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Transatlantic Security: NATO and Missile Defense

Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs

Press Roundtable with NATO Reporting Tour Journalists

Washington, DC

April 17, 2007

Assistant Secretary Fried: If you've been talked at for most of the day I am in a very unenviable position. You've been talking about Afghanistan, I understand, a fair amount of it. Let me do two brief things and then stop -- I mean really brief -- and then your questions can carry this if that's all right with you. Is that okay?

One is on NATO, and not just Afghanistan, but NATO has been transforming from its Cold War and then regional incarnation of the 1990s into a transatlantic institution with global missions, global reach, and global partners. This transformation is most evident in Afghanistan where NATO is at work, but the line we've crossed is that that "in area/out of area" debate that cost so much time to debate in the 1990s is effectively over. There is no "in area/out of area." Everything is NATO's area, potentially. That doesn't mean it's a global organization. It's a transatlantic organization, but Article 5 now has global implications. NATO is in the process of developing the capabilities and the political horizons to deal with problems and contingencies around the world. That is a huge change.

This is not going to happen overnight, and there is a disparity between the time horizons of governments and the time horizons of real change in organizations which are not always the same. So I think this is a profoundly important shift for the alliance and is going better than many people think and going farther.

The second point I'd like to make, and maybe we can discuss it, is missile defense, which has been a red hot topic in Europe since President Putin's speech in Munich, which put it on the agenda in a new way.

It's important to deal with the strategic challenge of the early 21st Century which includes the challenge of potentially small nuclear arsenals delivered, possibly delivered by relatively small but nevertheless deadly ballistic missiles. This is a very different challenge than the challenge of deterrence in the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and we need to address it on its own terms, not by rerunning debates of the 1980s. That's 25 years ago. But deal with the genuine challenges we face today. We need to take all of this seriously. Contemplate Ahmadi-Nejad with ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons, and imagine what he would look like on television announcing various things, and then tell me how comfortable you feel in a position of Europe's

absolute vulnerability, which is the current situation. Absolute vulnerability.

The modest American installation which may, if the negotiations work out, may be put in Poland, radars in the Czech Republic, is basically useless against the Russian nuclear arsenal, but that's okay because it's not intended to counter a Russian nuclear arsenal. It would not provide 100 percent protection against an Iranian or other small arsenal, but it would provide some protection, and it would certainly raise a significant element of doubt by eliminating the absolute insecurity that now exists in Europe and replacing it with uncertainty on both sides, which is far more stable, I would argue, in a situation where in a crisis one had no defense except a preemptive strike, which is a lousy idea as Europeans have told us.

Now I'm using language and categories common to Cold War, not because I think we're going to be in a Cold War with Iran but because we're dealing with concepts in a new situation and need to think through this.

NATO can be a venue for having this debate, but it needs to take place in a serious way and not through an exchange of slogans.

I'm encouraged by recent articles in the European press that suggest the initial rush to sloganeering is not going to be the final word in Europe.

Now with that, since I promised to be brief, I will try to be true to my word. Stop here, take questions, and hopefully I've been provocative enough to make this discussion interesting. But that's for you to decide.

Question: What do you expect to happen at the meeting at the NAC in NATO, the NATO-Russia Council -

Assistant Secretary Fried: This week on the 19th or the one in Oslo?

Question: No, on this week now. And also in Oslo, do you expect it will be a more useful discussion with less sloganeering? What would the outcome be? Would there be some sort of a joint decision by the alliance on missile defense or will there be something less than that?

Assistant Secretary Fried: I don't think that the discussion on April 19, this Thursday, will lead to a common position on missile defense. I think that will take some more time and some more discussion. But that's all right; you've got to start somewhere. If we did arrive at a common position so quickly it would be seen as rather odd given the intense politicking about this issue.

This is not the first NATO or NATO-Russia discussion. The fact that some in Europe don't want to acknowledge previous discussions doesn't mean they haven't taken place.

Question: Who are these people?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Oh, I wouldn't go there. But I notice that there are fevered calls for consultations in NATO whereas in fact NATO has not only discussed this, but the NATO Summit in Riga issued language about missile defense in its communiqué. That language didn't appear there by accident. Some things are true whether or not you believe them. Not you.

