A View from Russia’s Parliament

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Esteemed ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends! Russia today is actively and resolutely working to strengthen global security and efficiently counteract such challenges and threats of the XXI century as international terrorism, proliferation of nuclear weapons, and drug trafficking. We consistently call to preserve multi-polar world order which emerged on the planet after World War Two in which the United Nations plays a dominating role.

It is important for the United Nations and its Security Council to efficiently counteract new challenges and threats of the XXI century and ensure sustainable development of the world civilization. Nobody has the right to appropriate UN powers to himself. It specifically concerns the use of force against sovereign states. The talk is mostly about the North Atlantic alliance which tries to engage in inappropriate missions. Our relations with NATO are in the stage of formation at present. However the alliance is acting in way which does not allow us to trust it. Unfortunately, the situation provides a negative feedback regarding the solution of large-scale problems and slows down global and regional cooperation in the field of security. A series of armed conflicts which are justified by humanitarian reasons undermine the sacred and many-century principle of state
sovereignty. It is a very serious matter. Therefore, unfortunately, Russia and NATO differ in comprehending security. We have to understand that a unipolar world results in the hegemony of one country and, unfortunately, in absolute suppression of state sovereignty and subsequently of national identity of the others. Violation of the principle of unity and indivisibility of security is fraught with numerous threats. We have to come to an understanding that today we need a multi-polar world with cooperating centers of power and common comprehension of strategic security and human rights. I am convinced that Russia and the United States have to simply mount cooperation, including among experts and professionals in the sphere of international relations and global security. I am also convinced that meetings like we are holding today will promote consensus about complicated but necessary "common denominator" in the understanding of world development in the XXI century.

Two years ago the world faced a phenomenon - practically synchronous unrest and demonstrations in many Arab countries against authoritarian regimes. The Arab Spring at the time was perceived with hope for constructive changes and Russian citizens backed those who promoted democratic reforms. However it soon became clear that developments in some Arab countries sidetracked from a democratic path. There were coups instead of democracy and protection of minorities. One dominating force was replaced by another even more aggressive dominating force. Naturally, outside interference to support one side against the other in internal conflict and the force used in the interference added negative development to the situation. Actually, some countries under the cover of humanitarian slogans and with the help of the air force toppled the Libyan regime. Today we cannot allow a repetition of the Libyan scenario in Syria. The efforts of the international community and Russia and the United States, in particular, should target, first and foremost, reconciliation between conflicting parties in the country. We have to ensure an early end to violence and launch a
dialogue between various sides of the conflict no matter how difficult it may be. There should be no foreign military interference; there should be respect of Syrian sovereignty. That will create preconditions for practical implementations of measures aimed at promoting democracy in the country. It is important to prevent further escalation of the civil war. I believe diplomats from various countries will work this way.

We have learned the bitter experience and will oppose the adoption of any resolutions by the UN Security Council which can be interpreted as a signal for military interference in Syria. Therefore, Russia, as well as China barred the adoption of resolutions last year which could be interpreted ambiguously and in reality could again trigger violence against one party of the internal conflict.

In this connection and because of sharp reaction of many experts to Russian position on the crisis in Syria I would like to caution my colleagues about one destructive scheme: it's is OK if there is UN approval of that or another action, if there is not - we shall create a coalition of interested countries and use the same UN Security Council resolutions to deliver missile and bomb strikes. I believe such democracy does not correspond to the understanding of the global civilization in the XXI century. Today we have to act on the basis of fundamental principles stipulated by the UN Charter - prevent imbalance of the whole system of international security. By the way, it was the United States which insisted that the right to veto be enshrined in the UN Charter. I hope the United States and other countries would consider the latest grievous experience and refrain from the use of force in Syria without approval by the Security Council. I am convinced that no matter how extremely difficult the solution of the Syrian problem is, provided joint and concerted actions we shall definitely succeed in launching a dialogue between the government and the opposition and resolving the crisis
without foreign military interference. The priority goal for Russia is to secure civilians.

