



Briefing from New York

Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs
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(7:00 p.m. EDT)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: The Secretary met with the EU foreign ministers, then – late this morning, then back here had the Transatlantic Lunch, which is an – I should explain, an informal lunch to which all – almost all of European foreign ministers are invited – NATO members, EU members, both. It's an informal session. She then met with the Quint foreign ministers, and then finished up with Foreign Minister – Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov before going to meet with Armenian President Sargsian. That meeting just took place.

A theme of the meetings today, in fact the principal theme that ran through all of these, was the implications of Russia's attack on Georgia, what the consequences are, what the West's response is. That issue also came up, naturally enough, with Minister Lavrov. And let me give you a flavor first of the European meetings, and then I can discuss the meeting with – between the Secretary – between Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Lavrov. So don't worry, I will get to that. Okay? (Laughter.)

The strong sentiment in all her meetings with the Europeans was that transatlantic solidarity has prevented the situation in Georgia from getting even worse, that it was a critical component of our efforts to make the situation better, and that we needed to work together so that Russia's attack on Georgia does not succeed in destroying Georgia's sovereignty, and that Russia comes to realize sooner or later, hopefully sooner, that this attempt to change international borders through force was a grave mistake.

The discussion with the Europeans, which started at the formal EU session, continued over lunch was what I would call probably the most sustained, concentrated general discussion of Russia in a very long time that we have had at that level. It was marked by an overwhelming consensus, unbroken consensus, that our task was to support Georgia, including by the way supporting Georgia's efforts to deepen its economic and political, particularly political, reforms, but also to reach out and work with other countries in the region that may feel threatened by what Russia did, and to make clear that the transatlantic community is not going to accept Russia's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and that we are prepared to be quite strong in making this point to the Russians over time.

Now, ministers – many ministers had individual and particular takes on this, but it was – the solidarity shown was quite striking. Several ministers at the beginning of the EU meeting, the U.S.-EU meeting, pointed out that Secretary Rice, as Secretary, had presided over a considerable improvement in transatlantic ties, the strong implication being that the coordinated – the highly coordinated U.S.-European response to Russia's attack on Georgia was much easier because of the improvement in U.S.-European ties after all the disagreements about Iraq.

Now let me turn to the Secretary's meeting with Lavrov, because then we can get to your questions. It was a small meeting. I accompanied Secretary Rice, and Russian – the new Russian Ambassador Sergei Kislyak accompanied Foreign Minister Lavrov, and nobody else in the room, no interpreters. They discussed Georgia, and this was a – I would call it a polite, thorough exchange of views where the disagreements were quite clear. Secretary Rice's point is that – well, she said to him many of the things she said publicly, that the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was a mistake, it was quite a serious one, that Russia did not enjoy any significant international support. And this – and Russia had created grave difficulties for itself. It's not right of me to characterize what Foreign Minister Lavrov's response was, but he – I would – I think it is fair to say that he presented the known Russian positions. And again, this was – there was not shouting, table-pounding histrionics. These – the two ministers are professionals, they know each other well.

But this was not the only issue that was discussed. They also discussed North Korea and discussed the current difficulties and challenges that we face, given North Korea's current behavior. And they discussed ways to send the right kind of messages to the North Korean Government. And I would call this a business-like discussion and a constructive one.

They also discussed Iran. And I would also call this a constructive discussion. They discussed the fact that we both agreed it was premature to have a P-5+1 foreign ministers meeting right now. They agreed that political directors should work together, and agreed that there would come a time for another P-5+1 foreign ministers meeting. They also agreed that the two governments should be in close contact about the best way to signal that the P-5+1 process is intact, and grappling with the issue of how to proceed -- given the recent developments, proceed in the wake of the IAEA report. And I would call this a constructive discussion.

Now it is – the new Russian political director is not in town, but Ambassador Kislyak, who has vast experience, his previous – Ambassador Kislyak's previous job was as the Russian Foreign Ministry political director. He has vast experience on the Iran issue. He was Nick Burns' counterpart briefly, my counterpart when I was doing it -- the Iran portfolio temporarily, and is Bill Burns' counterpart now – well, he would have been Bill Burns' counterpart when he was political director. But he is in town and I think he and Bill Burns are also in touch about the way ahead. So this was a good – I would call this a constructive discussion.

