



U.S.-Russia Relationship, Kosovo, and Missile Defense

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Press Roundtable with Brussels-based Journalists

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Assistant Secretary Fried: Thank you for coming in at short notice.

I arrived in Brussels this morning from Moscow where I accompanied Secretary Rice in her meetings in Russia. As you know, she met with President Putin, dinner with Foreign Minister Lavrov last night. She met with civil society representatives, as is her usual practice, and had a set of in-depth discussions on some of the problems in the relationship and some of the areas of cooperation in the relationship.

A lot has been written in response about her message to the Russians that we hope the tone of the relationship and the rhetoric around the relationship will improve. I must say that reporting is quite largely accurate. That is, she did deliver that message, and as you saw yesterday Foreign Minister Lavrov said he agreed, that the tone of the relationship had gotten - my words, not his - a bit out of whack, and that it was important that the rhetoric be moderate and constructive. Again, my words, not his. But that was important.

The U.S.-Russia relationship is by its nature going to be a complicated one because we have a complicated history. There are a great number of areas in which we're working together well. There are some areas in which we have disagreements. And we have to learn how to deal with the relationship which embraces areas of cooperation, areas of disagreement, and not let ourselves get tied into knots, swinging wildly one way or another.

Secretary Rice had a good couple of days in Russia. There are issues on which we continue to disagree. Kosovo is one. Missile defense is another. We have said before that Russia needs to become accustomed to the fact of the independence and sovereignty of countries that were once in its sphere of influence or even Soviet-controlled, and realize these countries have found their own way in the world.

We also believe that it's natural for there to be political temptations in both Russia and some of these countries to take rhetorical swipes at each other, but we think a better future is one in which neighbors are working well together.

So Secretary Rice had a very good day in Moscow, but all that does is give us the ability to deal more effectively with an agenda which is complicated, as I said.

With that brief summary, I'm happy to take your questions.

Question: On Kosovo, after those talks and other contacts, have you got an idea as to whether resolution on Kosovo can still be possible by the end of this month? And have you got more of a feeling for what type of possible adaptations to the draft UN Resolution would be necessary to accommodate some of Russia's concerns?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Sure. We have not tabled a draft in New York, we have circulated a draft, and there is a difference. You table a draft when you're pretty sure that's basically the form it's going to go through on. You circulate it when you want to do some more consultations.

I can't speak as to the timeline now. The Europeans have at least as much at stake in Kosovo as we Americans. Quite arguably, more at stake. It is, after all, in Europe. It's a European problem. If things go very badly it will be Europeans who pay the price more than the Russians or the Americans.

So let's see how the talks in Samara go between Chancellor Merkel and President Putin. We'll be consulting with our European friends and decide the best way to go forward.

Look, no one likes the set of choices we have on Kosovo. We think the way Yugoslavia fell apart in war and bloodshed with ethnic cleansing was terrible. It was terrible. We would not have had it so, but that wasn't our doing and it wasn't our choice. We now are faced with the reality on the ground. The reality on the ground, like it or not, is that the Kosovars will never again be ruled by Belgrade. We have to face that.

They've been under UN administration since 1999. They're not going to be under Belgrade administration. That's just not going to happen.

So it is in our view best for all of the peoples, including the Kosovar Serbs, that this de facto situation be recognized de jure. That is why we support supervised independence for Kosovo, and the purpose of the supervision will be to, among other things, and principally to secure the rights of the Kosovar Serbs.

The other thing we need to do is to reach out to Serbia, which deserves a place in Europe. The Serbs need to see a European future as a counterpoint to the vision of the past that the nationalists keep offering and which has had such disastrous consequences for Serbia.

That's our position, it remains our position, and we want to get there as best we can.

If Russia has suggestions that make sense, we are more than happy to take them. There may be some good Russian ideas out there, and I look forward to hearing them.

Question: Could you brief us on the progress of negotiations on [missile defense]? How far are we from the end of it and what [inaudible]?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Oh, far from the end. We've barely begun. The formal negotiations have just started. These will take some time. The Polish and Czech governments will have lots of questions, as they should. There are lots of details to work out, and there are lots of larger issues to work out. This is something we can't jam this through. We need to take the time to answer the Polish and Czech concerns and to do so in a serious and open way.

At the same time that we're doing this, obviously we're also working with NATO because NATO has its own missile defense program, and we've made an offer of cooperation with Russia on missile defense. All of these things, hopefully, best case scenario, would take place in parallel so you would have missile defense with a strong NATO component, a possible component with Russia, the bilateral element between the United States, Poland and the Czech Republic, and all of this would be well understood and integrated so that we would deal effectively with emerging threats in the next decade.

Question: You said that you've made offers. It's been said all the time. The Russia General Baluyevski was here last week and said they are not buying anything. They

don't like anything at all that you are offering. And of course they reject the idea and they insist that breaking of the strategic balance because we are now talking about [inaudible], what happened tomorrow [inaudible], and there is no limit, then they can convert what is just the difference to other kinds of missiles. What is the latest news you are bringing us from Russia? And in particular, do you think the strategic balance is being broken with the missile defense?