One more thing. In Arab Spring countries, like earlier in Iraq, Russian companies are ceding positions which they built up in many years on local markets and losing major commercial projects. Their place is occupied by companies from countries directly related to the change of the regime. That makes me, and not only me think the true cause of the tragic events was not human rights, but a desire to seize the markets. I believe both Russians and Americans have to actively work with new authorities in the Arab world to promote our economic positions and, first and foremost, stability in Arab countries. Current developments in the Arab world show democracy cannot be imposed by force. Otherwise religious extremist forces take hold in the countries and work to change their democratic development guideline and secular character. We in multiconfessional Russia have always maintained close relationship with representatives of Islamic states and their world perception was close to traditions of Russian Muslims. We are interested in any active ties - political, trade, and economic - with countries of the Arab world, including those which went through a period of upheavals. I see real grounds for Russia to preserve leading positions in the Middle East where we always had a lot of friends.

As for the Arab-Israeli conflict, no roadmap which can resolve it has been designed yet. They say he who never climbed, never fell. In Russia they say - What the eyes fear, the hands do. We maintain close relations with the leaderships of Israel and the Palestinian Autonomy and we shall continue in the format of the Middle East Quartet to actively promote the resumption of the peaceful process, naturally, in close coordination with the League of Arab States.

The Arab Spring showed that world public opinion is currently influenced through new information and communication technologies: internet, social
networks, mobile communications like television developed into the most efficient instrument of home and foreign policy. This fact has to be comprehended anew in order to keep developing the unique freedom of communication in the Internet and decrease the risk of using the world web by criminals, including international terrorists.

We are often using the notion of "soft force". It means the achievement of foreign policy goals without the use of weapons through information and other means of influence which I mentioned. Unfortunately, the means are often used for completely different purposes - provocations, extremism, separatism, brainwashing and even direct interference into internal affairs of sovereign countries. We have to clearly distinguish between the freedom of speech and unlawful use of the soft force. I welcome the activities of humanitarian and charity non-governmental organizations, including those which criticize authorities. But today there are many quasi-NGO which are orchestrated from abroad and aim at destabilizing the situation in that or another country. I am the head of the biggest Russian NGO engaged in foreign policy and peacekeeping activities. It is the Russian Peace Fund. We can properly distinguish between non-governmental organizations that work to develop civil society, democracy, the rule of law and human rights and, unfortunately, those with destructive aims. I mean NGOs which are coordinated, and also financed, from abroad. NGOs can freely operate in our country. There are many non-governmental organizations in Russia, including the Russian Peace Fund, our universities. It is a form of civilized lobbying which should not be feared. But we do not use NGO in other countries and we do not use financial capabilities of foreign NGO to promote our interests. None of the BRICS countries – neither Brazil, nor India, nor China - acts in such a way. We believe influence on internal policy and public opinion in other countries should be exerted only openly. In this case all the players would be responsible in their actions.
Now about Iran. Russia is naturally concerned by the growing threat of a military strike against Iran. If it happens, the consequences would be catastrophic. The Iranian problem can be resolved only peacefully. We call to recognize the right of Iran to develop peaceful nuclear program, including uranium enrichment, but in exchange put the whole Iranian nuclear program under the global IAEA control. If that happens all sanctions should be dropped. The West is too obsessed with the "axes of evil" and punishment of various countries. It is inappropriate to immediately impose sanctions if you do not like something. In the XXI century we have to unite and try to understand rather than label and draw division lines.

As for the Korean nuclear program, Pyongyang is truly violating the non-proliferation regime and openly declared its claims to a military nuclear program. It several times conducted nuclear tests. The nuclear status of North Korea is inadmissible to us as it is, I believe, to the United States. We call to free the Korean Peninsula from nuclear arms but only through diplomatic means. I believe we shall use in full the existing mechanism of six-party talks for that. However it seems to me the United States no longer shares such an approach. We should not test the strength of the new leader of North Korea and thus provoke impetuous reaction of North Korean leadership to our actions. North Korea and Russia have a common border. You do not choose neighbors, you have them historically. Therefore, we shall continue an active dialogue with Pyongyang to make North Korea resolve its nuclear problem.

Colleagues, passions around the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea make me think how nuclear proliferation risks emerge and who promotes them. Whether we like it or not, frequent cases of outside interference make countries fear potential intervention against those who do not have the bomb. They want to be stronger. They see the trend towards the creation of a unipolar world and want to protect themselves the way they can. The easiest way according to the
logic is the path of least resistance - to launch a nuclear program of your own. Colleagues, if we do not want to promote the spread of such psychology we have to both maintain a dialogue with the mentioned countries and create zones free from mass destruction weapons in various parts of the globe. We believe it is no Utopia and such a zone can be created in the Middle East in the near future. Definitely we have to strengthen the universal role of the IAEA. Any country can develop peaceful nuclear energy only under the control of the international organization. It would be very beneficial for Russia as we actively operate on international markets, build nuclear power plants with modern safe technologies, and plan to participate in the creation of multilateral uranium enrichment centers and nuclear fuel pools.

