ASPI
AUSTRALIAN STRATEGIC POLICY INSTITUTE

STRATEGIC POLICY FORUM, 4 November 2008

The conflict in Georgia: the first proxy of a new Cold War?

Dr Alexey D Muraviev

Over the past seven years the world has come to accept that the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States eastern seaboard marked a new era of globalised instability. The Five Day War in Georgia may be viewed as a recent historical event that signifies a new era in strategic relations between major international players.

The August 2008 conflict in the Caucasus is yet to get proper analysis from tactical and operational perspectives. However, the strategic consequences of this political–military event can be pointed out already.

The events in Georgia reignited the information war between Russia and the West, which at the height of the crisis reached unprecedented levels of bitterness and political brutality. The level of anti- rhetoric used on both sides could only be compared to the times of the final strategic escalation during the Cold War at the turn of the 1980s. Not even in response to major political actions in 1999 and 2003 did both Moscow and Washington allow such a massive mobilisation of the old Cold War rhetoric.

However, the war of words was not the main outcome of the Five Day War. After all, considerations at home played as much of a role as foreign policy aspects in both camps. For Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (and his team), the August conflict was a golden chance to firm up his position as a President and to come out of the shadow of his mentor, Vladimir Putin. For the US President George W Bush and the White House it was a face-saving attempt to cover up strategic blunders in Iraq and Afghanistan and to prevent a fiasco with its Eurasian policy on the eve of a power hand-over in November.

The main outcomes were the Kremlin's actions and the position of the non-Western international community. What may seem to be a surprising show of hard power by Russia was in fact the predictable outcome of the long and painful process of a great power status restoration, the process that began at the turn of the 21st century.

When in 2002, at the height of the US hyperpower, Russia decided to terminate its military presence in Cuba and Vietnam, it was largely interpreted as the culmination of the nation's withdrawal from the global arena and the final abandonment of means to exercise power globally. In reality, the decision, whilst also motivated by economic concerns, was primarily aimed to show Russia's willingness to put behind the bitterness caused by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) eastward expansion, *Operation Allied Force* against Serbia, and the war in Chechnya, and to reconcile in the light of a common threat of globalised Islamic extremism.

Contrary to Moscow's expectations, the US and its allies interpreted the move as a sign of weakness and pushed ahead with the ambition to firm up geopolitical gains of the 1990s. The decision to expand NATO further into Central and Eastern Europe, including the Baltics, was combined with the direct and indirect penetration of the former Soviet space, including through the formation of the anti-Russia power block GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova), and through orchestrated regime changes in Georgia and the Ukraine (with lesser success in Kyrgyzstan).

Russian views about the invasion of Iraq, the annexation of Kosovo, confirmed plans to deploy a third operational echelon of Anti-Ballistic Missile defence in Central Europe, and the invitation of Georgia and Ukraine into NATO were continually ignored. The last attempt to avoid the confrontation was made by Russia in February 2007 in Munich where Putin delivered a much talked about speech warning the West of his country's concerns and possible counteractions. Since then the Russians have hardened their actions. In August 2007 strategic bombers resumed aerial patrols over the Atlantic and the Pacific; in December 2007–February 2008 a Russian carrier battle group toured the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, both actions coinciding with talks about Russia's return to Cuba, Yemen (and possibly Vietnam), expanding military presence in Syria, and opening bases in Venezuela.

The active use of the military factor in support of foreign policy goals is not just caused by allergic reactions toward 'neocons' in the White House and NATO's policies. After years of preparations Russia sees its chance to reclaim some positions once held by the Soviet Union. The nation wants to monopolise former Soviet Eurasia, establish dominance over the Arctic, and secure transit links to clientele in Europe, Asia and the Pacific, a desire also driven by the expanding Russian capitalism. The cold peace of the new millennium began transforming into a more visible strategic standoff.

The war in Georgia was not an internal conflict between official Tbilisi and separatists. It was a proxy war between Russian and US sponsored allies overtly, and Russia and the United States covertly. The problem of Georgia's territorial integrity overshadowed the great power clash over a strategically important area, a conflict driven by economic and political–military considerations.

