

How are the US primaries being followed in Russia? What can politicians expect from McCain, Clinton and Obama? And their voters? In general politicians and leading opinionists are inclined towards Obama,

Moscow: Obama's ahead but only on points

RUSSIA 1

by Piero Sinatti

the man in the street towards Hillary, though with moderation and scepticism. More interesting is the thoughts that the US primaries have primed on bilateral relations between the two countries

Russian media has attentively and accurately followed the American primaries, especially the leading daily papers, the most informed on international politics, such as "Nezavisimaja Gazeta" and "Kommersant". But also public television has provided good quality information reasonably frequently. The primaries intersected with the Russian presidential elections and the changing of the guard at the Kremlin.

On this subject, like on the complementary issue of Russia-USA relations, authoritative experts from academic study centres, specialist magazines, representatives from MID (Russian Foreign Office) and Duma (the lower chamber of the Russian parliament) as well as Russian presidential candidates have all expressed their opinions.

Firstly, it is worth seeing what the common people of Russian think. Surveys conducted by influential public opinion study centres such as the Levada Center and VTsIOM, focusing on the Russian perception of the current Russia-USA relations, have revealed contradictory points of view. In the January poll by the Levada Center in Moscow ("Novoe

Vremja", 11 February 2008) 51% of interviewees were more or less in favour of the USA compared to 39% who were more or less hostile. When describing the current state of the relations between the two countries, most of the interviewees defined it as "cold" (33%), "tense" (17%) or "hostile" (3%).

In the years preceding the NATO action in Serbia, the percentage of citizens in favour of the USA was 65-70 percent. Since then and especially after the outbreak of the US war against Iraq, "perceived by Russians as a global policing action as opposed to a traditional one", "negative behaviour towards the USA has increased", explained the director of the Levada Center Lev Gudkov.

Diffidence and hostility are on the rise, fuelled by the continuous expansion of NATO up to Russian borders and the project to install an American anti-missile defence system in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Nevertheless Gudkov underlined that "Russians perceive the USA as an ideal State – the wealthiest and strongest power in the world and a partner of great worth (...) the subject of admiration combined



with a sense of jealousy and repressed aggression”.

A later survey, this time conducted by VTsIOM (a centre studying Russian public opinion), released by the Russian agency Interfaks (2 April), revealed that the interviewees (in 153 cities in 46 federal subjects) defined Russia-USA relations as “calm” (36%), “cold” (26%), “tense” (12%), while only 4% defined them as “friendly” and 3% as “hostile”.

Concerning the American primaries, a VTsIOM poll, conducted in the middle of February on 1600 citizens of 135 cities, regions and territories of the Russian Federation (“Interfaks”, 12 March 2008) showed that 32% of Russians, especially those concentrated in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, were interested in the US primaries.

Almost one in every two people interviewed (48%) stated that their outcome would effect Russia, while 39% said the contrary.

On the USA presidential elections, 19% of those interviewed claimed that “in the interest of Russia” the victory of a Democrat candidate would be preferable. Only 4% stated preferring the Republican

candidate. For almost a third (31%) the US elections have no effect at all on Russia. 46% were uncertain.

Finally, moving on to choosing between the three candidates of the primaries still in the running, 19% of interviewees said they would vote for Hillary Clinton, 4% for Obama. 49% said they were undecided who to vote for, if they had the option.

The contrasting directions of the USA's Russian policy

Relations between Russia and the USA have changed enormously during Vladimir Putin's office, going in three contrasting directions. The first concerns the personal relationship between the two presidents Bush and Putin. It has been positive, right from the meeting in Lubjana in May 2001 – where the US president stated having looked into the eyes of his Russian counterparty and getting a sense “his soul” – up to the meeting in Sochi, on 6 April this year.