As for Afghanistan, we supported the operation to provide international assistance to the country. However the international force under the aegis of the North Atlantic alliance failed to cope with its mission. The terrorist and drug threat from Afghanistan did not decrease, but increased. As the international force is readying to withdraw from Afghanistan we think about the spread of major threats from that country mostly to Central Asia. Naturally, the expansion does not suit us. We have clear interests in Afghanistan as it is our close neighbor. We want the country to develop peacefully and stop being the source of the drugs threat most of all. Today drug trafficking comprises a major threat to humanity as it undermines the genofond of affected countries. Unfortunately, illegal drugs production has nearly doubled in Afghanistan. In Russia we encounter a true narcotic aggression which inflicts major harm to the health of our citizens. Given the scope of the drug threat from Afghanistan we plan to counteract it through joint effort in the UN and regional organizations - Collective Security Treaty Organization and Shanghai Cooperation Organization. We are ready to mount Russian participation in the operation to assist Afghan people. Any anti-drug program within Afghanistan shall be accompanied by
reliable closure of transportation routes for opium and its products to outside markets and by blocking financial flows that feed drug trafficking. Russia will promote joint efforts of the international community in order to achieve a quality breakthrough in the fight against the global drug threat. I believe we have to care more about the future of Afghanistan. We would like to see the reconciliation process to be joined by the armed opposition, including Taliban, on condition they recognize the constitution of the country and sever ties with terrorist groups. In case our actions are concerted the emergence of a stable and neutral Afghanistan is quite possible in foreseeable future.

Then United Nations has adopted a global counterterrorist strategy, however there is an impression that the fight against the evil does not go consistently along a common scenario yet but only as response to specifically dangerous manifestations when public indignation floods the world. We should not wait for a repetition of such tragedies as 9/11, new Beslan or Boston and only then act decisively and collectively. We have to design a single plan of the fight against the evil and implement it already today. I am convinced information institutions, media, religious organizations, NGO, education, science and business shall be engaged in the fight against international terrorism. We need a dialogue of civilizations which would help defeat the main threat of the XXI century.

Colleagues, our country borders on the main center of global economy - China. Many people today discuss its expansion into Africa and consider its coming role in global economy and international relations and, theoretically, its possible use of coercive diplomacy approach in different regions of the world.

What shall we do as the Chinese factor strengthens? Personally I am convinced the growing Chinese economy poses no threat, but is a challenge which offers major opportunities for business cooperation. We have to build up integration
and cooperation with China. In Russia we plan to closely cooperate with China to promote economic growth in Siberia and the Far East.

Let's be realists. The current Chinese conduct on the international arena gives no grounds to suspect any claims for global supremacy. China shares our vision of multi-polar and equal world order. We shall keep supporting each other on the global arena and jointly resolve problems in the Security Council, as well as in BRICS, SCO, G20 and other multilateral platforms. Moreover, we have practically resolved all major political issues in relations with China, including the main issue of the state border. We have a mighty constructive mechanism of bilateral relations. Naturally, we have some problems with China as our economic interests in third countries do not always coincide. We attentively monitor migration flows from China. However the main thing is that Russia needs a flourishing and stable China while China needs a strong and flourishing Russia.

Another Asian giant is growing fast - India. Russia maintains many-century friendly relations with it. I am sure enhanced partnership of our countries will benefit not only Russia and India, but also the whole growing global polycentric system of the XXI century.

We witness a growing role of Asia and the Pacific Rim in the world. There are new opportunities to join the rapidly mounting integration processes in new Asia. We shall also promote the BRICS group which exists not only on paper. It is an emerging association of five countries with a total population of three billion people, major labor and natural resources and domestic markets. After South Africa joined BRICS the group acquired a global format and today BRICS countries produce over a quarter of the global GDP. So far we are getting used to each other, but I am sure we shall closely cooperate in the United Nations and develop bilateral relations among BRICS members. I believe the group will develop into a collective and long-term player on the international arena.
Dear colleagues, as for the European guideline, Russia is an integral part of bigger Europe and European civilization. The Russians perceive themselves as Europeans. For us it is important how Europe will develop in the XXI century and who will design the new European architecture.