For the first time since its creation Russia openly fought in defence of its strategic interests outside its border. By challenging the US crafted regional order Moscow announced its comeback as a major international player, and one of the key poles of power. The question is whether this revisionist declaration will trigger another Cold War. The Russians feel confident, particularly after receiving silent and open support from Asia, Central America and the Middle East. It is important to remember that neither India nor China condemned Russia for its actions in the Caucasus or showed support to the West, which remains very much divided on Russia's recent behaviour.

While speaking at the World Policy Conference in French Evian in early October, Medvedev noted, 'Nothing fatal or irreparable has happened. A new edition of the Cold War is not threatening us.' These words could be interpreted as a reinforcement of a signal that Moscow was sending to the West since the end of hostilities in Georgia: Russia has no interest in fuelling political–military tensions with the transatlantic political community, particularly in the light of a growing economic crisis. At the same time, Russian leadership has clearly demonstrated that it is prepared to go all the way in supporting national interests, including through employing political–military means.

It is not clear if we are living through the initial stages of another 'Cold War'. However, what is apparent is the collapse of *Pax Americana*, the decline of the US hyperpower, and desperate attempts by Washington to stagnate the decline which causes a spiral of globalised instability. The Five Day War could be viewed as the first major defeat of a once supreme power by one of its key geopolitical rivals, an event, which may accelerate the transition from ageing unipolarity to a multipolar system of international affairs.

Dr Coral Bell

How to avoid a new cold war; crises and strategic perimeters

The brief Georgia crisis of August 2008 was a sort of reverse mirror-image of the most dangerous crisis of the Cold War, the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. That analogy offers clues as to how a new Cold War can be avoided.

In both crises, the true source of danger was the effort by one of the great powers to breach the strategic perimeter of another. In 1962, Khrushchev allowed himself to be persuaded by Castro [who feared a US invasion] to install Soviet missiles inside the US strategic perimeter, only ninety miles from Florida. In 2008, the Bush people, much less plausibly, have been arguing the necessity of installing elements of a US missile system in Poland and the Czech Republic in order to deter an alleged threat to Europe of missile attack from Iran. The local element in the crisis, the conflict between Georgia and its two would-be breakaway provinces was real enough, but it would not have induced speculation about ' proxy battles' and 'a new Cold War' without the current US–Russia frictions as a background. It just would have been seen as one of the many local outbreaks of a familiar conflict.

The major point to note about the two crises is their illustration of the acute sensitivity of the great powers [and many others] to intrusion by others into their respective strategic perimeters. In a world in which weapon-systems have become so destructive that governments are 'self-deterred' from using them, there are not many causes that can seem to rational decision-makers to justify threatening their use. Certainly the national interests of minor allies like Georgia is not among them, as the US Defense Secretary rapidly made clear to the President of Georgia.

That diplomatic lesson, which one must hope has been noted elsewhere, brings up the troubling moral question of the sovereign rights of small powers whose geographical destiny puts them within the strategic perimeter of a great power. It is already of profound concern in Europe, with Poland and the Ukraine, for instance, developing ambitions to be members of NATO as well as the EU.

In that particular context, there is, perhaps, a possible solution. Membership of the EU offers all the economic and social advantages of integration into Europe, without carrying the strategic commitments and implications of membership of NATO. A diplomatic bargain in which Russia conceded real autonomy to its 'near abroad' in return for the US abandoning the project [one of Bush's worst] of planting missile systems should be tried. That could be one of the many pressing tasks of the new Administration, whose time is now so near. It would be good practice for the even more difficult issue of deciding precisely where the strategic perimeters of China and Japan should run, in the seas between them.

Incidentally, a strategic perimeter should not be equated with a sphere of influence. The difference is easiest to see in the Chinese case. Beijing has recently cultivated a sphere of influence in both Central Africa and Latin America, but not even the most ambitious Chinese strategist would assume that China's strategic perimeter should run through those regions. Its strategic perimeter is a geographic zone in which the strategic assets of other powers are the subject of hawk-like scrutiny by the government and the armed forces, in the interests of national security. The same is true for Australia, which has a particularly wide such zone.

