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Public Remarks by Ambassador Beyrle

"US Ambassador Beyrle: U.S. has no Intention to Punish Russia for August Crisis in Caucasus"

[Interview, Interfax Information Service](#)

October 22, 2008

Interfax: Mr. Ambassador, our two countries seem to be approaching the end of the term in office of the current administration with a zero sum. In addition, we regressed in many areas after the August events. Are you, a high-ranking diplomat in charge of the development of Russian-U.S. relations, dispirited about this?

Ambassador Beyrle: I think the fact that I've been involved in U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Russian relations for most of career as a diplomat gives me a sense of perspective on these periods in our bilateral relationship where we go through strains, experience tensions and there is always an inclination to look at the dark side of things during these periods of strain. I think that sometimes obscures some of the very positive aspects of the joint work that we are doing together in a very positive way that started in the Bush administration (i.e., things that started in the Bush Administration), so I don't think we are ending with a zero result at all, if you look at something like the global initiative to combat nuclear terrorism, which was a joint idea, actually I believe it was a Russian idea. President Bush agreement with President Putin, and more than fifty countries, maybe it's up to sixty now, have joined together in this global initiative to take part in joint training and information exchange against global terrorism. The U.S. and Russia continue on a bilateral basis to do a lot of good work on securing nuclear materials in Russia and the United States.

On the economic side, our economic relationship has grown tremendously just since I left in 2005. The level of trade and investment is enormous now, we have companies like Ford and General Motors, which are expanding or opening plants, we have Boeing, which is involved in a very productive partnership with Sukhoi, Microsoft calls Russia its second largest market in the world after the U.S. We have Severstal, Lukoil in the U.S. doing great business, growing and prospering. We've greatly increased the levels of tourism and student educational exchanges. The number of visas that we give to Russians to visit the U.S. is up this year 22% over 2007.

We gave 32,000 visas to young Russians just this past year on a Summer Work and Travel program, to visit the U.S., to work, to make some money, to travel and see the beauty and natural wonder of our country. And in 2009 we are hoping to give visas to over 40,000 Russians to do that same Summer Work and Travel program. And in fact, we'll be accepting applications in January for that and the information is available on our website (<http://moscow.usembassy.gov>). So, all in all, yes, we are going through a period of strain in the relationship over what happened to Georgia and all of our countries are under stress because of the financial crisis. But there's still a lot of productive, constructive work done in the U.S.-Russian relationship.

Interfax: What positive signals can both countries send to each other in order to avoid a pause in bilateral relations, given that the current administration is stepping down and the new one will not be formed until March?

Ambassador Beyrle: Well I think the discussions that I described between John Rood and Deputy Minister Ryabkov would help a lot because one of the most important files that will be handed over to the new administration is the strategic security file. In 2009, the START I Treaty expires and we need to be prepared to move quickly to make a decision on how we are going to react to the fact that it's expiring. And the more

work that we can do now before the Bush administration leaves with the Russian Federation, the better we will understand the Russian position and the faster our new administration under a new president will be able to pick up that file and continue to work on it. That's one very concrete example where the Bush administration intends to work right up until January 20th, until the inauguration of the new president because these issues are simply too important to leave unattended.

Interfax: In your opinion, what are the chances of reaching a new mutually acceptable agreement before START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) I expires? Is the U.S. ready to conclude a full-fledged legally binding treaty that would stipulate all verification measures provided by START I?

Ambassador Beyrle: Well we have already made clear in the Sochi framework document that Presidents Bush and Putin signed in spring that the U.S. is in favor of a legally binding document as a follow-on to the START I agreement. What the actual details, what the structure of that agreement would be is obviously the subject of negotiation between the U.S. and Russia. But as I said, we are very hopeful that even now that it is very unlikely that the Bush administration and the Russian Federation will reach agreement on a new structure for the follow-on START before January 2009. We do hope to make some progress in explaining what the American position and hearing how the Russian side sees the future START process in order for the new administration to be able to make as quick progress as possible on that.

Interfax: How would the U.S. react to linking the new START with the missile defense issue?

Ambassador Beyrle: I've had some very interesting discussions with some of the people on the American side who are long-standing experts in this field, more of an expert in that field than I am. The question of strategic offense and strategic defense has a logical link to it. How that logical link could be expressed in a follow-on to the current START agreement is a very interesting question that I think it deserves study, but I would hesitate to go any further at this point in making any policy predictions on that. There certainly is a logic to looking at those things in tandem.

