



Remarks on the Situation in Georgia

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Ambassador Wolff: Good afternoon. We just finished a consultation round on the situation in Georgia in which the Russian Federation briefed on what their military authorities were doing on the ground and the humanitarian situation activities, as well as announcing that they would be putting their resolution on the six point plan in blue.

We had a clear and candid exchange of views about what the situation on the ground shows and doesn't show; remaining questions that exist, particularly in the minds of many about what the Russian disposition of forces looks like now and will end up looking like; we sought some clarifications, again, on intentions; and made clear that the resolution, as it stands now, would not be supported by my government.

The United States, of course, feels very strongly about the necessity to reaffirm, in any effort, this Council undertakes, Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and its sovereignty. And many of the questions we have dealt with what appear to be efforts to vitiate both of those. So, I'm happy to take your questions.

Reporter: By saying that your country is not going to support the Russian resolution, aren't you really saying it was a bad job done by negotiating the six points and that the sovereignty was not included? I mean, I don't want to point fingers to the negotiator – we know who he is – but aren't you really implying that it's not good enough for the international community?

Ambassador Wolff: No, that's not what I'm implying. The United States supported the mediation efforts. The United States was involved in securing the agreement and engagement by the Georgian authorities and in order to do so, we had clarifications that were conveyed by French President Sarkozy, which are an indispensable component of the interpretation of what those six points mean. The fact is that what we see now on the ground is a reflection of the ambiguities that could be helped immensely by the clarifications that have already been expressed by President Sarkozy. The French draft doesn't address those.

The draft, again, doesn't address anything about territorial integrity, neither do the six points, but that doesn't mean that the E.U., which has articulated its position in a communiqué, somehow doesn't agree with the territorial integrity of Georgia and the need to reaffirm it. And let's be clear in what this plan was. This plan was designed initially to ensure that the fighting stopped. It has several elements, and it was signed by the parties directly involved, including, by the Russian Federation. And it is not being implemented.

Now, we're told it's going to be implemented. We're told that the Russian forces are going to be withdrawing and we asked some questions how the statement that the withdrawal is going to be consistent with the six points and the clarifications laid out when indeed the Russian forces are going to be remaining in Georgia territory, outside the zone of conflict as defined in those clarifications and in previous agreements the Russian Federation has signed onto.

So we have a presence of so-called Russian peacekeepers in key Georgian chokepoints that will control economic life; it will control humanitarian activities; there's no access into South Ossetia from the Georgian side of the administrative boundary for humanitarian work, it's all coming from the north...

Reporter: [Inaudible]

Ambassador Wolff: That's why the clarifications... let me finish.

Reporter: [Inaudible]

Ambassador Wolff: Let me finish. That's why the clarifications are so important. Those clarifications are an essential component of this. Now we heard the Russian ambassador today say that they did not oppose those clarifications, so we will continue working and ensuring that the clarity we need to do the work the Council should be doing is enshrined in any resolution.

Reporter: If the Russian resolution included two lines about the integrity and sovereignty of Georgian territory, would that be, make it more acceptable to you?

Ambassador Wolff: I think you've just missed the entire point I was trying to make, which is the six points alone, without clarifications and without signs of compliance with those three – six – points, as clarified, raise the question of why should we put the Council in a position of enshrining something that's not being adhered to.

Reporter: Has today's session really been helpful or hurtful, would you say, and what would you say the spirit of the negotiations on either side has been – is it constructive or is it actually pulling things apart further?

Ambassador Wolff: I think any time we can get more clarity, any time we can express where our concerns are, any time we can have an exchange of what the fundamental issues and what the role of the Council can be to help the situation, that's a helpful meeting.

Reporter: I understand that, hearing what you said, if the six points are implemented, are you in any way ready to drop the wording of territorial integrity?

Ambassador Wolff: Territorial integrity is a fundamental principal that, given the situation underway in Georgia, with that territorial integrity being questioned, with actions by Abkhaz de facto authorities and South Ossetian de facto authorities seeking recognition by the Russian Federation for their independence, this is the last possible occasion where we would change one paragraph, one word, one comma, in the Council's reaffirmation of the territorial integrity of Georgia.