The second direction regards the Bush administration's initiative towards Russia. This has been anything but friendly. Washington is trying to replace Moscow's influence in the post-soviet area,

particularly in the Ukraine and the republics of Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

It has done so partly with its NATO expansion project eastwards, already concerning the Baltic States and set to involve Georgia and the Ukraine in a few years. And partly by provoking and supporting the so-called "colour revolution" whose effects have proved to be more destabilising than constructive in Georgia, the Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. The USA has tried and continues to try and hit Moscow's interests in the energy sector, especially by exerting pressure on oil producing countries in the central Asiatic-Caspian region urging them to create oil pipelines and gas pipelines that are not Russian.

It is a strategy of "replacing" influence (*vytesnenie*) by the USA to the detriment of Russia in areas where it is historically, politically and culturally strong.

This strategy was already applied by the Clinton administration in the previous decade, as theorised by Zbigniew Brzezinski in his *Grand Chessboard* (1997).

At the same time, the USA continues to arrogantly interfere in Russia's internal affairs on the subjects of human, political and civilian rights. Washington has openly supported Putin's discredited opponents with no popular support, like Garri Kasparov, Boris Nemtsov, Mikhail Kasjanov and a few others.

Last March, the Russian MID strongly protested against the publication by the State Department of a report attacking the state of democracy and rights in Russia.

The fact is – as influential Russian observers have written and not without cause – that the USA would prefer to deal with a politically, diplomatically and financially weak Russia, with a fragmented FFAA and a dispersed military-industrial complex (VPK), the one of the so-called "Yeltsin's freedom". And not with the Russia emerging, in the years of Putin, from the tragic previous decade, and facing the international scene as the greatest world energy power, politically and financially more stable, and in the process of reconstructing the FFAA and the VPK. Furthermore, Russia has stood out in recent years for a series of independent

international initiatives, establishing excellent economic-commercial cooperation relations with key countries of the EU (Germany, France, Italy, Holland and Belgium). It has established economic and military cooperation agreements with China and other Asian States, in the name of multipolarism and clearly in contrast with the unipolarism of Washington.

Russia condemned the American action in Iraq (which was damaging to say the least), while in 2003 it blocked the incumbent decision of the oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovskij to sell a US multinational a decisive share of his company Yukos, at the time Russia's largest oil company.

Nevertheless, cooperation between the two countries was not interrupted. Despite the US unilateral withdrawal from the ABM Soviet-American treaty of 1972 (against anti-missile defence) and the Russian deferment of the CFE (Treaty on limiting Conventional Forces in Europe), Washington and Moscow continue to comply with the requirements set by the agreement for the progressive strategic nuclear disarmament (START-2).

In addition, they cooperate in the fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (even if the USA has often shown aversion in the Russian-Iranian nuclear cooperation) and the fight against international terrorism, initiated between Moscow and Washington immediately after 11 September 2001. On 6 April, in Sochi, President Putin declared one of his deep-rooted concepts: "US-Russian relations are a key factor in world security".

Also in economics cooperation continues: the inter-exchange has risen this year to 23 billion dollars, while the American and Russian business community keeps investing in each others' country. One can easily talk about a partnership in progress, as was done by the US under secretary for economic affairs Reuben Jeffery III and the first deputy foreign minister Andrei Denisov in Washington in April, during the inaugural session of the USA-Russia Economic Dialogue, sponsored by the Department of State.

The first acknowledged that the greatest world economy – which is still America (but for how long?) – must deal with the



Grazia Neri

_Barack Obama was on the team that drew up the plan for the dismantling of Russia's nuclear weapons in 1991. Hillary Clinton's foreign policy advisors include some people who are nostalgic for the Yeltsin era

sixth one, Russia, referring to Bush's reiterated commitment to finally opening the WTO's doors to Russia, as already done for Georgia and the Ukraine, and to repealing the notorious Jackson-Vanik amendment of the '60s that excludes Russia from the most-favoured-nation clause (Department of State, Briefing on the Inaugural Session of U.S. – Russia Economic Dialogue, 28 April). Nevertheless it must be noted that in this area the USA does not particularly consider Russian interests and the international treaties that

link Moscow to central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) that produce and export oil.