Interfax: Moscow is certain that U.S. missile defense elements in Poland and the Czech Republic are directed against Russia's nuclear potential. Is the U.S. ready to provide Russia with confidence measures on this issue? In particular, is it possible to return to the discussions of the presence of Russian military experts at missile defense facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic? Are expert consultations on these issues at the level of Foreign and Defense ministries of the two countries possible before March 2009?

Ambassador Beyrle: Well we've been involved for quite some time in discussions with the Russian side on the anti-missile defense system in Europe. I recall when I was here as the Deputy Chief of Mission in 2005 we had some of the first discussions about that. We have been very clear from the start and very consistent in saying that there is no way that this system can be or would be used against the Russian potential and in fact, in terms of numbers, the ten interceptors that are foreseen to be placed in Central Europe couldn't pose a threat to Russian systems at all. But we understand very well that it's been difficult for the Russian side to accept that this is a system that is designed to guard against threats from the Middle East and so for the last several years we have tried a number of discussions at different levels to make clear to the Russian side why this system is or cannot be directed against it. We are hopeful to be able to continue those discussions before the end of this Administration, we have listened very carefully to Russian proposals on the kind of transparency and confidence building measures that would be necessary to assuage Russian concerns about this. And we are very hopeful that before the transition from the Bush Administration to a new U.S. administration there will be another round of talks at the level of our undersecretary John Rood with his Russian counterpart in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mr. Ryabkov.

Interfax: And what about the presence of Russian military representatives, permanent presence?

Ambassador Beyrle: Well that will certainly, I would expect, be one of the subjects that we would discuss in the context of transparency and confidence-building measures. Obviously, the presence of Russian forces on Polish or Czech Republic soil would also be a subject of conversation with those two sovereign governments as well.

Interfax: Are any multilateral consultations involving the United States, Russia, Poland and the

Czech Republic possible for agreeing on the permanent presence of Russian servicemen at missile defense sites in Eastern Europe?

Ambassador Beyrle: I wouldn't want to predict what the actual structure of the talks will be, I would say only that we are talking about the permanent presence of Russian military personnel or Russian civilian observers on the territory of another state, the other state needs to be involved in this discussion. What the actual mechanism or framework for that discussion would be, I wouldn't want to predict at this point. But as a principle, you can imagine that discussion taking place without those two governments being involved.

Interfax: What was the U.S. reaction to Russia's latest decisions in the military sphere, including guaranteed nuclear deterrence, the creation of aerospace defense and the building of nuclear-powered submarines? Do you think that the U.S. plans to build a global missile defense and the deployment of its elements near the Russian borders that could have pushed Russia to make these decisions?

Ambassador Beyrle: Well I think our view is that any state has the right to modernize its defense forces, to exercise its military assets and as long as it's done in a way that is transparent, that's not threatening. Then I don't think that we need to feel threatened by that. Certainly why the Russian military, the Russian leadership has chosen to do things in this way at this time, it is really more a question for them. But from the standpoint of the U.S., we obviously watch these things very closely, but I think we certainly don't feel threatened by it.

Interfax: What was the reaction to the movements of the Pyotr Veliky nuclear-powered cruiser and other warships, as well as the flight of Russian strategic bombers to Venezuela? Can you see any parallels with the Caribbean Crisis (or Cuban Missile Crisis) of the 1960-s?

Ambassador Beyrle: No I don't see any analogy with the Caribbean Crisis of the 1960s. The U.S. and Russia now have a much different relationship than we had in the 1960s. The Cold War is over, the ideological conflict that existed, which was in large part the basis of the Caribbean conflict, no longer exists, we now have a level of communication between our two governments that didn't exist in the 1960s. The hotline which exists now between Moscow and Washington was created as a consequence of the Caribbean crisis. All of these things I think are probably symbols of a much higher level of communication and mutual understanding and so I wouldn't draw any analogies between the movement of that ship in our hemisphere and what happened in 1962. It's a different era.

I think my attitude is that if you want to see an enemy, you can always find the enemy. We don't want to see an enemy in Russia. We want to see a country that shares our views, the global challenges of the 21st century, and wants to work with us and other countries to help confront and overcome those problems.

Interfax: What is the U.S. attitude to Russia's initiative to work out a new European security treaty?