Now, there's a couple more things and then questions. I'm not going to race out, okay? It's all right.

Secretary Rice's speech last week made clear both the depth of our concern about Russian actions in Georgia, but also said, clearly and explicitly, that there were areas where we do want to continue to work with Russia. And based on the discussion today, that work seems to be continuing despite the very serious disagreements we have and – with Russia and that, frankly, Europe and the United States together have with Russia about Georgia.

Let me stop here so I can answer questions. And thank you for all attending.

Yes.

QUESTION: Dan, Sergey Lavrov just spoke at the Council of Foreign Relations and he was talking about how, when you talk about these kind of areas of cooperation, ending discussions with the G-8 was really hurting the security of the world, because for instance, the agriculture ministers were supposed to meet to talk about food security. He said there were all of these issues that are of grave importance to the world, and you can't pick and choose what you want to cooperate – he said, you know, give us a list of what you want to cooperate with and what you don't want to cooperate with. He said that's not – that's not really fair.

And while you said that Russia can't have it both ways, he said that the United States can't have it both ways due to what he called a very emotional reaction to how they handled it. And yes, you have disagreements, but if you're going to agree to have a pragmatic relationship, then it should be across the board.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Well, I'm familiar both with Minister Lavrov's style in general and this particular – this particular logic train. We've heard this. This was the basis of -- the Russian Foreign Ministry statement yesterday made the same points. We're familiar with it, but the fact is Russia has, by invading Georgia and then

recognizing the independence of these tiny breakaway areas, has created grave difficulties for itself that cannot be wished away. And it is not a difficulty with the United States; it's a difficulty with much of the world. It's not just Europe either, though it certainly is Europe.

Secretary Rice's speech made clear that there are areas where we want to cooperate and made it clear also that we have grave concerns over what the Russians did. And I understand what the Russians are trying to do, but all I can report to you is what the meeting laid out; that is, they talked about North Korea, they talked about Iran in a constructive way, and they talked – they basically exchanged views of Georgia and the disagreements there are very deep and remain.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow – just a quick follow-up if I – can I just do a quick follow-up, please?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Yes.

QUESTION: Europeans today, in their discussion with him – obviously, the whole issue of the G-8 is very important to them. What's the kind of long-term trajectory on it with the G-8 discussion?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: No – fair or not – a fair question, but I don't have an answer for you yet. I can tell you that we did not think it appropriate at all to have a G-8 foreign ministers now. We look forward to Russia adhering to the terms of the ceasefire and the September 8th supplemental document that the French negotiated. And we will see how the Russians do in terms of meeting their commitments.

So I think that this was – I understand what Minister Lavrov has been saying, but the fact is this is – the Russians have created a grave problem for themselves, and that can't be – that can't be wished away.

MODERATOR: Bloomberg, please.

QUESTION: Yeah, just – I'm sorry, this is their first meeting, one-on-one, since the Georgia conflict, correct?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: It wasn't a one-on-one meeting because there were two other people there.

QUESTION: Two others, right.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Two-on-two, what --

QUESTION: But not in (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: That is correct. It is the first bilateral meeting they have had. They have spoken on the phone. I believe she called him before she made her speech last Thursday. And they spoke at the very beginning of the --

QUESTION: They spoke on September 11th and they spoke --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Yes.

QUESTION: -- when she was on the plane flying back to Georgia.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Well, you have --

QUESTION: Right, right.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Right, thank you.

QUESTION: Okay --

QUESTION: Well, we went through this earlier today.

QUESTION: Yeah.