Russia proposes to create a common economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. Today Europe which is used to be a zone of stability and order suffers from the Eurozone crisis. Naturally, it also affects the Russian interests mostly because the European Union is a major foreign economic and trade partner of our country. Prospects of the whole global economic construction greatly depend on the situation in Europe.

As for the European Union, today it is difficult to speak about overall cooperation between Russia and the EU mostly because of the barrier called visa regime. We call to drop it. The measure would give a powerful and constructive impulse to real integration between Russia and the European Union and will expand cultural and business ties specifically between small and medium businesses. I believe we shall agree on a set of moves towards visa-free travel in the coming years. We have to be realists, as it is not easy. But I hope it is no Utopia and we shall succeed.

I would like to dwell on the Eurasian project which I am dealing with as chairman of a corresponding committee of Russian parliament. We have set up the Customs Union with Kazakhstan and Belarus and have already enjoyed major economic benefits from it. The Common Economic Space comprising the markets of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan laid the basis for the highest integration level - Eurasian Economic Union. It will be a mighty economic association. The aggregate Gross Domestic Product of our three countries is close to two trillion dollars, the industrial potential is estimated at 600 billion dollars, agricultural production - at over 100 billion dollars, and the consumer markets number close
to 170 million people. We are developing into a solid link which unites the Euro-Atlantic and Asian development areas. In the economic field the Eurasian Economic Union will be a bridge spanning rapidly emerging economies of the European Union, East, South-East, and South Asia. I would like to tell those people who see the Eurasian development vector as anti-European or European vector as anti-Eurasian that we should not contrapose them. Europe is a component part of Eurasia, the European integration which began several decades ago is a component part of Eurasian integration which began only several years ago. However from a historic point of view the several decades mean nothing. We have to clearly comprehend European integration as a component part of Eurasian economic integration in the framework of the whole Eurasian continent. Expanded economic cooperation between present-day Common Economic Space of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan with the European Union, China, Japan, and India is beneficial for us.

The geoeconomic and in future geopolitical growth of Eurasian integration should be evolutionary and only voluntary, not revolutionary. We should not forget that the common European market was created for nearly forty years while the Common Economic Space is only one year old. Therefore, I have to say that the Eurasian Economic Union will develop into a major player in the global economic and political arena of the XXI century only in case the project enjoys a broad public support rather than the backing of presidents, lawmakers and experts. I am sure you will have numerous questions to me regarding the Eurasian project and I will be pleased to answer them.

As for Russian-US relations, our country has not been perceiving the United States as an adversary for long. We want to forge relationship and stand for mutually beneficial cooperation. However we, unfortunately, still differ in understanding the architecture of the XXI century. Which world order will exist
on the planet - uni-polar or multi-polar? Which role will the United Nations play in it? What will the idea of a European missile defense result in? I am sure the last issue should be resolved on the basis of the new Strategic offensive arms reduction treaty signed three years ago. It has come into force and properly operates. It is a major foreign policy achievement of our countries. I believe we shall be able to find a common denominator for the complicated problem. Contacts of experts and meetings like this one will promote it.

One of the major issues in Russian-US interaction is the coordination of the fight against international terrorism. Tragic events in Boston showed that it is alive and continues to threaten all of us. Attempts by some US observers to link the terrorist act to the situation in Chechnya are incorrect. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov told me the other day that all claims to his republic are groundless as the suspects had never lived in Chechnya, but grew up in the United States. They targeted their hatred against ordinary Americans.

(Condolences)

Esteemed colleagues, there is a bleeding wound in the families of those killed and wounded in the Boston terrorist act. I would like to extend my deep condolences to family members and friends of the victims and to the whole American people. But I have also to tell those who always look for a Chechen trace in any terrorist act that the situation in North Caucasus is rapidly stabilizing. In the Chechen Republic there is practically no crime at present. I invite all those present here to join me on a trip to Chechnya to see the crime situation there with your own eyes and talk to people in any remote corner of Chechnya. The policy to enforce the Russian constitutional system in Chechnya launched by President Putin has justified itself. I am not painting everything in pink color. It is simply true. There are problems as children are growing up in families where someone was killed or wounded. The war is in the souls of
people, including young generation. They go to other parts of the globe and carry the war in their soul. I am not talking about the Tsarnaevy, they grew up in the USA. It is not related only to Chechnya. It is related to any major conflict which people remember. They live in peaceful countries with their bristling and affected psychology. Naturally, only time can cure it, as well as education of the growing generation, humanitarian, cultural, educational integration. We should not fear Caucasian peoples, we have to help him overcome the war which remained inside them and their children after the military campaign. I am speaking about very concrete things, there is no pathos or philosophy. I am telling you what is really happening in the Russian North Caucasus. The remains of illegal armed formations are still there, particularly in Dagestan, and law enforcers are successfully fighting them. They will be eliminated in the near future. As for those who decided to keep their heads down for the time being... Let's recall unlawful armed formations on the territory of Soviet Ukraine after the end of World War Two. They were finally eliminated only in early '60s, i.e. two decades after the end of World War Two. We should not marginalize the words "Chechnya", "Chechen people", "the Chechens". I would refrain from labeling anyone until the investigation of Boston developments is over. However I am convinced the situation in North Caucasus will continue to attract our attention in decades to come. It will be mostly humane attention.