Ambassador Beyrle: We've been obviously very interested in these ideas and have been looking for more details, more context to understand exactly what the Russian side, President Medvedev, has in mind, we read his speech in Evian with great interest, and I think our reaction is it's very good that Russia wants to be part of this debate about the future of security architecture in Europe, that Russia feels it's important to be part of that discussion, it's a very important signal of where Russia sees itself in the world and where it sees its future. I would say at this point that we are open to ideas, but we consider that the existing institutions are not broken, they still function and they function well. But with the passage of time, obviously, any institution is in need of a fresh look, perhaps there is something that can be done to improve the way that existing European security institutions work. But we don't see the need to start over, to create something fresh here. And Russia is very much part of these structures. Russia has very close ties with the EU. Russia is in the OSCE, Russia is, through the NATO-Russia Council, very closely involved with the internal discussions in NATO. So I think our reaction would be Russia would be well-served by using its seat at the table in all of these existing organizations to talk about its ideas and to work from the inside for any eventual change that may come to these institutions. But we are still very early in the process, we are listening very carefully and respectfully to Russia's views on this.

Interfax: In your opinion, does the harsh rhetoric heard on both sides and threats to 'punish'

Russia hinder the normalization of relationships?

Ambassador Beyrle: I'm not sure the U.S. is in a position to punish a country like Russia. I think when we look at what happened in the Caucasus in August and events that lead up to it we certainly see that there were miscalculations and mistakes on both sides. We have said very clearly that we tried until the very last moment to convince Mr President Saakashvili not to give in to provocations, and there were provocations, but not to take the step of trying to solve the question of South Ossetia by force. And obviously we spoke up very clearly in seeing that the Russian forces went too far in their response, in moving into Georgia the way that they did. But I think what's important is to look to the future, to look to the process that's underway now. We've very much supported the efforts of President Sarkozy to mediate a ceasefire, two ceasefire agreements which are very important, provisions in them that we have looked both to the Georgian and to the Russian sides to fulfill. There was a very important meeting in Geneva on the issue of longer-term security and stability in the region involving the EU, the U.S., Georgia, Russia, and others. This process needs to move forward. We've made very clear at the same time that it's been difficult to conduct business as usual with Russia during this time of high emotions, in which we wanted not to punish Russia, but to send a message to the Russian leadership that we have very grave concerns about some of the decisions they have taken and that we wanted to try to influence their decision-making not to stray far from the course.

Interfax: Do you think it's possible to improve the relationship between Russia and USA without reversal of Moscow's decision to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia?

Ambassador Beyrle: The unilateral recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia has made it much more difficult to get at a longer-term resolution of these two issues, of these two entities and to talk about stability and security in the region. Our feeling is that the recognition came too quickly after the war was over when the emotions were still running high, but we are faced with that fact that Russia has made very clear that this is an irreversible decision and we need to move forward on that basis now respecting the territorial integrity of Georgia and the sovereignty of Georgia at the same time, which is extremely important. And that's why we've encouraged other states not to join in the recognition of these two entities.

Interfax: The United States does not plan to condition the resolution of global problems in bilateral relations on the South Ossetian and Abkhaz settlement the way you see it. Is it right?

Ambassador Beyrle: We've stated our disagreement very clearly with the steps Russia took by recognizing these two entities. As I said, it makes it very difficult to move forward, even within the framework of the Geneva process on long-term questions of security and stability. We are always faced with situations in the U.S.-Russia relationship where we have areas where we starkly disagree. It's I think important for us to be able to state these disagreements very clearly, while at the same time continuing to make progress in areas where we have joint interests and global responsibilities.

Interfax: If a decision is made to allow Georgia and Ukraine to join the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the December meeting of NATO foreign ministers, Russia will treat this as a very hostile move that will have disastrous consequences in relations with the U.S. and NATO. Is the U.S. ready to completely spoil relations with Russia by allowing these countries' membership in NATO?

Ambassador Beyrle: We hope very much that one would not follow from the other. I think seeing this as a hostile act, describing this as a catastrophe raises the rhetorical level in a way that's not particularly useful. NATO is a very different organization than the NATO that existed during the Cold War. The NATO that existed during the Cold War was directed against the perception of a Soviet military threat. The Soviet military threat no longer exists. NATO now has transformed itself into an organization which is not strictly defense, but which also takes part in confronting global challenges like terrorism in Afghanistan, like responding to humanitarian catastrophes in places like Pakistan, as NATO did a few years back. And NATO has made it clear that it is open to new members which share the values of the alliance and which can and are willing to contribute to the efforts to deal with those new challenges. Georgia and Ukraine have expressed interest in joining NATO just as the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary and others did in earlier years. And NATO remains open to that possibility if those two countries can contribute to the mission and the goals of the alliance. NATO heads of state made very clear in Bucharest this past spring that eventually Georgia and Ukraine will join the alliance, that is foreseen, the question is when and how. The question whether these will be a Membership Action Plan