QUESTION: So how can you move out of this – how can you move out of this kind of – seems like a rut that the relations have dropped into at this point, where the rhetoric continues to escalate or periodically spike and there doesn't seem to be any way forward because each side has staked out its territory. What --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Well, that's why – but the premise of your question is, I think, not quite right, because we were – the two ministers were able to have productive, serious discussions about North Korea and Iran despite the ongoing disagreements. It is – I also am not sure that I accept the characterization of, you know, a rut, which is sort of a neutral term, relations are in a rut so we have to improve relations. Russia invaded another country. It tried to – it is trying to change international borders by force.

That is a problem that Russia has, and it's not our responsibility to help Russia mitigate the consequences of such an action. It is our responsibility to work with Russia where we have common interests, but it's also our responsibility, as the Secretary said last Thursday, to help the Russians relook at some of their actions and reconsider what they've done.

MODERATOR: If we can limit the follow-ons, please. Reuters, I think we have time, sir, for one or two.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Yeah, a couple more. I want to be decent to my colleagues.

QUESTION: Did you get any sense from Lavrov whether the Russians are going to follow through on their commitments on the Russian deal? I mean, did he say to you, yes, by --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: I'm sorry. Which deal are you talking about?

QUESTION: The --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: You mean the withdrawal?

QUESTION: The withdrawal deal, yes. Did he say, yes, we'll --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: There are -- they -- I have a somewhat higher degree of confidence that the Russians will pull out of their checkpoints beyond South Ossetia and Abkhazia than I do that the Russians will honor their ceasefire commitment to pull their troops out of Georgia altogether. You remember the September -- the August 8th -- the August 12th ceasefire provides for all Russian and Georgian forces to go back to their original positions on August -- and before August 7th. The Russians have said publicly that they're going to station much larger forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in clearly inconsistent with the ceasefire. And I fear that that is what the Russians intend to do. That would be, of course, institutionalizing this violation of the ceasefire and that's, of course, a problem.

QUESTION: So, Dan, did the Secretary make the same points that she made in her speech to Lavrov today and -- obviously a condensed version if she did, I don't know -- and can you give us any idea about what the response was? We're recently hearing about Lavrov losing his temper on the phone with David Miliband. I'm sure you --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: I've heard that rumor, too.

QUESTION: Yeah. And --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: I've heard that rumor, too. I can assure you, though --

QUESTION: And on Iran, was there any indication that the Russians -- that, in fact, track two, the sanctions, was the way to go?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: I have heard the story and many -- I don't know whether it's true, but I've also heard this story about that conversation between Secretary Miliband and Foreign Minister Lavrov. But the conversation today was polite, completely professional. There was none of -- there was none of that.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: No foul language?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: It was a completely professional conversation from beginning to end.

QUESTION: And, well -- wait, hold on a second.

MODERATOR: I asked you to limit your follow-up.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: No, no, I'll --

QUESTION: It was all -- I asked it already.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Okay. So which part do you want answered now?

QUESTION: The -- did she make the same points in her speech that she --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: She didn't give him a condensed version of the speech. She made -- many of the points that she made to him you have heard before about the problem that Russia has created for itself.

QUESTION: And he wasn't buying that, right?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Well, I didn't actually expect him to. (Laughter.) And he had his own position, which we did not find -- which our side doesn't find convincing. But that's pretty well known.

QUESTION: And then on Iran?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: And which?

QUESTION: Sanctions.

QUESTION: Sanctions on Iran. Whether sanctions (inaudible).

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: They discussed the way ahead and the two-track approach, but also the need to send Iran a very clear signal that the P-5+1 process is intact and that we stand -- that the P-5+1 stand by all of their work today. And I think under the circumstances, that would be an important signal. That's what they discussed.

QUESTION: He said that you didn't discuss sanctions at all.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Particular next-step sanctions, I think that's right. They didn't discuss that, but they discussed sending the larger signal.

QUESTION: And they agreed to do that?