Professor Nick Bisley

A New, New World Order?

In one of her least effective diplomatic interventions, Condoleeza Rice claimed that the 2006 Israeli–Hizbollah conflict in Lebanon was part of the 'birth pangs of a new Middle East'. While this has proved to be as wrong in its assessment as it was ham-fisted in its rhetoric, the idea of conflict being a harbinger of a new order has a long history and no small appeal. War's searing pain makes plain the fissures and tensions of a new set of political and strategic relations. Muraviev's piece implies that the 2008 Georgian War prefigures the arrival of a new pattern of geostrategic rivalry in world politics. While it is clear that Russia's use of force in its 'near abroad' is of significance, the search for historical parallels in the Prague Spring, Hungary 1956 or indeed the broader East–West conflict are badly misplaced. South Ossetia was not the birth-place of a new Cold War.

It has been an explicit goal of Putin's Russia to redeem its great power legacy and to sit, once again, at the high table of world politics. Does Georgia, therefore, make good this ambition, and provide the world with a balance to American power or do circumstances warrant a more cautious analysis?

Russia is in a curious position. As with a number of other geographically and demographically expansive states, Russia is clearly no longer on the mat of international politics. But it is not the power it once was. Its new-found wealth provides an opportunity to express disquiet with its geopolitical circumstances. Yet the edifice of Putin's Russia is far from robust. The elite are haunted by the spectre of velvet revolution and many key decision-makers genuinely believe that the West is actively trying to overthrow the government and more generally erode Russian power. The extent of insecurity which this reveals sheds some light on the military swaggering on show in the Caucuses. As many have pointed out, the Russian state is still in the throes of a complex transition from its Soviet past. But the extent to which Russia was willing to risk international ire, thumb its nose at international law and use force to pursue its interests, alongside the fairly limited room for manoeuvre which the US and its allies found for themselves, demands careful consideration.

The events of August 2008 show that Russia is conflicted in its relations with the dominant norms and principles of international politics. This is in marked contrast with other emerging powers, such as China and India. Russian ire provoked by Kosovo and Iraq was articulated in terms of international law, concerns both genuine and confected, yet it wants to retain the right to a quasi-suzerainty over its sphere of influence and over Russians wherever they may be found. While its position as a significant autonomous power cannot be doubted, Russia's unclear commitment to the rules of the system, and the uncertainty that this produces, is the first lesson of the Georgian War.

Russia's political system is not especially stable and as recent stockmarket plunges show that while relatively affluent, the economy is brittle. The Georgian War was, in many respects, an articulation of the domestic political insecurity and fragility evident on both sides of the Caucasus. While the structures of the Putin state appear solid, particularly when compared with the Yeltsin years, the extent to which the system is effectively rooted in Russian society is open to question. This combined with the heavy dependence on hydrocarbon wealth and the inability, thus far, to build any credible diversification in wealth creation exacerbates the uncertain attitudes toward the international system and tends to amplify the way in which the ambition to redeem the past shapes Russian policy.

Finally, and perhaps most evidently, Russia's intervention in Georgia demonstrates unambiguously the elite's desire to retain a 'right of refusal' over affairs within the former Soviet space. All this means that Russia can be described neither as a status quo power nor as a revolutionary one. Equally, its very real internal shortcomings, themselves revealed in part through the Georgian conflict, make plain that Russia is now a regional power, but one of global significance. It is not a counter-weight to the US in any meaningful sense, but that does not mean its interests and ambitions should be ignored.

