

Transatlantic Unity on Russia

By: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

For much of August, the world's focus turned to Russia. We took up the urgent, initial challenge of supporting Georgia after the Russian attack – a challenge that we are, for now, successfully meeting. The main question going forward – which I addressed at length in a recent speech – is, what do the events of the past month mean for Russia's relationship with the world, especially the United States and Europe?

The attack on Georgia brought us to a critical moment – but not a deterministic one. Russia's leaders are making some unfortunate choices. But they can make different ones. Russia's future is in Russia's hands. But its choices will be shaped, in part, by the actions of others – especially the United States and our European allies.

This goal will require the resolve and the unity of the United States and Europe. We cannot afford to validate the prejudices that some Russian leaders seem to have: that if you pressure free nations – if you bully, threaten, and lash out – we will cave in and eventually concede. The United States and Europe must stand up to this kind of behavior, and not allow Russia's aggression to achieve any benefit.

We and our European allies are therefore acting as one in supporting Georgia. At the same time, the United States and Europe are supporting – unequivocally – the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Russia's neighbors. And we will not allow Russia to wield a veto over the future of our Euro-Atlantic community – neither what states we offer membership, nor the choice of those states to accept it.

The United States and Europe are deepening our cooperation in pursuit of greater energy independence. We will expand and defend an open global energy economy from abusive practices.

Indeed, Russia's leaders cannot have it both ways – drawing benefits from international norms, markets, and institutions, while challenging their very foundations. To reach its full potential, Russia needs to be fully integrated into the international political and economic order.

Already, Russia's leaders are seeing a glimpse of what the future might look like if they persist with their aggressive behavior. In contrast to Georgia's position, Russia's international standing is worse now than at any time since 1991. Russia's civil nuclear cooperation with the United States is not going anywhere now. Russia's leaders are imposing pain on their nation's economy. Their bid to join the World Trade Organization is now in jeopardy. So too is their bid to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

But perhaps the worst fallout of all for Moscow is that its behavior has fundamentally called into question whose vision of Russia's future is really guiding the country. There was a time recently when the new president of Russia laid out a positive and forward-looking vision of his nation's future. This vision took account of Russia's vulnerabilities, called for greater reform at home, and most importantly, recognized that Russia cannot afford a relationship with the world that is based on antagonism and alienation.

By necessity, the United States and Europe will continue to pursue our shared interests with Russia – including fighting terrorism, stopping Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons, supporting Middle East peace, and fostering an effective UN Security Council. But it would be a real shame if our relationship with Russia never rose above the level of interests – for the best relationships are those among states that also share goals and values.

Whether Russia's leaders overcome their nostalgia for the 19th century, and reconcile themselves to the sources of power and the exercise of power in the 21st century, still remains to be seen. The decision is Russia's, and Russia's alone. And we hope that Russia's leaders choose responsibly – for the sake of their people and the sake of the world.