Now a couple of words about economic diplomacy. We have finally joined the World Trade Organization and the administration of President Barack Obama promoted it. We are grateful to the United States. Naturally, accession to the global trade club is a staged result. We shall abide by WTO norms like we do with all our international commitments. We have already introduced WTO norms into the normative and legal base of the Common Economic Space of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan which I mentioned above. Today we work to attract foreign capital into the Russian economy and open the most attractive industries for
foreign investors. Unfortunately, so far the situation is different with our investors abroad. We failed to acquire either the German Opel or Arselor in Luxembourg although the governments of the countries approved the deals. Well, it is likely a developmental disease and a result of existing mistrust in Russian investors which I hope will decrease in the near future. You should not fear Russia, you should make friends with Russia and integrate with it in projects where you are ready for it. Russia wants to integrate with any constructive partner. We are currently the biggest country with a rich resource base, maybe the biggest in the world. It comprises not only oil and gas, but also timber, land, and water reserves. We are open for any cooperation and are convinced that economic cooperation guarantees political stability. I am sure we have to mount trust between our countries in the spirit of proclaimed "reset" in Russian-US relationship. The "reset" is not just an empty phrase. Although it skids sometimes, it is still moving forward and we, as experts, have to promote its progress and development.

I fear I have been speaking too long. I will conclude to leave time for questions and answers. I would like to say about issues which I am dealing with besides the Eurasian project in the corresponding committee of Russian parliament. I mean humanitarian presence in the world and support to compatriots. We will resolutely support the Russian World. The number of Russian speakers in the world dropped from 350 to 280 million in the past 20 years. The Russian-speaking education space in the world is also squeezing. We are going to resolutely support compatriots at the current stage. We shall work to make authorities of two Baltic countries - Latvia and Estonia - to comply with numerous recommendations of international non-governmental organizations and fulfill their commitments to the Council of Europe, in particular. For example, in ratifying the CE convention on regional and minority languages Latvia deleted from it sections which are bigger than those which remained. (Nil
Ushakov, Education law Daugavpils). Every year on March 16 Waffen-SS veterans march in Riga, the capital of Latvia. The notion of "non-citizens" used in Latvian and Estonian legislation does not exist in international law. Every sixth resident of Latvia and every 13th resident of Estonia is deprived as non-citizen of political, voting, and social-economic rights, including a possibility to freely use the Russian language. We hope for the support of the United States in the human rights dossier. None of us should usurp the human rights dossier and use it as an instrument of pressure. We have to cooperate in the human rights field in which nobody can play the role of a coordinator. We have to join efforts in human rights protection. Russia today is a young democracy. We can reproach those who often reprimand us in the sensitive sphere. Nobody is absolutely perfect in observing human rights and major freedoms. There are major human rights violations in mature democracies. We shall resolutely promote human rights and, definitely, the rights of compatriots abroad. After 20 years of its modern history Russia is ripe to gather the Russian World.

Esteemed colleagues, Russia has a great culture which is recognized also in the West and East. Unfortunately, we did not sufficiently invest into our cultural industry and its promotion on the global market. Today we are planning to do it. We will include culture and humanitarian issues in the global information network. We will develop cooperation in the information world.

Thus, not imperial ambitions but economic, cultural and humanitarian promotion comprises the vector of our expansion in the world. It is economic, cultural, and humanitarian expansion rather than military or gas-driven of which we are often accused. We are ready for serious cooperation with foreign partners, including the United States. I am convinced we shall succeed. Now I am ready to answer your questions.