The Georgian conflict also draws attention to the ongoing shifts in the tectonic structures of world politics. Europe, the US and its allies strongly objected to Russian moves but there was little they could do and not only because of Iraq and Afghanistan. There is little significant leverage that can be brought to bear on Russia due, in part, to the slow moving transformation of world politics. The centre of gravity in the international system is moving unambiguously toward Asia. It is not only the epochal economic modernisation of India and China which is driving this; Russia will be an important part of an Asian world order. This order will be dominated by the rivalries of four or so major powers each of which sees itself as a great power and beholden to no other. Each also has distinct views on what it means to be a great power. The challenge lies in managing not only the risks that come with transition but in coping with the conflicts of interest and value that will inevitably emerge. Georgia provides a first glimpse of how difficult this will be.

So how ought we react to what may well be the first minor war of an Asian world order? Perhaps the greatest mistake strategists can make is to see in the Georgian War a new Cold War and a reason to return to the verities of containment. The new Russia is a worrying combination of the prickly, the insecure and the militarily powerful. To respond to this through isolation and encirclement would be folly. The unfortunate August war shows clearly that it is in everyone's interest to ensure Russia is a genuine status quo power. This means not only that Russia respect the full gamut of rules and norms in the international system, not just the ones it prefers, but that it should, in the best traditions of Congress diplomacy, not be humiliated and the legitimacy of its place in the system respected. Western diplomats and strategists are convinced that this is the right way to respond to the rise of China and India and it is also the case with Russia.

Dr Rod Lyon

Russia: the bear is—still—lost

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union left Russia profoundly uncertain about its place and role. Having followed for seventy years a path that led only to a dustbowl—to disintegration and collapse—Russians took refuge in recrimination and vodka. Now, in the wake of events in Georgia in August, some analysts are concluding that 'the bear is back' and that a new Cold War looms. Those judgments are wrong. No new Cold War is in prospect. And the bear isn't 'back': the bear is fatter and grumpier than it was during the 1990s, but essentially the bear is, still, lost.

The bear is fatter because high oil and gas prices have delivered a windfall for the Russian economy. And the bear is grumpier because it believes its legitimate strategic interests have been largely ignored for almost twenty years by the victorious Western powers. But the bear has done almost nothing to remedy the weaknesses that made it—in Zbigniew Brzezinski's words—a 'one-dimensional superpower' during the Cold War. Until it begins such a process of remedial power-building, its assets will remain limited and its strategic instincts will remain coercive. It will be a 'derivative power', able to exercise influence only in specific (and usually regional) cases.

Events in Georgia show that Russia remains a frustrated power, keen to reinherit the global leadership role that it enjoyed in the Cold War years. And they show too a readiness to use military force for political objectives: for coercion and intimidation. But they don't give us much of a feel for the limits of Russian capabilities. Russia is well able to project land-power for limited brutalities in its near abroad, but its broader power-projection capabilities remain very limited. The Russian economy is still heavily dependent on energy and arms sales; Russia itself is still a peripheral actor in a much more dynamic Asia; the Russian military forces are still in need of substantial rejuvenation; and the Russian style of diplomacy is still blunt.

In essence, Moscow is playing a weak hand as well as it can. Putin and Medvedev have been able to use burgeoning resource prices to put a floor under Russia's slippage in the global order. But Russia still doesn't have a clear vision of its own role in the world, nor a domestic consensus on the same (notwithstanding a surging Russian nationalism). Being an energy supplier and a gun runner is not really a good basis for international respect: the first reminds too many customers of their dependencies on the supplier (a point which Russia's implicit threats to Europe have only underlined); the second reminds too many former adversaries of the Soviet Union of Moscow's attempts then to buy influence through weapons sales.

Russia remains too a power that feels keenly the growth of other power centres on the Eurasian continent, and is determined to protect Russian interests during the geopolitical restructuring now under way across the continent. It fears a more 'independent' European strategic centre, a Middle East beset by a range of proliferation pressures, a troubled Caucasus region, and a China growing strong. In every case, events on the Eurasian landmass are already diluting Moscow's importance. As a result, Russia has become more determined to create a sense of 'strategic space' about its own borders.

Why then, have Russia's actions stirred such alarm in the West? They have done so because Western countries are sensitive to their own vulnerabilities at the moment: sensitive to the fact that Iraq and Afghanistan have been more difficult engagements

than many believed they would be; sensitive to NATO's perception of itself as a 'two-tier' alliance increasingly incapable of coordinated military action; sensitive to worries about the strategic consequences of the current financial crisis. But those sensitivities shouldn't blind us to geopolitical realities.