I think that this discussion will be useful. I think the discussion in Oslo will be extremely useful. The spring ministerial is an informal one. That is, it is not intended to produce agreed communiqués, which means in some cases like this the discussion can

be even more useful because you can actually have a debate without people worrying about commas and clauses in paragraphs of the communiqué.

So I think that the discussion will go to the next level. I think it will be very useful. I think Oslo discussions will feature missile defense, Afghanistan, and Kosovo, as they should.

Question: What is the ultimate aim from the U.S. point of view? Is it to make this a NATO thing or to get a NATO operation, somehow NATO-sponsored? And second, what do you expect the NATO-Russia Council, taking into account that Russia is politically in rather agitated state right now, consumed with presidential elections and not likely to embrace Western missile defense real soon?

Assistant Secretary Fried: We have made it very clear publicly and officially in NATO that we look forward to cooperation with Russia on missile defense. The form of that cooperation will depend at least as much on the Russians as it does on us. We wanted to make that very clear and public, that we do look forward to cooperation.

It is logical if the United States identifies Iran as one potential source of a threat that we would want to work with Russia on this. It would be strange if we weren't interested in working with Russia, but we are interested.

Do I think this can be a NATO system? NATO has a role to play in missile defense. NATO has already undertaken and completed a missile defense study. I think that it is quite possible that NATO could support shorter and mid-range national systems and their integration, and that the system the U.S. has in mind could be made compatible with that and could be integrated with that. Now I'm not a missile defense expert. The experts are capable of discussing this more precisely than I can, but we certainly want, at a minimum, want NATO to develop a common strategic understanding of the problem I identified and in that context to raise everyone's comfort level with the role that missile defenses could play -- limited, modest missile defenses -- could play in creating a more stable military situation in the early part of the 21st Century than we are likely to have without them. So first things first.

Question: Before Putin's speech in Munich nobody in Germany, in Europe cared about that missile defense. So why didn't the United States do different with that subject? Why didn't they discuss it earlier in NATO?

Assistant Secretary Fried: We did discuss it inside NATO. The irony is we did discuss it and we keep getting asked why we didn't discuss it, but in fact there were NATO-Russia Council sessions devoted to missile defense. There were NATO sessions devoted to missile defense. And go look at the Riga Summit communiqué paragraph on missile defense. It's odd that people keep asking why we didn't discuss it in NATO when the record shows that we did.

We also discussed it with Russia, and not at the technical level. General Obering was in Russia. Rumsfeld and Gates discussed missile defense with their Russian counterparts. Rumsfeld then took Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov to a U. S. missile defense base in Alaska.

So I keep answering questions suggesting we didn't do something that we demonstrably did. Again, some things are true whether you believe them or not.

Question: I believe.

Assistant Secretary Fried: Thank you.

Question: But whether the Americans or the climate in Europe really made it public...

Assistant Secretary Fried: Look, I will acknowledge that we raised this issue in a way that did not draw a lot of public attention. We raised it. We raised it repeatedly, and we discussed it. But when issues hit the media in a new way, new people look at it, and if they haven't paid attention to the debate they may think that that previous debate didn't exist. Fair point.

The question I could ask you is why is it that the debate only became loud in Europe after Putin made that speech? Who writes Europeans' talking points? Now that's an arch question, and it's intended to be arch, but when I read some of the Russian press commentary it seems clearly designed to drive wedges rather than to advance a serious strategic dialogue. There needs to be a serious strategic dialogue, and Russia needs to be part of it because they're not the problem that we're trying to counter. But there needs to be a serious discussion and not one based on charges of unilateralism or division of Europe or kind of scare tactics left over from four or five years ago. There needs to be a discussion based on the real problem and the best way to counter the problem in a way that is stabilizing rather than destabilizing.