for these two countries is a decision that will be taken at the ministerial meeting in December and I wouldn't prejudge what that decision will be, except to say that the U.S. still strongly supports a Membership Action Plan for both Georgia and Ukraine. We understand that Russia sees this in a different light, and it makes it all the more important for us and other members of NATO to keep the dialogue open with Russia to help Russia come to the understanding that NATO has changed. And we understand that after a long Cold War those attitudes, those perceptions may be changed slowly, more slowly than we would like, but we will continue to work with Russia inside of NATO and outside to bring them to a better understanding that expansion of the alliance poses no threat to Russia.

Interfax: As far as we understand from your answer, the United States will firmly insist on the Georgian and Ukrainian accession to the NATO Membership Action Plan this December. Is that so?

Ambassador Beyrle: We think that both Georgia and Ukraine deserve to have a Membership Action Plan. Yes.

Interfax: Why did the U.S. unconditionally back Georgia in the August crisis?

Ambassador Beyrle: Our support for Georgia has always been premised on the fact that this is a democratically elected government, which has been a friend and an ally of the U.S. in very tough places like Iraq, like Afghanistan. At the same time, our support for Georgia is not unconditional. We made very clear to Georgia that we did not support the use of force to resolve the status of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia and we consider that the Georgian leadership made a mistake in using force in the way they did to try to resolve that issue. But it does not change the fact that the U.S. and Georgia are two countries which have worked together very well. We continue to support Georgia's democratic ambitions, we do not see that in a zero-sum relationship to Georgia's relationship with Russia. We think that Russia also has a stake in seeing strong, prospering neighbors around its border. In the 21st century that's the surest guarantee of prosperity for any country is to have strong trading relationships with prosperous, predictable neighbors.

Interfax: But some political experts explain this in terms of the U.S. aspiration to deprive Russia of influence on post-Soviet territories and to limit Russia's role as an energy supplier...

Ambassador Beyrle: I think there are always people who see the world only in terms of power politics, only in terms of the rivalry that existed between the Soviet Union and the U.S. during the Cold War. It's an old model, it's an outdated model, and I talk to plenty of people in Russia who understand that that view still exists, but reject it as a model for understanding what's happening in the world today.

Interfax: Will the U.S. seek the return of U.S. 'hummers' seized by the Russian military in combat areas in Georgia?

Ambassador Beyrle: I would point out that those vehicles were in Georgia because we had recently concluded a joint military exercise. They were not part of Georgia's military hardware inventory, they belong to the U.S., so we continue to maintain that those vehicles should be returned to the U.S.

I'm sure there are discussions going on about it, but I don't have the details.

Interfax: Is it true that the U.S. viewed Georgia as a base for a possible strike on Iran? What is the U.S. attitude to a possible force resolution of the Iranian nuclear problem, including the recently debated possibility of Israel's strike on this country?

Ambassador Beyrle: Our position is very clear. We see that there's still a lot of room for diplomatic efforts to resolve the problem of Iran's desire to acquire nuclear weapons. We have worked very effectively with our European allies and with Russia inside the UN Security Council, we've co-sponsored five Security Council resolutions that call on Iran to live up to its promises to freeze the enrichment of uranium. Three of those resolutions had sanctions attached to them, and we continue our consultations with Russia and our other allies to that end. But we do not see force against Iran as a way to resolve this issue. We still see a lot of space for diplomatic discussions and will continue those diplomatic discussions, so any discussion of Georgia as a possible base for activities is simply not connected with reality at all.

Interfax: What is the U.S. attitude to the suggestion of an urgent G8 summit involving China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Mexico in connection with the world financial crisis?

Ambassador Beyrle: I think we are obviously still in the middle of the global financial crisis. And our feeling is that this is a time of a closest coordination, closest communication between world's largest economies. You can't over communicate at the time like this, you can only under-communicate.

What the actual format, what number of countries taking place is still under discussion. But I would argue for the widest possible format that makes sense.

Interfax: A Rosatom representative expressed hope that the ratification process of the peaceful atom agreement could resume in spring 2009. Is this possible?