Relations between the world's great powers have not been especially disturbed by the events in Georgia. Russia is yesteryear's revisionist power, and although its strategic culture is slow to change, it shows little inclination of wanting to return to that role. For one thing, it has not yet available to it the power assets that it would need to challenge Western and Asian global dominance. A loan to Iceland and a naval visit to Venezuela won't really shift the pillars of the current global order. Russia is, at best, a limited balancer against that order, and frankly it doesn't balance very often: its own needs for investment, markets and technology are too great. Bandwagoning with the dominant powers is still its preferred global strategy.

Where does that leave us? Well, the bear is not back; the bear is lost. He lost his way when the end of the Cold War took away the Russian road map to global and regional influence. He doesn't yet have a new map.

Dr Peter Shearman

The war in Georgia: reflecting an old problem, not a new Cold War

9/11, as Alexey notes, marked a new era in international relations, at least as far as the United States was concerned. 9/11 was a strategic shock for the US, and it resulted in a temporary grand strategy of democracy promotion and preventive war. With a change of leadership in Washington it is unlikely that this policy will be renewed, no matter who wins the presidential race (despite some of John McCain's rhetoric). But I think it is wrong to see the short war in Georgia as marking a new era in strategic relations. On the contrary, it solidifies already existing realities and tendencies and highlights the problems that have been inherent in the international system since the end of the Cold War: unresolved issues relating to ethnic conflicts, the role of NATO, Russia's place in the world, the importance of Eurasia, and the saliency of energy security. It is also wrong in my view to argue that the events in Georgia reflect a new Cold War between Russia and the United States.

Alexey is correct to see Russia's response to Georgia's premeditated aggression (for that's what it was: premeditated) as 'predictable'. And it was not difficult to predict. A logical question arises then: did the US deliberately orchestrate events to facilitate Georgia's act of war? Georgia was supplied with American military equipment and had received military training from US troops stationed in Georgia. The US had been pushing for NATO membership for Georgia, had supported its 'Rose Revolution', and had criticised Russia for undermining the sovereignty of its neighbours. President Medvedev stated that American promises that Georgia would be allowed to join NATO are 'unjust, humiliating, and intolerable'.

I don't agree that the war helped Medvedev shore up his power. On the contrary, one could argue that the war provided Prime Minister Putin the opportunity to reassert *his* power, evidenced by his talks with American and Chinese leaders, his immediate visit to the area, and his strong statements in various forums indicating that he is still in charge. However, the important point here is that there were no divisions in the Russian leadership about how to respond. Since the end of the Cold War Russian leaders have come to distrust American intentions towards Russia. President George Herbert Bush promised that a reunified Germany would not lead to an expanded NATO, Bill Clinton promised to help Russia develop a market economy, and George W Bush promised to cooperate in the security realm. Yet NATO has expanded to incorporate former Soviet Republics and has been used in a war against Serbia; US economic policies under Clinton helped create an economic crisis in Russia; and now the US is pushing for a missile defence system with installations in Poland and the Czech Republic. It is incredible to assume that Russia would sit back and watch as Georgia or Ukraine become integrated into a military alliance whose very purpose has always been, in Russia's perceptions, to undermine Moscow's legitimate interests in its strategic sphere of influence.

Yet the Cold War analogy is wrong. There are no fundamental ideological differences between Russia and the United States. Russia is not concerned about the domestic arrangements of government in Tbilisi. It is ridiculous and unhelpful to explain relations on the basis of differences between freedom and democracy on the one hand and authoritarianism on the other. Russia does not object to democracy; it objects to the United States seeking to expand its military and political influence amongst its nearest neighbours.

