s power abroad.’

As if to provide a balanced opinion page, the *Post* offered a companion article from policy analysts on the Democratic side: “Black Sea Watershed” by Ronald D. Asmus and Richard Holbrooke. Holbrooke would require no introduction to the newspaper’s readership: he had served as US ambassador to the United Nations in the Clinton Administration, and he also had a highly visible role in regulating the Balkan conflicts resulting from the Yugoslav civil wars. Most recently his name has figured among leading contenders for Secretary of State in any incoming Obama Administration. Asmus was a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Clinton Administration and today is Executive Director of a Center within the German Marshall Fund, the hosts of the above mentioned conference in Brussels. According to his online biography, Dr Asmus has been awarded Poland’s Commander Cross, Lithuania’s Order of the Grand Duke Gediminas, Estonia’s Order of the Cross of St Mary’s Land and Latvia’s Order of the Three Stars. One may be allowed to doubt that any essay about Russia carrying his signature could be unprejudiced.

Asmus and Holbrooke remind readers that they had long spoken out in their periodic *Post* articles about how Moscow was ‘pursuing a policy of regime change toward Georgia and its pro-Western, democratically elected president Mikheil Saakashvili.’ Despite the well known sequence of events that began with Georgian troops entering South Ossetia and shelling the civilian population of the republic’s capital, the authors insist that

‘exactly what happened in South Ossetia last week is unclear’ and that this was ‘not a war Georgia wanted’ since they were allegedly reasserting their control of the republic ‘through a strategy of soft power.’

Asmus and Holbrooke speak of Russia’s invasion as an ‘illegal act of aggression’ and violation of the UN Charter and fundamental principles of cooperation and security in Europe.’ Russia’s evil designs are to ‘roll back democratic breakthroughs on its borders...and to reestablish a hegemony over its neighbors.’ The authors see in all this a ‘watershed’ in relations between East and West.

So what do we do in the circumstances? Firstly, the authors call for a show of solidarity and support for Georgia and ‘a major transatlantic effort to help Tbilisi rebuild and recover.’ Next we must disavow Russia’s 16-year-long peace-keeper status in the breakaway republics and replace them with ‘neutral international forces’ under the United Nations. And we have to apply

political, economic and other sanctions against Russia. In particular, as a first action we must serve notice on the Russians that the Sochi Olympics are being called into question. Given the nature of ‘watershed’ this suggested punishment may appear to be rather mild, but perhaps the authors require more time to identify better levers of influence.

Finally, with a view to his new status as candidate for the Vice Presidency, let us take a brief look at the article which Joseph Biden published in the *Financial Times* on August 12 [“Russia has the most to lose in this costly conflict”]. The Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is seemingly restrained in apportioning blame for the outbreak of hostilities, saying that it is ‘too soon to know with certainty who was responsible.’ However, the subsequent turn of events and Russia’s ‘overwhelming advantage in size and firepower’ made the Kremlin the clear culprit. Moreover, the specifics of the outbreak of fighting served as a mere pretext for prosecuting much broader objectives on the Russian side.

Biden likens the Russian counter-attack in Georgia to the Red Army’s invasion of Hungary in 1956 and to Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan in the following decades, concluding that “the single greatest obstacle to Russia’s full acceptance into the international system has been the Kremlin’s pattern of aggressive actions towards its neighbors.’

So what does Senator Biden propose to do to rein in the Russians? Firstly, to stop his own efforts at removing the punitive Jackson-Vanik amendment, a holdover from the deepest days of the Cold War intended to force open the floodgates of Jewish emigration from the USSR; and to halt American support for Russia’s joining the World Trade Organization. He threatens the Russians over the Sochi Winter Olympics and over loss of their hoped for development of Moscow into an international financial center.

In order to avert a crisis in relations, he calls upon Russia to give up its military victory, pull back its forces and agree to an internationally brokered peace; in a word, to accept defeat.

Here again, the punitive sanctions are quite modest, though the hullabaloo directed against Russia is considerable.

In this context, it is remarkable that there was no equivalent among US political leaders to the vocal dissent voiced by several countries in the European Union at the outset of the rush to judgment. It is worth remembering the interview which Belgian Foreign Minister DeGucht gave to the daily newspaper *Le Soir* on August 11, saying that the Georgian push into the breakaway province was reckless and that Belgium was taking enlargement of NATO to Georgia and to the Ukraine off its national agenda. Italian Foreign Secretary Franco Fattini said very much the same thing.

It is also remarkable that there was no expression of misgivings about support for the corrupt and irresponsible regime in Tbilisi that was advanced by well-informed and respected European think-tank analysts [Claude Moniquet, “Georgian Adventurism,” ESISC, August 11, 2008].