Question: You know that the Social Democrats have already announced that they will oppose the missile defense because they had success in 2002 when they opposed the war in Iraq. Now we will oppose missile defense because we have elections in 2005. Are you aware of this and -

Assistant Secretary Fried: Of course I'm aware of it. I would hope that a major and responsible political party in Europe would not base strategic decisions on electoral politics. You're the one who's made that suggestion rather than me. So I certainly hope that is not the case. I hope that the Germans at least can pause a moment to think about the prospect of Ahmadi-Nejad who has called for the destruction of Israel, who has denied the Holocaust, armed with nuclear weapons and in a position to say, for example, we could attack Tel Aviv. And if Europe says something, we could attack Berlin. Are you prepared to tell me that you find that wholly implausible? I don't. Can you imagine Ahmadi-Nejad saying that on television? I can. Doesn't that raise some questions for Europeans? Doesn't that raise some concerns? That's not a scenario which is wholly implausible.

We are far better off, it seems to me, thinking about the potential advantages of missile defenses in preventing a situation where we feel so vulnerable that in a crisis we have no choice except to do what? Acquiesce? Preempt? Those are both bad, bad, bad options.

Now I'm drawing this rather starkly in an effort to break through the language which reminds me of the early 1980s. Granted, we all enjoyed ourselves 25 years ago. Who doesn't like to relive glories of their youth? But, in fact, the zero option, the stationing of the Pershings, didn't turn out to be quite the apocalypse the demonstrators in Europe suggested at the time. It all turned out rather well.

But let's not debate that. Let's think about the real problem we have.

Question: One small point on missile defense before you move to other topics.

Assistant Secretary Fried: Sure.

Question: Lots of things are plausible, but one would easily think that to go into all this farther the U.S. has to think it's more than plausible, that there's some likelihood of it. So can you tell us what is your information and your knowledge of Iran's ability to produce such a nuclear weapon and such a delivery system and within what timeframe? What is the information that the alarm is based on?

Assistant Secretary Fried: I would call it less alarm than I would prudence in the face of alarming potential, which is different. I'm not here suggesting that there is a date certain, but if we wait for an announcement that they have the capability we are too late. After all, we're not talking about a system involving hundreds or thousands of interceptors. We're talking about 10 tiny unarmed missiles each weighing about 75 kilos. That's not a lot of hardware on which a lot of discussion is now resting.

We know that Iran has ballistic missile programs. We know that Iran has a nuclear program which is obviously raising huge concerns that the UN Security Council has addressed. We are familiar, all of us, with Ahmadi-Nejad's style, with Iran's support for terrorism, for its record of trying to blow up, literally, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. So it strikes me as prudence, and I use the word deliberately, as prudence to plan for eventualities that we hope do not come to pass. And of course it is not simply about Iran.

The danger exists that a number of countries could develop these capabilities and we should consider ways now of dealing with it.

There is an overall strategic challenge at the beginning of the 21st Century of irresponsible countries with small arsenals and we need to think that through, and we need to have options, it seems to me, other than capitulation or preemption. And Europeans have argued with great intensity against strategies based on preemption. And with some merit, I must say. Those are serious European arguments. You don't want to face a situation where you feel you have no choice but to acquiesce or preempt in a situation of, let us say, potentially foggy intelligence. The advantage of the missile defense system is that it doesn't require you to take an action and the missiles don't have warheads and aren't armed.

So it seems to me at least worth having a discussion like this. In any event I do think that the discussion was, after President Putin's speech, took on a form that I find anachronistic. It's better to have a discussion based on the realities of the problem and then a discussion of the best way to handle it. Part of that discussion has to include cooperation with Russia which clearly in this context is not the problem or part of the problem. It is, I hope, part of the solution.

Question: Is ten missiles in Central Europe enough for United States, enough defense? Or you are planning now another augmentation?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Actually the 10 missiles are not necessary at all for the defense of the continental United States. We can defend ourselves without this Central European system. It's slightly better if we do. But the chief advantage of the system is that it also covers Europe.

In our view, having two levels of security in the alliance is not a good idea. It does us only limited good if we are relatively secure and Europe is absolutely insecure. That would mean a decoupling of Europe from the United States.

