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I want to be even more provocative than I normally am, and I am known to be a plain speaker. Robert Blackwill gave a great rundown yesterday of the problems we face, but I think they are even larger. The US withdrawal from Iraq leaves the country in pieces, unstable, and a hotbed of terrorism, the NATO is losing the war in Afghanistan and will soon withdraw, again leaving behind a hotbed of terrorism. Pakistan is facing a choice between dissolution or radicalism, and there is no other way out. There is no hope for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement unless there is someone to enforce it, but there is no one to do so. Iran will become nuclear, and the only question is whether it will stop after developing a capacity to produce a bomb or simply proclaim that it has a bomb. An Israeli attack will lead to a wave of instability and terrorism, an energy crisis, and the bomb two years later.

There are no arguments left against nuclear proliferation. North Korea has several nuclear weapons, and will continue with impunity for the time being.

We are unwilling to take responsibility and we are blaming Bush for everything in the world, but we all are to blame for this miserable state of affairs. Clinton, while taking credit for the alleged victory in the Cold War, allowed two nations to obtain nuclear weapons, he alienated Russia, and worse, arranged the attack on Yugoslavia. Following attacks on Yugoslavia and Iraq, every sensible country would try, if it could afford, to acquire nuclear weapons just to protect its sovereignty and people. Unless, of course, if we are able to provide these states with trustworthy guarantees. The EU, pretending to play a role in the world, conducted endless negotiations with Iran, making themselves a laughing stock and giving Iran precious time to develop nuclear capacities.

There are several security vacuums developing in addition to all that. One, which we inherited from the past, because it was convenient to overlook it, was the Persian Gulf and the Middle East where all the countries are afraid of each other. We are now living through a very strange period, because we are even allowing a security vacuum to be created in Europe. Following the formal end of the Cold War, the West behaved like a victor vis-à-vis Russia, and NATO enlargement was emblematic of this. This was a blatant enlargement of the zone of the US's military and political influence, or even domination, adding insult to injury. When Russia has been denied the right to have a zone of security interests of its own. It was accompanied, and still is, by sermons about the end of the notion of spheres of influence.

The problem was that, while the US saw itself as the victor, Russia did not see itself as a defeated nation. The Russian elite felt that it had been the victor, and counted at least on an honourable peace. Russia, in addition, is one of the two countries in Europe, which has never been defeated,

along with Britain. We were living in dismal conditions, but our spine had not been broken, and we were ready to fight. We understood that the enlargement of NATO could eventually bring war to the heart of Europe and to our borders. However, Georgia attacked, and it got its nose bloodied, but the blow was directed against Washington, and NATO expansion was put on hold. Nobody is talking about the expansion of NATO anymore, but it has not stopped.

Things are getting worse in Europe, which is steadily continuing its withdrawal from the world, and the Lisbon Treaty will probably hasten the speed of that withdrawal. The US, notwithstanding Obama's nice words about his pro-Atlantic ideas, is drifting away from Europe. Russia is drifting with frightening speed towards China. The Euro-Atlantic region is ceasing to be an exporter of stability, and that is happening on the back of all the new security problems, such as renewed competition for energy, water and resources, as well as for arable soil, which is often overlooked but which is very real.

The worst vacuum is the intellectual one, our escapism, our refusal to acknowledge realities. We have been talking about the economic crisis and the climate as if all the other problems did not exist. The other problems are pushed aside because they are insoluble, or we are offering answers which are laughable. For example, Obama came up with the great idea of improving American and Russian relations by tightening controls over nuclear armaments and even eliminating them. Strategic nuclear arms are not a problem. He just took an instrument from a dusty attic and put it on the table. I am not against the control of nuclear weapons, particularly if it has the addition benefit of better relations between countries. However, it is accompanied by talk about global elimination, a daring and very dangerous proposal, as small nuclear powers will have a huge incentive to proliferate.

Regarding the positive component, the divide in Europe must be healed either by signing a new security treaty or by taking Russia into NATO. The divide in the Middle East must be healed by providing nuclear guarantees to Israel and all other countries involved. It is the responsibility of the US and Russia to do so. A new security alliance must be forged between those countries which are willing and able, so as to deal with problems before they flare up. Politics must be de-ideologised, as we are in a pre-war situation. Churchill and Roosevelt dealt with Stalin, one of the worst dictators in human history, because they had a problem and solved it. We have a problem and should solve it. The dismal situation in Russia could be ameliorated if we were part of an alliance. We need to stop hiding our heads in the sand and look problems straight in the face.