Reporter: You used the terminology that was used by the Russians a couple of days ago, which is, you cannot support a text. Does that mean you will abstain? Or does that mean you'll vote against it?

Ambassador Wolff: Well, I have to wait for my instructions but we cannot support means I'm not voting for under the circumstances, I think we would be prepared to oppose it. Now, I do hope that one of the benefits of the Council discussion we had today is recognizing that there is great desire on the part of many members of the

Council—probably most of them to have a consensual outcome. And that like all our previous work, their ability to contribute to peace on the ground and to provide clarity, so the Council's work in the future is not deadlocked because of the lack of clarity in any resolution.

We'll need to continue and I hope that we'll have ongoing discussions with all the parties and the resolution will not be put to a vote.

Reporter: You said that the Russians decided to put the resolution in blue which means that they are planning to vote pretty soon so what's going to be the Council's reaction and what are you going to continue talking about? Are you going to put your own resolution in blue too, the one that the French presented and you support?

Ambassador Wolff: We'll, again, you'll have to ask the Russian Ambassador, who I'm sure will be happy to explain their plans, what the fate of this resolution is. The rules of procedure do not oblige a sponsor to put a resolution to a vote once it's in blue. Modifications could happen, other resolutions could come up, it could be put on the back burner, and I prefer not to speak for the Russian Federation on this point.

Reporter: Mr. Ambassador, you asked for clarification for the six points but the resolution is supported, the French resolution is very short in clarification—actually, it's a very short resolution, period. How can you explain that to us?

Ambassador Wolff: Well, the French resolution that was circulated yesterday addresses a very critical element that, in essence, opens the door to the type of work that the Council should be doing on this issue both political and otherwise and that is the withdrawal of Russian forces from Georgia.

Reporter: Mr. Ambassador, how divided is the Council at this point?

Ambassador Wolff: Well, it's hard to say how divided we are, we haven't had any show of hands on anything. I think that there are a number of principles that Council members espouse which show a great degree of unity on. We've heard a lot of support for territorial integrity, for example. I think Council members understand the need for clarifications. Others feel more comfortable with ambiguity, frankly, which we don't think will contribute to any positive objective at this time.

Reporter: [Inaudible] two Presidents made this agreement, and that perhaps the Security Council shouldn't put its nose in there and just do what the Russians want?

Ambassador Wolff: No, I don't think there's any feeling to that extent. I think Council understands it has a responsibility to deal with international peace and security issues. That responsibility is not simply rubber stamping. That responsibility includes value added.

Reporter: When you say, 'withdrawal of Russians from Georgia,' it seems like you acknowledge that they can stay in South Ossetia and Georgia and some area outside it. How big is the area outside it? And how is it consistent with this overall statement of Russians out of Georgia, given that the agreement keeps them there?

Ambassador Wolff: From our perspective, it's very clear that the areas the Russians want to stay in and the role they want to play is not consistent with the clarifications of the six points. The six points call for the withdrawal of Russian forces to their lines prior to August 7. And there's a secondary point which says that they may set up some security zones, I believe. That's where the problem lies.

The first part of the sentence on its own is very clear. There are interim provisions, and we cannot afford ambiguity on that point, we have to be clear. Are Russian forces going to be back in positions where they were before the outbreak of hostilities? Are they consistent with prior agreements? Are they consistent with their numbers before?

I'll give you one example. We understand where one of the outposts that the Russian military wants to maintain is on the main Georgian civilian Port of Poti. It's 85 miles from the South Ossetian administrative border. There's no agreement that exists that defines that as a zone of conflict related to South Ossetia.

When you look at the other positions along main highways and critical chokepoints in Georgia, it raises the question whether this is an effort to strangle the state and not give it the full sovereignty and rights with territorial integrity and control of its own cities, urban centers, transportation routes, economic infrastructure. Those are important questions.

Reporter: In today's session, you were presented with a map and locations where they want to be?

Ambassador Wolff: No, we were not. We had some general descriptions but from what we see in the reports we're getting on the ground, this is where those positions will be.

Thank you very much.

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