

THE CRISIS IN THE CAUCASUS – A NEW WORLD ORDER EMERGES

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The ongoing crisis in the Caucasus is a tell tale sign of a changing world whereby the unipolar world is slowly but surely being replaced by a post-American one, to use the words of Fareed Zakaria, the editor of *Newsweek International*. In this new world order, the challenge is to find a way to share power, to create a model of global governance where the United States, the European Union and the winners of globalization – countries such as Russia, China, Brazil, and India among others – all have a role.

The war in Georgia clearly shows that the world has changed from the singular moment of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the splitting up of the Soviet Union soon after. The United States which reassessed its foreign policy and maintained its hegemony as the world's leading power after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 now finds itself confronted with the reality that it is not omnipotent or at least with the fact that it cannot control the course of events on its own.

In the grand chessboard that is, in this case at least, the quest for power in the Eurasian landmass in the post-Soviet environment of 2008, there is an ongoing tug of war between the United States and Russia in a region the latter claims to be its "near abroad". The immediate, powerful and deadly Russian response to the Georgian attempts to take control of South Ossetia and its

subsequent unilateral recognition of the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is a show of strength by Moscow with many recipients. Moscow clearly demonstrates that any resolution of the conflict as well as the neighbouring one of Abkhazia among others can only be achieved with the active and leading participation of Russia nevermind NATO promises that the future of Georgia (and Ukraine) lies in the Alliance. Even the comparisons between the recognition of Kosovo and that of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are more of a political nature. Moscow's message has nothing to do with which context is more legitimate than the other; rather it implies that if the rules of engagement in international relations are to be altered, this cannot be done without Moscow's consent. In other words, the crisis seems to be defined by Washington's and Moscow's simultaneous but opposing quests for regional hegemony.

Albeit, the 'New Cold War' discourses by both Moscow and Washington, the crisis provides the European Union with an opportunity to seek a substantive role in conflict management and conflict resolution and ample ammunition to play the key role of honest broker. While the question that arose before the Georgian crisis was whether the EU could play a significant role in the region without stumbling on these secessionist conflicts, the conflict in the Caucasus, in fact, has, for a variety of reasons, managed to establish the EU as the principal diplomatic broker in the conflict. The EU brokered the ceasefire accord and as the 'war of words' between Russia and the United States intensifies, the Union, because of its consensus-driven policy-making approach and its contractual policies with the Caucasian states and Russia, stands much

to gain as the voice of moderation notwithstanding the danger a protracted conflict could have on achieving consensus.

While a common EU position is difficult to attain due to the disparate positions of its member states regarding Russia's present and future relations with the Union, the symbiotic relationship between the two sides (the EU accounts for 48,6% of Russia's foreign trade while more than 90% of Russian energy exports today go to European countries) assumes that cooler heads will prevail on both sides. A combination of political will and a strong and steadfast commitment to contributing to the region's stability together with a substantial physical presence in the region (both military and civilian) would act as a deterrent to future unilateral actions and contribute both to post-conflict rehabilitation and a future settlement and the strengthening of its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

While the crisis has claimed its fair share of civilian victims and has cynically shown the ineptitude of the Helsinki principles regarding territorial sovereignty and the right of self-determination, it strengthens the argument in favour of a multipolar model of governance, at least in this common EU-Russian neighbourhood that is the Caucasus which accounts for the interests all stakeholders. If anything, the crisis reveals that today's globalised world has nothing in common with that of the Cold War.