In June the economic dialogue between Russia and the USA will continue in the Economic Forum in Saint Petersburg. A "grand US delegation", chaired by the secretary for commerce Carlos M. Gutierrez will arrive in the beautiful Baltic city.

The three candidates of the primaries and Russia: McCain

As we have seen, the trend of US-Russia relations has experienced many contradictions. Despite the indisputable growth in "tension" (so much so that a "renewed" Cold War climate has been talked about), we are still far from "confrontation".

In the political foreign agenda of the three

stars of the American primaries, Russia “does not hold first place”. Instead that goes to Iraq, international terrorism, the energy problem and the situation in the Middle East, due to the influence exercised in the USA by the powerful pro-Israel lobby.

The US senator of Arizona John McCain, longstanding victor of the primaries of the Republican Party, knows Russia better than the two Democratic competitors: Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. He is a renowned specialist on the subjects of internal security and international politics. He heads the senatorial commission for the armed forces. Revealing his disposition back in 1999 was his vote in the Senate against the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1996, which bans all nuclear experiments, ratified by Russia and the European allies of the USA. His councillors feature Henry Kissinger, as well as a think host of seasoned ministers and advisors from President Reagan's office. Another councillor, Robert McFarlane, talking about McCain stated that: “The senator is very interested in Russia. He does not see it as a friend or a foe, rather as a great power with important interests (...). For negotiations with Russia, Ronald Reagan is his model” (“Itar – Tass”, 6 March 2008). Coming from a family of admirals, the Republican candidate was an aviation official during the Vietnam War. Captured by the North Vietnamese he spent five hard years as a prisoner there. He is a Vietnam veteran, a man whose roots are linked to the Cold War both personally and psychologically.

There is another fact, much more recent, that may have accentuated McCain's hostility towards Moscow. On 28 August 2006, while flying over the skies of South Ossetia (the pro-Russian separatist Georgian region) with the Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili and a delegation of American senators, the aircraft came under hostile fire from South Ossetia.

McCain had a meeting, in those days, with the secessionist president of South Ossetia Eduard Kokoity, which he defined as “unproductive” (washingtonpost.com, 5 September 2006).

In April McCain accused Russia of

“seeking a de facto annexation of the separatist Georgian regions” (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and “threatening Georgian sovereignty (...) pursuing the path of confrontation rather than cooperation” (Reuters, 17 April 2008).

During the speech given on 26 March 2008 to the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles, the Republican senator urged the West to “expel Russia from the G8” and “not to tolerate its cyber attacks and its nuclear blackmail” (referring to the presumed Russian attacks on the IT structure of the Estonian government and to declarations by Putin and the head of SM Jurij Baluevskij on a possible Russian nuclear response to possible threats to the security of Russian territory).

Furthermore, referring to the imminent NATO summit in Bucharest (2-4 April 2008), McCain urged the countries of the Atlantic Alliance to “keep the doors open to all the democracies committed to defending freedom (read: Georgia and the Ukraine)” and to consider “as indivisible its solidarity from the Black Sea to the Baltic” (“Moscow News”, 3 April 2008). Finally, McCain's comment on the Russian presidential elections: “Yesterday we saw what is unfortunately yet another step away from democracy in Russia. In an election where opposition candidates were either suppressed or arrested, where the result was foreordained by the manipulations of a corrupt and undemocratic regime (...). It is a tragedy of history that at this moment, when the democratic tide has reached more nations than ever before, the Russian people who rose in unison in 1991 to end totalitarian rule backed by a pervasive and cruel KGB would, after less than two decades, be again deprived of the opportunity to choose their leaders in a free and open context” (www.johnmccain.com, 3 March 2008). Has Iraq also benefited from the “tide of democracy”?