The system we will be discussing with the Poles and Czechs gives us the potential to cover almost all of Western and Central Europe. You cover more, you cover less depending on the exact placement of radars. It gets technical and there are people who know this better than I do. But we're not trying to counter a massive Soviet style arsenal. We don't think we can do that technically. It's a much smaller operation. So compared to President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, the technology is 25 years more advanced and the problem is much, much, much smaller. So we think it suddenly means the problem and the means to deal with the problem have matched in a way they may not have matched 25 years ago.

Question: Will you try to open some more missiles?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Not planning to. I can't say ever, but that's not at all what is planning, I've never heard the

slightest suggestion that we're planning to make this much bigger. What we're talking about is this modest installation.

Question: I have two questions. You have been talking with all sides and it appears some people have some concerns. What is your explanation about their concerns, why they have the concerns? And Turkey, which will not be under this protection umbrella, there could be a better place against Iranian attack? I'm not sure about the details, but why is Turkey not on this plan and why it is not installing there, not considered if Russia is not the target, but Iran is the target?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Actually it's a very good question and easily answered. The missile defense experts will explain that if you put these missiles in Turkey it would be completely ineffective against Iranian ballistic missiles because it's too close. Apparently you'll never catch them. They're launched, you never catch up. You have to be further away. It's a matter of geography, which means you have to defend Turkey through shorter and medium range systems. That's a legitimate Turkish military concern and I think it's one of the legitimate issues NATO should discuss. The same applies to Russia.

Missiles stationed in Poland are no good against Russian offensive weapons because they're too close. If you're going to counter Russian missiles you have to be further back. And the Russians know this. Their technical people are no worse than ours. They're smart. They know this is not a threat against them. They don't like any military installation in Central Europe, I'm afraid.

Question: How about what else could be in Turkey? It would be closer to the early warning -

Assistant Secretary Fried: Look, the missile defense technical people thought that the Czech Republic was an ideal place to cover most of Europe. I can't predict what future contingencies might be and whether or not an installation to protect Turkey would or would not involve radars in Turkey. I don't know that. It's a technical question but it's a fair one.

To answer your first question as to why people are concerned, I think the United States honestly should have raised this issue earlier to a higher level. That was partly your question. I think we should have done that. In retrospect, I wish we had. But I think the first a lot of Europeans heard about it was in Putin's speech and the Russian arguments I think were designed to raise concerns and memories of the early 1980s. Someone said that the SPD has an election, and who knows what their calculation was. So I think that was a problem and I think that as Europeans think about this more systematically they will start to get past the initial slogans and onto the real problem. That's certainly my hope.

Question: Since the system is designed to cover Europe, have you tried to tell the Russians that this should be in their interest also and -

Assistant Secretary Fried: Of course.

Question: And get them to cooperate?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Of course. We have repeatedly and we will again. We are going to have discussions with the Russians this month at the NATO-Russia Council in Moscow, hopefully in Oslo, and we will be making exactly those arguments.

It is true that if we have a problem, if a nuclear armed Iran with missiles is a problem for us it is no less a problem for the Russians and we want to have a discussion about how we could cooperate. We're certainly open to cooperation. The Russians have given us mixed signals. Sometimes they say they don't want any cooperation, sometimes they say they want cooperation. They certainly responded positively to President Bush's offer to President Putin to cooperate. That is potentially a very fruitful area of U.S.-Russian cooperation or NATO-Russian Council cooperation or both. I look forward to having it. There's no reason we shouldn't

be working with the Russians.

Question: Had President Putin been invited to cooperation when he made his famous speech?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Yes. We had talked to the Russians about cooperation before. General Obering, the head of the Missile Defense Agency had been to Moscow and had talked about cooperation. But clearly the message hadn't sunk in and maybe as the Russians see that we're serious about cooperation, maybe they will come back and say well if you are serious, then let's explore this. Let's move ahead. I certainly hope that's their reaction. We certainly would be delighted to work with the Russians. They'd have a lot to contribute.

Question: You said that the United States is already protected. You said the United States doesn't need this missile defense system.

Assistant Secretary Fried: It helps us, but we can do without it. Yes.

Question: So second, I learn that the assets for the Czechs and Poland because the missile would be on the way to the United States, that it's not to protect Europe. You can't -

Assistant Secretary Fried: That's not quite right. The missiles, the unarmed missiles that might be installed in Poland would actually protect Europe. They would actually protect Europe.

