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Remarks by Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, U.S. Permanent Representative, on the situation in Georgia, at the Security Council Stakeout, August 11, 2008

Ambassador Khalilzad: Good evening. We had a good discussion inside, with regard to the situation in Georgia and continuing Russian aggression against the sovereign state of Georgia. We used the opportunity to raise fundamental questions with colleagues, particularly with Ambassador Churkin of the Russian Federation. We asked for him to answer the question I put to him yesterday, whether it was the goal of the Russian Federation to overthrow the democratically elected president of Georgia. We had not received a clear answer yesterday to that question but it seems the fact that we raised the issue yesterday in a public session has had a salutary effect because he said in the Council today that that was not the goal of the Russian Federation, and quoted from a statement from his foreign ministry to that effect. We raised the issue, the question to him - why is Russia intensifying the attacks while the Georgians have agreed to a ceasefire, have agreed to a return to the status quo ante. They have communicated that to the Russian government, they have signed a statement today, the Georgians, the statement that was presented to them by the French and Finnish Foreign Ministers. And [there was] a call by many Council members for an immediate cessation of hostilities for respect for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Why is there a continuing assault using a variety of means against Georgia? We have not received a satisfactory answer to that question. The attacks continue, the attacks have intensified, the attacks have expanded geographically. Forces, Russian forces, have come into areas outside the two separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Why? If the Russian intent as has been stated has been the return to status quo ante in South Ossetia, why start a second front from Abkhazia? Why attack the rest of Georgia? And why attack the infrastructure of Georgia? Why threaten to attack the civilian airport of Tbilisi?

We believe that the time has come for the Council to take the necessary action. That's part of our diplomatic effort to bring more pressure on Russia to encourage Russia to cease hostilities, to accept what Georgia has accepted. We have, in addition to our engagement in the Security Council and announcement by our French colleague with whom we have been working to distribute the draft resolution today, we have been active diplomatically otherwise. This morning there was a consultation among G7 members with regards to the situation in Georgia and the G7 ministers agreed that there should be a cessation of hostilities immediately and conditionally, that there should be respect for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. So, we hope that Russia will join the broad consensus that's emerging that this has gone for too long. What is happening there raises all kinds of questions about Russian motivations and the direction of Russian policy, implications not only for Georgia but implications for the region and implications for the future relations of Russia with the United States and others in the international community. Those are legitimate issues and questions that have arisen and the longer this conflict goes on the more severe the implications will be for relations between Russia and the rest of the world. Thank you very much.

Reporter: Mr. Ambassador, we haven't seen the draft resolution yet of the... French Ambassador, he just kindly gave us the points, included in the draft. Are you happy with the draft as it stands or has it been watered down from the version you'd like to see and are we – is there any hope that it will pass in the Council or is it going to be a practice of just isolating and showing the isolation of Russia?

Ambassador Khalilzad: First we are happy with the draft resolution. We support it; we're actively participating in the drafting of it, along with other colleagues. Two, I believe that whether it passes or not, it depends exclusively on Russia. I think the resolution as is, as drafted, is likely to have very broad support. Several members worked very hard together to produce it, so this would be the Russian response to this resolution, this would be an indication of where Russia is heading with regard to Georgia and it will lead to judgments and assessments about what this implies, in terms of Russia's relations with the region and the world and the responses that that in turn would produce from the rest of the world.

Reporter: Ambassador, in the speech that Bush gave at the Rose Garden, he did not mention the Security Council, although he did mention the European Union and the OSCE – and so, does that mean anything and secondly, does the U.S. plan anything beyond calling for a cease-fire, just in case this – that Russia doesn't heed the call for cease-fire, is there any plan to confront the Russian aggression as Bush...

Ambassador Khalilzad: Well, there is of course a range of tools in the toolbox, there is in the immediate future a focus is clearly on bringing about a cessation of hostilities there is also, of course, a variety of other measures from political to economic to other measures, but look, I don't want to give the wrong impression – the United States is not looking for hostile relations between Russia and the United States. That's not our goal. We want this conflict to be resolved, a cease-fire to go into effect as quickly as possible. But we cannot be indifferent to what is happening in Georgia: the brutality of the action; the intensity of the attacks; the use of the variety of means that have been employed; the duration of the conflict. And, as I said before, that as this conflict continues, it will have a significant impact on the relationship between us and Russia and as I said, the G-7 ministers conferred today and we are united in our objective that Georgia must be restored as a sovereign, independent state – territorial integrity must be respected and forces that have been brought in, foreign forces have to be withdrawn.

Reporter: Russian media has reported that among the dead soldiers in South Ossetia are Americans, either troops or trainers, is that something that you can – some people say that's propaganda, some people say that's true, what do you say to it?

Ambassador Khalilzad: Well, I, of course we hear a lot of propaganda; we've heard the propaganda that the U.S. gave a green light to this operation, we've heard the Russians connecting to Georgia's actions with the United States in their public statements, but I have nothing specific on, with regard to these reports but I would not conclude that those reports are correct or accurate. Let me say that we did not have any prior knowledge of, or were not consulted by Georgia, although I would say the circumstances around what happened on August the sixth, we need to withhold judgment exactly what has happened, not necessarily by the lines that Georgia initiated a conflict. We need to study this, we need to know what set of circumstances that they can place before then or neither did, of course, Russia consult with us before it took the actions that it's taking in Georgia. Yes.

Reporter: You said that you did not have prior knowledge about this but however you have consultants on the ground, American consultants to the government and you've been training the Georgian army. Wouldn't you be able to know beforehand that they intended to do that?

Ambassador Khalilzad: Well, I said that we were not consulted ahead of time, as you know, we have been urging all along and this has been stated publicly for political negotiations, for restraint on all sides dating to an earlier period, but you know this conflict has a long history and the key issue is that no legitimate Russian interest can justify the magnitude of the attacks that are taking place, the expansion of the conflict, the persistence, and using the kind of firepower that is being used, including strategic bombers against a rather, if you compare the relative power of Russia with Georgia, a hugely disproportionate, you could even frankly call it, a kind of a defenseless small country which it has accepted to what the Russians have said, was their demands, which is a cease-fire, go back to status quo ante, they have agreed to that repeatedly. The persistent assault, brutal assault, raises legitimate questions about where Russia is heading and that, in turn, has implications for the rest of the world.

Thank you very much. Thank you.