Hillary Clinton and Russia

Hillary Clinton's foreign policy advisors include some names from her husband Bill's administration, such as the former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the former councillor for National Security Sandy Berger, the former Ambassador to



Grazia Neri

_Senator McCain, the winner of the Republican primaries, knows Russia better than his two Democratic contenders and is considered a specialist on homeland security and foreign policy issues

Moscow Strobe Talbott and finally Richard Holbrooke, diplomat, former Assistant Secretary of State for Asia and Europe. They are not overwhelmingly friendly towards Russia, more a blast from the Yeltsin era.

The Senator of New York, when asked to name the new President Medvedev during a debate, muttered confused: "Uhm, Med-Medvedova, something like that", unaware of having forged a female surname ("Washington Post", 1 March 2008). Her judgement of the Russian elections is not very far from McCain's: "Today's elections in Russia (...) mark a milestone in the

distancing of this country from democracy (...)". Even though during the electoral campaign Medvedev "said something sounding hopeful", the future US President must "keep their eyes open" and check if Medvedev is really the man to bring a "new approach to Russian internal and foreign policies".

Hillary Clinton accuses Russia of fuelling nationalist sentiments against neighbouring countries, using oil and gas as a weapon of blackmail, obstructing Western peace efforts in the Balkans and criticising countries that want to join NATO. Finally, "Putin has suffocated freedom of press, harrying and imprisoning political opponents and transforming the election into a depressing formality".

This emphatic almost grotesque representation of Putin's Russia is necessary for Clinton to attack Bush,

guilty of "not having understood what was happening in Russia". On another occasion, Mrs. Clinton, citing Bush's well-known statement in Lubiana, said: "I looked into Putin's eyes, and I saw three things, a 'K' a 'G' and a 'B'. Putin has no soul". From here one of the regular biting jokes of the former Russian President: "Someone said that as an ex-agent of the KGB I have no soul: a statesman only needs his head". Nevertheless, Mrs. Clinton declared to be "ready, as President, to work with Russia in the areas where our interests overlap: the fight against terrorism and nuclear proliferation". But warned Russia "to understand America's priorities, those for which we will fight" (www.hillaryclinton.com, 2 March 2008).

Barack Obama and Russia

Barack Obama's position is different. The young Senator of Illinois was in Russia in August 2005 together with fellow Republican Richard Lugar, one of the makers in 1991 of the Soviet-American cooperation programme for the disposal and safe storage of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, continued by post-soviet Russia. The two senators visited the storage and destruction sites of those deadly devices. Obama had the opportunity to spend time with high level Russian officials and the then American ambassador to Moscow William J. Burns¹. Obama also visited the Ukraine, President Jushchenko, and Azerbaydhan. Included in Obama's councillors in the field of international politics is the already mentioned Zbigniew Brzezinski, eighty years old, political scientist and historian, a leading specialist in the problems of Russia and ex-communist central Eastern Europe, and a former councillor for the National Security of former President Jimmy Carter.

He is a man of the Cold War who in 2004 he compared Putin to Benito Mussolini. More than once has he declared to be in favour of NATO encircling Russia. In his opinion, the Russian worries on this subject are only "paranoia" and Dmitriy Medvedev is just a "nominal figure". Obama's specific Russian advisor is Michael McFaul, 43, Professor of Political

Science at the prestigious Stanford University, considered one the leading specialists of Russian politics and "nostalgic" of the Yeltsin administration, after an initial interest in Putin.

However Obama, who in the eyes of the Russians (and not only) is given credit for being the only senator in the USA to vote against the war in Iraq, has taken, just like Hillary Clinton, a very cautious, if not hostile, stance to deploying the American antimissile defence system in Europe.

On the contrary, McCain approved it without reserve, declaring not to be at all worried about Putin's objections. Obama also made negative statements on the March Russian presidential elections. Yes there is some "progress" compared to "hundreds of years of autocratic regimes that weigh down on Russia", but also "a tragic step backwards compared to recent experiments of democracy".