Voice: If they're coming from Iran. Not from Russia.

Assistant Secretary Fried: Not from Russia. It gives you coverage of Europe.

Question: How?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Most of Central, all of Western Europe. Turkey, the Balkans would not be covered and you have to come up with other means to protect them.

Question: Spain?

Assistant Secretary Fried: I think Spain is covered.

What you should do is get a briefing at some point from the Missile Defense Agency folks who can give you -

Voice: On the coverage map from General Obering's presentation at the FPC, the first one, and you should all have that.

Assistant Secretary Fried: There it is.

Question: One more question. In addition to [inaudible] nostalgia from 25 years back that you pointed out, what seems to be the main source of difference amongst the allies? Is it disagreement over the missile system or disagreement over the risk assessment?

Assistant Secretary Fried: If it were that developed I would be a happier man. The public discussion has remained at a different

level. It's been about arms control, it's been about arms race, all very puzzling since the United States and Russia are reducing our levels of nuclear warheads to lows we haven't seen in decades, in two generations.

So I think that the discussion has not reached the level where we can start finally parsing it. I hope it does. I hope it does soon. These are serious issues. In the short run I think political slogans can dominate. In the longer run, they never do. I think sort of reality tends to improve and be persistent, and I think it will be the case here. We need a sane, serious, sober dialogue with Europe about this and we need to have it at NATO as well as bilaterally. I certainly agree.

Question: If there is no other question about - [Laughter].

Question: What will United States do if Russia will not agree with missiles -

Assistant Secretary Fried: We hope they do agree, but when Russia did not agree to the enlargement of NATO to include Slovakia we went ahead anyway. Russia has a voice and certainly a right to be consulted and should have the opportunity in this case to participate. We will not close that door. But we will proceed working with our European allies and partners and consulting in NATO. We think there is a need to do this. But I think that Russia in the end will want to cooperate, at least to some degree. Especially when they realize that we're serious about cooperation. They may think we're not, but we are serious, and as they discover that we're serious they may become quite interested for reasons of their own national security and cooperation, and we will welcome that kind of cooperation.

Question: No question about [inaudible]?

Assistant Secretary Fried: I'm sure there are, but Turkish national questions.

Question: I'm sure you know the question -

Assistant Secretary Fried: There are so many. [Laughter].

Question: Yes, unfortunately. But I'm sure you know the most recent one which is General Staff explanations in not going to Northern Iraq, fighting with PKK. There were some explanations, declarations from the U.S. side, but you are the one who was in negotiations with the Kurds, so -

Assistant Secretary Fried: I'm not the chief one. General Joe Ralston is the one you really want to talk to and I'm sorry to say he's in Alaska at the moment. When he isn't in Washington and in Turkey or Iraq, he lives outside of Anchorage.

We take very seriously the problem of the PKK terrorist organization. We want to work with Turkey and work with Iraq to see this threat to Turkey eliminated. It is a terrorist organization. We have said so and we believe it is nothing but a problem. We want to work with Turkey and have recently increased our cooperation with Turkey against the PKK.

It is certainly understandable that Turks would be frustrated given the attacks in Southeast Turkey. We think that the best way for Turkey to proceed is to work with us, work with the Iraqi government to see to it that the PKK threat is eliminated.

It is understandable that Turkey wants to defend itself but we want Turkey to be able to defend itself in ways that are most effective and that's why we thought that cross-border action may not be the best way to go.

I should say something else about Turkey while we're on the subject. There was a very large demonstration in Ankara over the weekend and it was a serious demonstration, but I noticed that it was completely peaceful. Now that's not news except that it demonstrates that Turkey really is a democratic country where serious differences do not lead to police arresting, beating up protesters.

I mention this because I wish all countries could handle demonstrations in this democratic, civilized way. The contrast was just interesting to me. It shows how much Turkish democracy has deepened, that a demonstration like this doesn't even -- the fact that it is peaceful and orderly doesn't even merit comment because it is taken for granted. So I mention this as an indication of how far Turkish democracy has developed.