The consistently anti-Russian, propagandistic tone of US media generally considered to be responsible, intellectually solid and independent is all the more stunning given the results of a write-in poll of its viewers that CNN International published on August 12: out of approximately 30,000 participants in the online survey who were asked whether the Russians were justified in their military action against Georgia, some 69% said yes and only 31% called it aggression.

Given that in this same period, Russian State Television carried live and complete direct broadcasts of the UN Security Council deliberations over the Georgian crisis, one has to wonder where indeed the media are slavishly spreading the official government line on events and depriving their citizens of balanced news: in today’s Russian Federation or in the USA.

We may safely conclude that US reaction to the Georgian crisis reaffirms our working hypothesis that American foreign policy is truly ‘bipartisan’ in that the public, through its elected officials in both major parties and its media do not seriously debate the direction the political leadership is taking it – namely towards an ideologically based Cold War, confrontational foreign policy that justifies ever rising military expenditures at a time when the United States allocates to defense more than 20 times the military budgets of its nearest competitors, Russia and China, and more than the rest of the world combined.

What then would constitute ‘change’ in American foreign policy and what must be done to set the groundwork for such change by encouraging the emergence of a politically significant debate? Can America’s present neo-imperialist consensus be successfully challenged?

As George Soros stated time and again in his publications and promoted in the work of his Open Society Foundation in Eastern Europe and the CIS, to endure democracy must rest upon pluralism and an active and engaged ‘civil society.’

The passivity and disinterest in community and political involvement on the part of most Americans today has for more than a decade attracted the attention and dismay of its political scientists [*Bowling Alone*]. Any attempt

to rekindle serious debate over the directions of foreign policy and not merely its modalities or to challenge the conventional wisdom will have to begin with a well-administered resuscitation of civic involvement and bravery in the public at large, no mean feat.

Although there have been a vast number of journalistic exposes of the abuses and crimes of the US military in Iraq, we have not witnessed anything resembling the political activism that the revelations of the My Lai massacre elicited in the domestically contentious Viet Nam War. And in general, the decade from the 90s into the present day has seen utter calm on campuses. [see Harvard Crimson, The Boston Globe, "An Open Letter to President Drew Faust," G. Doctorow et al.] This self-evident passivity is all the more striking in what should normally be a hearth of generational conflict given the constitutional challenges to civil liberties that have accompanied the War on Terror and the Patriot Act.

The explanation of this calm where one would be most likely to see pluralism and questioning of the establishment in action is not far below the surface: the single most important distinction between the present day and the revolutionary, turbulent late 1960s has been the absence of the draft army.

It may be argued that the lesson from the Viet Nam War best learned by President Nixon and later acted upon by the Reagan Administration was to de-politicize military action abroad by removing the threat of military service from the middle classes, namely by ending the draft and installing a 'volunteer army.' The change-over was sold to Congress and the public in terms of efficiency gains to come from a 'professional' force that could retain all the highly technical skills that modern warfare requires.

The complementary policies introduced by the Administration of George W. Bush have been firstly to outsource a very large part of military operations and intelligence work to civilian contractors. This has gone well beyond logistics and support to take in private security details amounting finally to the creation of a classic mercenary force. Secondly, the Administration has used the unique reserve currency status of the American dollar to borrow its way out of the concomitant current expenses of its military build-up through issuance of Treasury bonds sold successfully abroad, thereby reducing dramatically the impact of these policies on the pocketbook of today's voters.

The issue of reinstating the draft has been kept alive in Congress by periodic proposals from veteran Harlem Congressman Rangel, who argues that the professional army is excessively black and that the obligations of citizenship are not being shared equitably by the overall population. The draft remains politically unacceptable to the vast majority of the American political establishment, and to recommend it as a way out of the present policy swamp in the United States would be quixotic. Nonetheless, it has to constitute a long-term objective if the normal generational frictions are ever to be harnessed to power the necessary societal debate on whether its foreign policy.

A more rigorous approach to the financing of America's foreign policy adventures may well be more feasible in the short term, whichever Party comes to power in 2009 given that economic prudence and a return to balanced federal budgets is a widely shared positive value. The painful devaluation of the national currency over the past several years has brought home to the general public the cost of its financial profligacy under George W. Bush,

much of it going into military funding. If pursued consistently, this policy would sensitize the electorate to the cost in money, if not in blood, of its projection of force and, presumably, open the door to real political debate.

Considering the scope of the debacle in the Administration's waging of war in Iraq

<http://usforeignpolicy.lalibreblogs.be/archive/2008/09/17/is-change-possible-crise-georgie-russie.html>