Assistant Secretary Fried: The strategic balance between the United States and Russia being broke?

Question: What they are saying in Europe.

Assistant Secretary Fried: Certainly not. That is, pardon me, a difficult thesis to sustain. Ten unarmed interceptors, no warheads at all, are hardly going to make a difference whatsoever with respect to the Russian nuclear deterrent force. Those systems, those missiles are completely incapable of doing anything with respect to that Russian force.

When you make these points to the Russians they often go on to say well what about tomorrow? You could convert it, you could change it.

Well, a missile expert will tell you that you don't easily convert an unarmed interceptor to an offensive missile. You don't do that in the dead of night. But if the Russians are concerned about this, let's sit down and discuss ways in which we can address their concerns. This isn't Dan Fried speaking, this is what Secretary Gates said in Moscow a couple of weeks ago, and he meant it. He meant it.

We are very happy to talk to the Russians about these concerns, and let's hear what some of their ideas might be for addressing them.

I also think they ought to take a look again at some of the offers of cooperation because clearly if they're worried about an increase in capacity in the American system, one way to address that is make it a cooperative system so that nothing would happen that they weren't a part of and didn't know about.

We really aren't doing this with Russia as an object. We're really doing it considering the threats that are emerging in the Middle East, whether it's Iran, or think about other countries. That's real. That's a real problem.

Imagine Iran with ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons and what it would do with them or what it could do with them. That's not a situation that makes us, makes me feel terribly comfortable. So if that's the problem, then the solution ought to be a joint one, a multilateral one involving NATO, involving Russia, involving the Poles and Czechs with us so that all of our territory is secure and so our security is indivisible.

Question: What is the general mood and dynamic of the Russian-American relations in these days? And is there some more clear things about the problem of [inaudible] regime?

Assistant Secretary Fried: I think that the atmospherics and the dynamics of the relationship will be improved by the discussions that Secretary Rice had with President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov. We were very pleased that Foreign Minister Lavrov said what he said. The Russians can be very serious partners, very good partners, and we hope that we build on our partnership. That certainly is our objective.

With respect to the CFE Treaties, it came up yesterday in Secretary Rice's press conferences. The CFE Treaty, as the Russians point out, was built for Cold War times. That's why in 1999 we developed a new CFE Treaty, the adapted CFE Treaty, to modernize the old one. It hasn't been ratified because of Russia's need to fulfill certain commitments it made at the time that the treaty was signed in Istanbul in 1999. These are the so-called Istanbul Commitments that have to do with troop withdrawals from Georgia and Transnistria and Moldova. Russia's close to meeting those conditions. We hope it does.

In the mean time, if Russia has concerns about the CFE Treaty regime, if it feels that this treaty or even the adapted treaty impinges on Russia's sovereignty in some way, let's talk about this. This is another thing that Secretary Gates said. He was completely open to hear what Russian concerns are and discuss them. Secretary Rice said this yesterday. She said there are fora for consultations on the treaty; there are fora for discussions. By all means let's discuss what Russia's problems are. But Russia should not simply pull out of a treaty which has been useful for peace and stability in Europe.

Question: Is it clear, the statement of Mr. Putin? He said that Russia could freeze the participation.

Assistant Secretary Fried: President Putin usually speaks with clarity. He did so in this case. We hope that Russia will take up our offer of cooperation and take up our offer to discuss what problems it might have with the CFE Treaty. And by all means, let's move as quickly as we can to find a way to ratify, for all of us to ratify the adapted CFE Treaty which is far better for all of us, including for Russia, than the current CFE Treaty. We're all for it.

Question: Poland is seeking specific installations, i.e. Patriots and others, in exchange for the interceptors. How helpful is that in trying to engage the Russians?

Assistant Secretary Fried: The Poles haven't presented to us a formal request yet. What we have said to the Poles is basically if you have concerns about your security, let's discuss these. Let's discuss what those concerns are and the best way to deal with it. Poland's a NATO member. You have every right to consult with us about this. Let's discuss this issue and let's see what makes sense for your security.

I think that Poland will engage us in a serious discussion of these issues. I look forward to it and I look forward to coming up with mutually satisfactory ways forward so that Poland's national security is increased as a result of any missile defense arrangements that we make. The same is true for the Czech Republic.

Question: A U.S. House committee has voted to cut missile defense funding and also launch the Pentagon studies using mobile launchers instead of a fixed site in Poland. Realizing this is just at the committee stage, it's not gone to the Senate and so on: first what signal does this vote alone send to the Europeans, to the Russians about U.S. government resolve to see through missile defense as currently formulated?

And certainly if the Congress then does end up with a budget that cuts funding and requires a mobile launcher study, what does that mean to you?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Let's see what happens at the end of the day. Those familiar with the history of American weapon systems and American defensive systems and the congressional appropriation process are very familiar with this. Things get cut, things get added, studies are mandated. This is not a simple process. It never has been, it probably never will be.

