

"The New World Geopolitical Order: End of Act I"

It would be a mistake to underestimate the importance of the agreement on September 9 between Nicolas Sarkozy of France in his capacity as current president of the European Union (EU) and Dmitri Medvedev, President of Russia. It marks the definitive end of Act I of the new world geopolitical order.

What was decided? The Russians agreed to withdraw all their troops from what are called "central Georgian areas" or "Georgia proper," that is, those parts of Georgia the Russians recognize as Georgia. These troops are being replaced by 200 monitors from the EU. This is done on guarantees by the EU that there will be no use of force against South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The issue of Russian recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia has been left entirely open. Sarkozy and the EU's Foreign Minister, Javier Solana, "hope" that Russia will agree in the future to allow EU monitors into these two areas. Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, said they had made no such promise and that "all future monitoring arrangements would require ratification by the Abkhaz and South Ossetian governments." Lavrov said that Russian troops would remain in the two areas "for the foreseeable future." And the secretary of Georgia's National Security Council, Alexander Lomaia, while applauding the clear deadlines for Russian withdrawal from Georgia proper, did note that "the bad news is that [the agreement] doesn't refer to [Georgian] territorial integrity."

This accord was reached between Europe and Russia, and the United States played no diplomatic role whatsoever. Medvedev charged the United States with having given its blessing to the original Georgian action of entering South Ossetia. He said that, by contrast, the Europeans are "our natural partners, our key partners." Georgia's president received the strong encouragement of John McCain, and Vice-President Cheney flew there to say that the United States was giving \$1 billion in aid for Georgian reconstruction. But Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, explaining why this aid would not include military aid and why there would be no economic sanctions against Russia, said that "if we act too precipitously, we could be the ones who are isolated."

So, what is the bottom line? Russia has gotten more or less what it wanted in Georgia. Its "irrevocable" recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia could well be something it might trade in the future for a basic turn-around in Georgia's relations with Russia. If not, not. The fact is that Europe believes it needs to come to terms with Russia, and has ruled out renewing what the Chinese call "the European civil war."

The United States finds it has no real cards to play. Meanwhile, in the Middle East, it finds itself publicly rebuffed by its closest allies. In Iraq, Prime Minister al-Maliki is being a very tough negotiator about the continued presence of U.S. troops, and it is not impossible, barring further major U.S. concessions, that the current agreements that terminate on December 31 will simply run out.

In Afghanistan, President Karzai is so exasperated with the bombing missions of U.S. special troops that he has demanded "a review of the presence of U.S. and NATO troops in the country," in what CBS News calls a "harshly worded statement." The immediate provocation was an air raid in Azizabad that the U.S. army said had few casualties and attacked a Taliban group. The Afghans insisted there were no Taliban there and a large number of civilians were killed. When UN officials and others gave credence to the Afghan version, the senior U.S. general in Afghanistan, David McKiernan, back-tracked on the U.S. position and called for a further high-level U.S. investigation by a general who would come from the United States.

And in Pakistan, President Bush authorized U.S. hot pursuit of Taliban from Afghanistan into Pakistan against the advice of the National Intelligence Council who said it would carry "a high risk of further destabilizing the Pakistani military and government." The incursion brought what the *New York Times* called "an unusually strong statement" by the chief of the Pakistani army, Gen. Ashfaq Kayani, who said his forces would defend Pakistan's sovereignty "at all costs." Since the U. S. government has been looking on Gen. Kayani as its strong supporter in Pakistan, this is not exactly what the United States has been hoping to hear.

So, ignored in Georgia and under attack by its closest allies in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, the United States is somewhat unhappily entering the realities of the post-Cold War world, in which it has to play by new rules that it seems to find rather unpalatable.

Meanwhile, as an ironic but not unimportant footnote, on September 10, a major development in particle physics was celebrated in Geneva when the European laboratory called CERN achieved a scientific breakthrough after 14 years of work and \$8 billion in expense. This was such a major moment in world science that their U.S. counterparts at the Fermilab in Batavia, Illinois opened the champagne bottles at 4:38 in the morning to celebrate. Nonetheless, Pier Oddone, the director of the Fermilab, admitted this was a "bittersweet moment." Until 1993, the United States ruled particle physics. That year, the U.S. Congress, flush with the self-confidence of having "won" the cold war, believed it was too expensive - and no longer geopolitically necessary - to build the kind of supercollider needed for this new advance in particle physics. The Europeans made a different kind of decision, and the United States now finds itself in second place here too.

I call this the end of Act I because it has sealed the reality of a true multilateral geopolitical arena. Of course, there are still further acts to come. And any faithful playgoer know that Act I merely establishes who are the actors. It is in Act II that we see what really happens. And then there's Act III, the denouement.

by Immanuel Wallerstein