Medvedev won – commented Obama – due to a choice made by the "ultra popular Putin". Because "genuine opposition candidates were not admitted", while "the TV was monopolised by Medvedev". So, "these elections were the least competitive in Russia's recent history".

Nevertheless, the senator-candidate concluded, the United States must work with President Medvedev on a series of common aims: "stop the distribution of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) getting into the hands of terrorists, control Iran's nuclear ambitions, reduce the nuclear arsenals on both sides, and ensure a stabile supply of gas and oil".

Finally, urging people "not to ignore the erosion of democracy in Russia", Obama concluded his judgement by remembering the formal commitment of Medvedev to "guarantee rule of law, media independence and acceptance of political freedom" (www.barackobama.com, 3 March 2008).

This last statement shows signs of openness towards Medvedev. In any case

_During her election campaign, Hillary Clinton accused Putin of squelching press freedom and reducing the elections to a farce and said Bush had not realised what was going on in Russia



the new Russian President and the Senator of Illinois share studies in law, as well as belonging to the same generation of forty year olds that was not politically formed in the climate of the Cold War. Both of them avoid the aggressive language that is typical of a confrontational spirit. For this the two “could overcome the rhetoric of the Cold War and build a constructive relationship on shared principles” (E. Christens and W. Partlett, in “Foreign Policy in Focus”, www.fpif.org, 6 March 2008).

The Russian perception

Neither Putin nor his successor to the presidency Medvedev have expressed their favouritism towards one or another American presidential candidate. They only hope for an easing of tension and restoration of dialogue, in the spirit of the document signed at the Putin-Bush summit in Sochi on 6 April: the Declaration on the Strategic Russia-USA framework.

As the already mentioned under secretary Burns wrote, more than making the differences emerge, this document “put in first place what we both earn from working together to prevent the diffusion of WMDs, protecting and reducing reciprocal nuclear arsenals, developing cooperation on civil nuclear power, fighting terrorism and helping to settle local conflicts, remembering that our economic connections are growing quickly” (“The Moscow Times”, 13 May 2008. In the first ten days of May, Russia and the United States have reached an agreement on cooperating in the civil nuclear power field.

Furthermore, the two governments have agreed on the passage, across Russian land, of (non lethal) NATO supplies and means to Afghanistan. For some time the U.S. Air Mobility Command has been renting “Antonov”-type large Russian transportation military aircrafts to transport weapons directed to Iraq and Afghanistan.

At this point, it is worth knowing the expectations of the Russian élite: politicians, councillors to the Kremlin, influential political scientists and well-known experts in international politics.

We will start with the President of the Duma Committee for International Affairs Konstantin Kosachev. In a comment made during the primaries of the "Super Tuesday" in February, he wrote that "from a Russian view point the choice (between the three) is not very pleasing (*prijatnyj*). Senator McCain, standing out for his 'Carthage must be destroyed' statements, for his desire to throw Russia out of the G8 and for a host of other expressions worthy of the 'hot moments of the Cold War', has expressed sincere sentiments. It was traditionally believed that it is easier to do business with the Republicans, but in light of the above, the senator-veteran is ready to put an end to this stereotype". The future relationship between Washington and Moscow – according to the influential parliamentarian – is made "difficult" by the "excessively ideological democratic approaches, founded especially on the subject of rights". Furthermore, both Obama and Clinton are surrounded by "characters who are not well-known for loving Russia".

In the end, Obama seems to be "the candidate from which we can expect more serious steps in the direction of Russia, since he is not connected to the phobia of the Cold War, like McCain, or to the old exponents of the previous democratic administration, like Mrs. Clinton" ("Kommersant", 7 February 2008).