Question: Yes, but democracy doesn't help sometimes to protect your country from a terrorist attack.

Assistant Secretary Fried: No, no, I was making a very different point. I do know about, and certainly the United States knows about democracies vulnerable to terrorist attacks. I'm sure we are, so we understand that.

Question: I would like to know how the U.S. expects, its expectations about reducing possible problems, I mean in time schedule on the issue of Kosovo.

Assistant Secretary Fried: I refer you to Under Secretary Burns' testimony today -- and the questions and answers. It has been eight years since NATO's intervention in Kosovo. It is certainly time for the people of Kosovo to have some clarity about their future. Ahtisaari has come up with a comprehensive and in our view very workable practical plan which we support, and we hope the Security Council takes action on it this spring as we've said. Delay is not going to clarify the problem. You have a Kosovo leadership which has embraced the plan, embraced its responsibility. We see many Kosovo Serbs ready to live their lives in Kosovo and make accommodations that need to be made, but we support the Kosovo Serbs remaining in Kosovo and we support their security and their future. As I said in Serbia, we support the Serbska of Kosovo. That is the Serbian historical presence. We want to move ahead and do so and now is the time.

Question: Let's go back to what the Russians will do...

Assistant Secretary Fried: We have worked with the Russians consistently from the beginning. I can't predict what their position will be.

It is certainly true that at the beginning of the process the Russians were very clear about the protection they believed the Serbs in Kosovo needed to have. It's also true, and partly through the efforts of the Russians, that Ahtisaari's plan incorporates extremely far-reaching protections for the Kosovo Serbs.

If I were the Russians I would claim some credit for this, and frankly they'd be justified in doing so because their experts are very good indeed. They had some ideas very early on and their ideas were incorporated. I'm not speaking obviously for the Russians, but they would be entirely justified in saying well, we got a lot for the Kosovo Serbs. We had them in our minds and we achieved what we needed to achieve. I hope in the end Russia sees that the Ahtisaari plan is the best way forward in what is, after all, a very unfortunate situation. Unfortunate because the way that Yugoslavia broke up was the worst way possible, through bloodshed and war and ethnic cleansing and extreme nationalism. We didn't make that situation. The Yugoslavs did this, and we have to deal with the situation that remains, and we're doing so as best we can working with our European friends. Germany is EU President.

Question: Maybe I should ask my question in a way that Mr. Ralston would not like to answer and you will. In a democratic way,

if Turkey decides to go to Northern Iraq, what would be the U.S. reaction to that?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Happily I don't have to answer hypotheticals. [Laughter]. I realize that Turkey is debating this question, and the best way forward for Turkey is to work with us and in common do what we have to do to eliminate the PKK threat to Turkey.

Question: Do you have a formula for that?

Assistant Secretary Fried: We have been having some very detailed discussions with Turkish authorities recently that Joe Ralston has helped put in motion. The nature of such discussions is that I won't discuss them here.

Question: I have a quick Russia question. I'd like to phrase it like your question. [Laughter].

Recently there has emerged what is apparently a pattern of intimidation, of retaliation to political opposition in Russia. As the U.S.-Russian relationship has been nurturing assurances of democracy, and the U.S. policy of these things. How would you comment and how do you look at these developments?

Assistant Secretary Fried: We commented yesterday about the demonstrations which were broken up by police. We were very disturbed by the way this was handled. In normal democratic countries opposition can demonstrate and it is not treated this way, with arrests, with beatings, with warnings to people to stay away. We don't understand why Russia reacted in the way it did, and we've expressed our concerns. The European Union expressed its concern and it's interesting that we said almost exactly the same thing. So this is not an America-Russia issue, this is an issue where Europe and the United States have simultaneously expressed concerns about this.

We want to see a strong Russia, but a strong Russia means strong in 21st Century terms of a strong democracy, strong independent media, and strong opposition. Strong nations have strong democratic institutions. A weak Russia does nothing for us. A strong Russia, strong in this way is apt to be a better partner and we believe that that is the kind of Russia -- that's certainly the kind of Russia we want to see emerge as a partner and friend.

Thank you.



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