Also, neither side could afford a new Cold War. An anti-Russian stance that openly threatened retaliation for its war against Georgia would be too costly. The US is

already fighting two wars in the midst of a global financial crisis with a lame duck president in the White House. McCain ('today, we are all Georgians') even before the war had wanted Russia thrown out of the G8. Yet that would leave the seven remaining democratic states on their own at a time when perhaps the momentum of the global economy is shifting to other countries (China, India, Brazil, and Russia itself). This new Group of nations might correspond more closely to McCain's idea of a League of Democracies, but it would not enhance its global influence. Isolating Russia politically or economically would only backfire. Despite the talk of energy independence the fact remains that the Europeans are heavily dependent on oil and gas supplies from Russia. In terms of energy security there is a symbiotic relationship between Russia and Europe. Due to the logics of geography, transport and pipe-line infrastructures, and political and economic ties Europe and Russia have many symmetrical and complementary needs. Neither could afford to easily jeopardise these by engaging a new Cold War.

In the final analysis it is important to avoid viewing the events in South Ossetia simply through the paradigm of Russian–Georgian relations or of the wider manifestation of divisions between Russia and the West. The conflict reflects a deeper and more complex regional problem of unresolved ethnic conflicts across the Caucasus. The mistakes of the Cold War should not be repeated: viewing ethnic, local and regional conflicts solely through the prism of Great Power relations. Alexey's conception of a proxy war I think is to misunderstand the nature of the conflict. Yes, both the US and Russia, by taking different sides, have had an influence on events. But the roots of the conflict are to be found in the patchwork of unresolved ethnic and territorial conflicts that are a hangover from the collapse of the USSR. Rather than marking a new Cold War they rather reflect unresolved issues from the last Cold War. In order to prevent a spill-over of such issues into a wider conflict it is necessary to deal with their root causes. NATO expansion would exacerbate such problems and not serve to resolve them. Medvedev's proposal for a new European security dialogue to discuss a new security architecture for the region is a sensible one, and it should be taken seriously. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union Russia's leaders have all seen their country as a part of Europe and of the West. However western states have undertaken policies to keep Russia apart from the West. Depending upon the outcome, the war in Georgia might be the last straw for Russia, encouraging it to look elsewhere for its allies. This would not so much mark a new era as the continuation of a process that began in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Dr Alexey D Muraviev

Concluding remarks

Perhaps, in time, the turbulent first decade of the 21st century will be described by historians and political scientists as one of the most complex and controversial periods of the millennium. The Forum has produced conflicting, often polarised views on the strategic implications of the August 2008 conflict in the Caucasus. In particular, three contesting problems could be identified:

- the significance of the conflict, and, linked to that
- root causes
- Russia's current role and place in the changing international system.

The Five Day War brought to the surface many problems but I would like to identify the two most significant points. First, it has once again highlighted the limitations of US global power. The conflict showed that Washington overestimated its own strategic strength and reputation as an undisputed world-transformer. The political defeat in the Caucasus was soon followed by another shock, this time on the economic front. Unless the US economic power shows its effective resilience, the deepening economic crisis may further accelerate the decline of the nation's superpower status.

Second, the war didn't show much sympathy for the US course among the Third World countries, including key Asian nations, China and India. Even in Indonesia, where separatism continues to be viewed as a serious security challenge, public opinion was inclined to support Russia's actions. Taking into account Professor Bisley's reference to an emerging 'Asian world order', this is an important factor.

Contrary to initial assumptions that Russia will end up in political isolation Moscow was also able to secure support through regional security and political frameworks, the Collective Security Treaty and the Shanghai organisations. Europe remained divided over the crisis, leaving Washington with even fewer options to pressure Russia.

I agree with Professor Shearman that the origins of the Georgian problem are inherited from the complex Soviet past. However, the root causes go even deeper, to the times of Catherine II (the Great) and Russia's power struggle with the Ottoman and British empires for control over the Black Sea/Transcaucasus region, a gateway into the Near and Middle East (a nightmare scenario for Whitehall), to the Mediterranean and the Holy Land (what was known in Russian imperial diplomacy as the 'Eastern question').