A high MID official

The considerations of a level ranking *chinovnik* (State official), the director of the Foreign Policy Planning Department of the MID, Aleksandr Kramarenko, are interesting.

On 2 April, he wrote in the "Kommersant" a reply to an article by the Democratic Senator Joseph Biden, President of the Senatorial Committee for foreign policy, appearing a few days before in the "Wall Street Journal" (a paper openly against Russia and Putin).

In this article Biden urged the future administration to take "a new and harder approach" towards Russia. For Kramarenko similar stances show that "the entire American political elite – Democratic and Republican – is simply unable to change old habits, while the trend in international



Lev Gudkov, the director of the Levada Center, has said that the number of Russians with a negative opinion of the US increased after the US declared war on Iraq

events is going in the opposite direction to American expectations for a 'unipolar world'".

"Nevertheless", states Kramarenko, "the real cause behind American hostility is not the "bad behaviour of Moscow", but rather the fact that Putin's Russia is a growing country while the USA is said to be in a phase of decline".

Also concerning disarmament, it is not Russia by rather the USA who is responsible for the "lack of progress in priority areas for both countries, such as the control of arms".

The diplomat emphasises how Washington withdrew unilaterally (in 2002, NDA) from a fundamental Soviet-American treaty like the ABM².

Kramarenko concluded his piece by accusing Biden of “giving poor advice to the next US President”.

Two political leaders

Of little significance are the declarations of the Nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovskij, the only Russian politician to be in favour of McCain, based on the similar international political approaches he shares with the senator. For the Communist Gennadij Zjuganov there are no substantial differences between the three towards Russia (ITAR-TASS, 6 February).

Mikhajl Margelov, President of the Committee for International Affairs of the Council for the Federation (High Chamber), taking heed of the primaries of the “Super Tuesdays” in February, noted that “the political need will make it so that the electoral rhetoric will be followed by more pragmatic tones. Measuring the global level of the mutual responsibilities and dependencies of our countries, it will be clear that additional confrontation is dangerous for both (...). In the world we have too many interconnected issues for us to waste time and energy in prolonging arguments”. Margelov proposed Obama as the victor.

For Sergej Markov, Duma deputy of the dominant party Russia Unity, Director of the Institute for Political Studies in Moscow and influential councillor to the Kremlin, “the worst situation for Russia” is the victory of McCain, “a warrior of the Cold War that hates Russia like he hated the URSS”. Instead a democratic affirmation “would put a stop to the political insanity of the American leaders who, instead of investing in education or social polities, throw all the money into an effort to exceed the entire planet in military terms”. Finally for Russia “the preferred option would be Obama: it would mark a turning point in US foreign policy”.

According Markov in the case of a Clinton presidency, the Department of State would fall into the hands of those who bombed Serbia” (Interfaks, 6 February 2008).

The director of the USA and Canada Institute of the Academy of Science Sergej Rogov, writing in “Rodnaja Gazeta” (no. 9,

21 March 2008), starts from the consideration that “current USA-Russia relations are really bad. We disagree on many political, military and economic issues. Relations recently started to worsen in the ideological sphere. The USA accuses Russia of not being a democratic country”. For Rogov, in the campaign for the primaries the priorities of the US foreign policy are Iraq, Iran and China. “The Americans fear China reaching their level of GDP in 2020”. “Nevertheless”, continues Rogov, “the USA knows that Russia is the only country in the world able to destroy them. For this reason they cannot ignore us. We are also important in terms of energy. And without us the nuclear problems of North-Korea and Iran cannot be solved”. Thus they are compelled to work with Russia. For Rogov, unlike McCain, “the Democrats will not support the financing of the antimissile defence project in Poland and the Czech Republic and will want to exercise more control over the armament policy”.

Nonetheless, whoever the next American President is, in his opinion, “it is likely that the behaviour of the future US administration towards Russia will be even harder” than the current one.

On this subject many other specialists, observers, Russian politicians have expressed their differing judgements and opinions, with sound arguments and much less ideology than thought (or used) in the West.