Ambassador Beyrle: We'll have to wait until a new Congress is elected and comes to take their places on Capitol Hill in January. In signing the agreement on civilian nuclear cooperation with Russia we made a very clear statement I think that we saw this kind of cooperation in mutual benefit of both Russia and the U.S., and frankly there is a global benefit to that as well, in the light of the importance of the nuclear power in the 21st century. But Congress made it very clear to us that they had concerns about this agreement even before [the war with] Georgia, although we were making progress in our consultations with the Capital Hill law-makers. But after Georgia, the space, the possibility of moving this forward through Congress simply evaporated, so the administration pulled it back, pulled the agreement back, and our hope is that we will reach a point where we can resubmit it and begin the process again because strategically we are still committed to a strong relationship with Russia in the area of civilian nuclear power. Both countries have much to gain from cooperation given everything we bring to the table on this issue.

I think there's tremendous space also for more cooperation between Russia and the U.S. on hydrocarbon energy. Just take the issue of energy efficiency, for one example. Energy efficiency in Russia is a great concern of the government. The amount of energy that's expended in Russia to produce one unit of economic growth is very high by world standards, and there are technologies out there which were invented, promoted and developed by some of the leading American companies, which could help Russia increase its energy efficiency. So there is tremendous scope for cooperation just in that particular issue. We see companies like Lukoil and ConocoPhillips, an American company, which have worked together very closely and are not only successful in their efforts in the U.S., but also in exploiting some of the oil fields in Russia and making them more productive and more efficient. So I think without a doubt U.S.-Russian cooperation in this area could pay dividends for both countries and for the world economy as well.

Interfax: U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that Russia's membership in the WTO (World Trade Organization) and OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) is in question after the events in August. Will the U.S. block Russia's entry to these organizations, and will it spur its Western partners to do the same?

Ambassador Beyrle: She didn't say actually that it is under question, she said that it isn't going anywhere, if I remember her exact words, and that reflected a recognition, I think, of two things. First of all, we have seen a slowdown on the Russian side, in the Russian government on some of the steps, some compromises that needed to be taken both bilaterally and in multilateral discussions to overcome some of the last remaining issues standing in the way of Russia's accession to the WTO. The second thing that her comment reflected was simply the fact that after Georgia, the climate for compromises to be reached had gotten a little bit smaller for obvious reasons. But as a strategic matter, we still consider the membership of Russia in the WTO to be very important for the U.S., for Russia, and for the rest of the world. Russia is the largest economy that is currently still outside of the WTO framework. That's not a normal situation in the 21st century. But it will take concerted action by the Russian government to overcome the last obstacles, and we have been considered by some indications that Russia in this period might be moving away from some of the bilateral agreements that it agreed to as part of the process of joining the WTO. We very much hope that that situation doesn't make it more difficult that we don't have to go back and re-negotiate understandings we thought were settled already.

Interfax: As far as we understand, should one not mention the scrapping of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment in current conditions?

Ambassador Beyrle: The Jackson-Vanik Amendment in practical effect has no impact on Russia's economy because the administration routinely waives the Jackson-Vanik Amendment every year and we recognize that the reason Jackson-Vanik was created has long since been answered, not only as Jewish immigration from Russia to Israel and other places is completely unimpeded now, we are even seeing Russian Jews immigrating from Israel back to Russia. So the proximate cause for the Jackson-Vanik Amendment went away a long time ago. As a practical matter, I think we see the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and WTO as part of the package, and as Russia joins the WTO I think we expect that the Jackson-Vanik Amendment will finally be overcome.

Interfax: How do you treat Russia's decision to limit the import of U.S. poultry? Do you think that there were just economic reasons behind the decision or not?

Ambassador Beyrle: I've spent a lot of time talking about chicken legs in the time I have worked on U.S.-Russian affairs. I remember Colin Powell once said it is better to argue about chicken legs than about nuclear missiles. But nonetheless, it does seem periodically that the issue of meat and chicken imports from the U.S. tends to come up at a time when protectionist circles in Russia are feeling stronger, and I would say in that context that American beef and chicken is safe, it undergoes very rigorous inspections that have been agreed as part of the process with the Russian side. We are continuing to do that, nothing has changed in the quality of American poultry and American beef that's imported into Russia, and we hope very much that these sort of cyclical problems that we have that go up and go down with imports can be resolved and the Russian government will do everything to make sure that all ministries are living up to the agreements that were signed, because if American imports go down, the prices for the Russian consumer go up.

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