The Russians don't consider the war as a conflict with Georgia. They look at the recent clash *over* Georgia as a continuation of historical strategic confrontation with the Anglo-Saxon geopolitical tradition of averting Peter the Great's revolutionary transformation of the Russian state, and even deeper conflict between Western and Eastern Christian civilisations that goes back to the 13th century. By defeating the US-sponsored Georgian regime the Kremlin achieved not just a military but an important political victory. It gave the Russians a sense of extra confidence in themselves, which they were lacking over the past seventeen years.

Dr Lyon described the 'Russian Bear' as 'fatter and grumpier' but above all as a confused geopolitical actor who is yet to find a sense of direction. This viewpoint is

the anachronism of the 1990s, a reflection of the notoriously strong perception of Russia being an unstable, unpredictable and unreliable international actor, which continues to occupy vast geographical space on the periphery of the world's power arena.

Russia–2008 is a revisionist power with a clear sense of strategic direction and a power base sufficient to press ahead by employing a combined 'soft'/'hard' power approach. The nation has globalised interests that stretch well beyond Eurasia. Its hungry and highly opportunistic authoritarian capitalism seeks new markets, while the Kremlin creates regional political and security networks in support of these and other long-term goals. In the Pacific, the Russians are working hard to change the nation's image of being a Northeast Asian peripheral spectator to a major regional player. In particular, this becomes evident whilst examining Russia's persistence in engaging the Southeast Asian community, particularly Indonesia.

However, it is a gross miscalculation to consider Russia's ongoing strategic revival as an attempt to reincarnate the fallen Soviet Union. The Russian liberal empire is not the USSR nor will it ever become one. The nation doesn't have either the resources to fight for global dominance, nor the political desire to take on this unrealistic burden. Nevertheless, Moscow wants to be recognised as one of the principal centres of global power, an ambition that the Russians consider to be sufficiently realistic to accomplish.

To achieve this strategic end Russia strives to position itself as Eurasia's hegemon, the supreme political, economic and military power inside the former Soviet space, and an active heavyweight in adjacent areas. By intervening in the Georgian conflict, Moscow made its claim clear. Being a master of this 'pivot area' will enable the Kremlin to play a high impact role in the coming Asian century.

The clash over Georgia has accelerated plans to modernise national defence capability. In 2009 alone, Russia will increase defence spending by 1.3 times. Through intensifying exercise activity (for example, strategic manoeuvres *Stability–2008*) the nation demonstrates its growing capacity and will to fight regional and large-scale conflicts in defence of Eurasia, also with the employment of its strategic deterrent capability.

The increasing operational activity outside its borders, including strategic bomber patrols, long-range naval deployments and plans to reopen overseas defence facilities are part of the defensive approach aimed at securing Eurasia's strategic perimeter. For example, by intensifying activity in the Caribbean, by developing close links with Venezuela and other regional states, Russia attempts to dilute US attention from Eurasia by forcing it to reallocate assets elsewhere. Moscow also reminds Washington of the need to behave correctly alongside a strategic perimeter of a great power, a point highlighted by Dr Bell.

We are witnessing a major shift in the global balance of power. It is a transition period where talks about dominances of either Western or Asian centres of power is premature as the transformation is far from being complete. Any shake-up of the international system causes instability and friction. The period of a cold peace at the turn of the century gives way to a more open great power struggle characterised by technological competition, including technological warfare, the fight to secure strategic energy resources and raw materials, and civilisational confrontation. If this development could be described as a new 'Cold War', then it is not a reincarnated version of the post-1945 model simply because the geopolitical environment is

different to the one sixty or so years ago, leaving aside the cost of a robust confrontation in times of a global economic thunderstorm.

The emerging global architecture will be based around several poles whose power base will be tied to a certain geographical area, among them US (North and Central America), Chinese (East Asia), Russian (Eurasia), European, Indian (South Asia), Brazilian (South America) and some others of minor significance. These power poles will have global interests and will be active in other parts of the world, whilst fiercely protecting their keep (as was demonstrated in Georgia). In this sense, respect for each others' geopolitical prerogatives and status will determine the level of political tension in this future world order.