Almost all of them agree that for Russia the worst situation would be a future President McCain. The best one would be Obama.

Medvedev's think-tank

Finally, according to some Russian newspapers like the “Komsomolskaja Gazeta” (19 March 2008), the newly elected President Dmitrij Medvedev has set up a think-tank for international policy, called the Institute of Modern Development. Specialists in international policy, research institutes, newspapers and magazines that support pragmatic rather than ideological approaches to foreign policy are said to lead it. Of the thinkers considered to be ideologically closer to the new President, a US source (US Open

Source Center, 7 May 2008) mentions Sergej Karaganov, director of the Council for Foreign Policy and Defence, Aleksej Arbatov, who heads the Centre for International Security at IMEMO, and Fjodor Lukjanov, director of the leading quarterly magazine on international politics "Rossija v Global'noj Politike" (published in English with the name "Russia in Global Affairs").

They take critical positions towards the USA, especially concerning the eastwards expansion of NATO. As Karaganov declares, however, the Russian managerial group must "avoid unjustified demonstrations of inelasticity that could only sap the modest reserve of power that Russia has acquired" ("Jezhenedel'nyj Zhurnal", 4 March 2008).

The director of "Russia in Global Affairs" Lukjanov has declared that Russia must not let itself be involved in another Cold War and that the new Russian President must conduct a flexible foreign policy and make compromises, if necessary.

Compromises are not to the detriment of the nation's interests, as generally believed" (www.strana.ru , 5 March 2008). Lukjanov questions the need for Russia to increase military spending: "the experience of the USA in recent decades has shown us that its enormous military force is not a guarantee of political success" (ibidem)³. In an article appearing in an unofficially governmental newspaper like "Rossijskaja Gazeta" (3 March 2008) Karaganov advised the new Russian President to pursue the "super task of avoiding a new great war or a series of wars" or, in any case, to "not get involved in conflicts".

Finally, on 14 April the political reporter Julija Petrovskaja heavily criticised a statement by the powerful head of SM General Jurij Baluevskij, according to whom Russia would take "measures that are not only military" concerning Georgia and the Ukraine, if they joined NATO. Petrovskaja defined that intervention as "aggressive" and "counterproductive" for the relations with those countries, and only able of fuelling international tension. An important fact: for the first time a general, used to warlike declarations, was being publicly reproached, from the columns of an important newspaper at that.

The fact is that Russia objectively has the need not to fall into a ruinous spiral of tension and a new arms race, given that difficult, complex and very expensive modernization and growth processes await it in the coming years.

Thus dialogue is fundamental, as long as the future resident of the White House, on the other side of the Ocean, becomes convinced that it must negotiate with Russia by moving in new and different directions.

1. We note, en passant, that on 13 May 2008 the "Nezavisimaja Gazeta" published an interview in which Burns, becoming the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs in April, emphasizing the possibilities of relaunching Russian-American cooperation concerning nuclear and economic issues, as well as of a positive compromise on antimissile defense in Europe. At the same time he stuck to the American commitment towards Georgia and the Ukraine's entry into NATO.

2. It is the treaty that since 1972 outlawed the deployment of anti-missile or space defense missiles, able to destroy the mutual nuclear deterrence, thus opening the path to possible nuclear attacks by the superpower equipping itself with this defense.

3. Under Putin Russian military spending has grown from 7 billion dollars in 2001 to 40 billion forecast for this year. Nothing in comparison to the gigantic US spending, but in any case significant. The new orders of weapons by the Russian government for its FFAs were confirmed by the great Victory Parade of 9 May in Moscow. For the first time since 1990 strategic missiles (such as the Topol'-M) and almost 200 models of vehicles and new weapons were shown off in Red Square, while new models (or updates) of strategic bombers (Tupolev 160) and MiG and Il fighter planes flew in the skies above.