I don't take this as tragically as some of the media has. I think this will be a step by step process. The committee, some of the committee members were talking about zeroing it out. In the end they reduced it but didn't zero it out. There will be more consultations on the Hill and more discussion of what this means.

I think the Congress will come to understand the purpose of these limited missile defense systems, and as our discussions with NATO increase, as the administration succeeds in pointing out what the real threats and emerging threats are that these systems are designed to counter, I think that congressional support will gradually grow. That's not a statement of fact, that's an assertion somewhere between a hope and a prediction.

Question: If I could just come back to your point about the importance of having a European perspective for Serbia. Correct me if I'm wrong, but that's what we seem to hear pretty much every day of the week from European Union politicians, almost in that formulation. I'm wondering if I'm missing something here or in fact are you looking

for something a bit more encouraging from the European Union?

Assistant Secretary Fried: The message needs to be loud enough and clear enough and unambiguous enough that Serbs, ordinary Serbs, will realize that they do face a choice and that they have the ability, the real ability, not just the hypothetical one, to enjoy a future in Europe. That's a pretty powerful pull.

Question: You mean they should be given candidate status as quickly as possible?

Assistant Secretary Fried: It's not for the Americans to start talking about the details of what this might mean, but I think it's important that Serbs be given that kind of prospect.

Question: With or without the war criminals being brought in?

Assistant Secretary Fried: We think it's important that Serbia fulfill its obligations to do everything they can to bring to justice those war criminals who were responsible for so much misery and so much death.

I am sure that we can find a way and Europe can find a way to offer Serbia that realistic prospect of a European future and at the same time make clear that the apprehension of the war criminals and efforts to apprehend them are important.

Question: About Kosovo again. It seems, at least from what we hear coming from the States, that the United States has already made up its mind about Kosovo. And talking about independence as already a given fact. Will you support self-proclaimed independence of the Kosovars if things go wrong in the Security Council?

Assistant Secretary Fried: We support the Ahtisaari plan. The Ahtisaari plan provides extensive detailed protections for the Serb community in Kosovo and it provides for supervised independence to see to it that these provisions are carried out in practice. We've said so. We've said so publicly, so there's no secret there.

You asked a hypothetical question. Although it is a generally wise thing never to answer hypotheticals, I will put it this way. We see no advantages whatsoever of taking action outside the Security Council. We see only disadvantages. In every way a Security Council Resolution of this matter is better, again, in all aspects, than doing it some other way. The United States and Europe are determined that this last major issue of former Yugoslavia be settled. The Security Council members have traveled to Kosovo and Belgrade. They've gained an understanding of the situation on the ground. We think the time has come for the Security Council to act.

That's our policy. As a factual matter, it's probably the case that independence is coming one way or another. It's coming in a way that is supervised, therefore controlled, therefore better off for everyone; or in a way that is more chaotic, more bloody, more of a mess for everyone. And in the real world we don't get to choose the scenarios we deal with. We have to take the choices that are before us in the real world. The choices before us in the real world are not the best ones, but they are what they are and we have a responsibility to deal with it. Not wish these hard choices away. But we want to do this through the Security Council. That is in all respects the better path.

Question: Back to missile defense. After the talks in Prague, are there any concerns voiced by the Czech government that are difficult for you to solve or cause you problems? Are there any new round of talks --

Assistant Secretary Fried: I admit I've been on the road for most of the last week and a half so I'm not familiar with the latest round of talks in Prague, but I will say this. We look forward to talks with our Czech and Polish friends. The Czechs and the Poles will ask tough questions. They will want to know a lot of details. They will want to talk about the security of their countries, and we look forward to this.

My last conversation with the lead American negotiator, Assistant Secretary John Rood, suggested to me that he's open to hear from the Poles and the Czechs and he doesn't know of any deal-breakers out there. But we'll work this an issue at a time.

Question: I understand the issues of relations between Russia and neighbor countries were discussed between Madame Secretary and Putin. Do you see any progress in points of view of the United States and Russia on this?

Assistant Secretary Fried: As a matter of fact, we have held very productive discussions with Russia about issues in Georgia and Moldova. Russian interlocutors, Russian experts are serious people, very knowledgeable. These discussions are not, we don't trade polemics, we deal with issues seriously. I can't speak for the Russians, but I find these conversations useful. We don't want to see these situations spiral into violence. I have seen recently signs of, well, some very constructive steps by the Russians.

I noticed just over the weekend the South Ossetians put some pressure on the Russian-led peacekeeping force and the Russians, quite rightly, criticized this.

The Russians know perfectly well that we have consistently urged the Georgians to find only peaceful and diplomatic solutions to these problems, and in no cases to resort to violence or adventurism. And although it's clear that the Russians have some suspicions about U.S. motives, we are able to sustain a very useful dialogue. We intend to do so.

Thank you very much.

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