QUESTION: You said the Europeans are completely on the same page, but they are very concerned that if the P-5+1 process is going slowly, if it slows down, there is the risk and it would mean that the Russians are waiting for the next administration and it would also mean that it would give ground to people in Israel who favor a military strike on Iran. And they are very concerned about that. So what is your answer today?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Well, I would -- you mean to the Europeans? I would say that we very much want the P-5+1 process to continue. Secretary Rice said so in her speech last week. They had a -- Secretary Rice and Minister Lavrov had a constructive discussion about this. But -- and I'm -- and we're -- obviously, that's a good thing. But the Iran -- the problem that Iran's nuclear program represents is something that we have to take care of, hopefully through the P-5+1 process. But in any event, it is a problem and we have to deal with it pretty seriously.

QUESTION: But are you sure that there will be a ministerial meeting soon?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Am I sure? No, I'm not sure that there will be, but it is a good thing that the two ministers agree that they should have a ministerial

meeting.

QUESTION: Colum Lynch from *The Washington Post*. I just wanted – I know you talked about this a little bit earlier, but if you could just give us some sense of – Lavrov, you know, was essentially saying that he was, you know, withdrawing in reaction to the position on the G-8 meetings and –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: He did not say that. He did not say that during --

QUESTION: He did not say that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: He did not say that. I mean, I'm familiar with the argument that that was their motive, but he did not say that. That did not come up. The --Secretary Rice made clear that she agreed that it was not the right time to have a P-5+1 ministerial. Political directors needed to do their work. And he agreed with that assessment.

QUESTION: But a senior official last night said that you thought it was useful to have such a meeting.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: All I can tell you is what the -- what Minister Lavrov and Secretary Rice said today. She said that she agreed that, in fact, it was not the right time --

QUESTION: Last night after they said they're not coming.

QUESTION: Well, but I mean, the Russian remark that you can't have it both ways, you can't ask us to, you know, participate in the Iranian stuff -- I know, but I've got to write a story tomorrow, so I'm sorry. But I mean, you know, he didn't sort of indicate that there was no way that they were going to go ahead with high-level meetings on Iran if you didn't sort of change your position on cooperation?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: He did not say that; in fact, quite the opposite. He said that he looked -- that there should be a ministerial meeting at the right time. I mean, I understand the logic, okay, of that line of argument. But in fact, that's not what happened at the meeting of the two ministers today.

MODERATOR: Libby.

QUESTION: Yeah, just on North Korea, Dan. You had said that they came up -- they discussed ways to send the right kind of messages to North Korea. What -- did they conclude anything? Are they -- are the Russians going to --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: The Russians are going -- I think it was -- the best way to say is that the Russians are going to think about this in light of the conversation. I think that's fair.

QUESTION: Think about what?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: The best way to send the messages.

QUESTION: Is there any more detail you can give us on that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Not that I can give you, no.

QUESTION: Dan, this was --

QUESTION: I mean, you're not very reassuring.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Well, I'm sorry. (Laughter.) But you know, I'm not very reassuring about what? About Iran's intentions? About -- I mean, these are --

QUESTION: About the continuity of the P-5+1.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: No, I -- and quite the contrary. I thought I was quite reassuring that both leaders had a constructive discussion given the press articles that I read in the morning papers, which were understandable. I think it's quite reassuring for me to be able to tell you that they had a constructive discussion on the way forward and that Minister Lavrov agreed that there should be a ministerial meeting and they also agreed on ways to send the right signal that the P-5+1 process is intact. That actually is pretty reassuring, I mean, as these things go. It's not been a great month and a half in U.S.-Russian relations, so under the circumstances, that may be -- that's pretty good.

MODERATOR: I think this will have to be the last one, and be brief because --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Sure.

QUESTION: On North Korea, did Minister Lavrov suggest that the U.S. needed to show more flexibility on the verification protocol, that the process was more important at this point than getting a stringent verification regime?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Fair question. They did discuss -- they did discuss the best tactics for moving ahead. And Lavrov -- I should not characterize what he said, not quite right, but certainly they discussed some of these issues. And Lavrov said -- at the end of the discussion of North Korea, Lavrov said he would think about sending the right kind of message.

QUESTION: Are you still wrangling over the interpretation of the September and August options?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: We've not wrangled at all. We think the French interpretation is the right one.

QUESTION: Yeah, but the Russians don't agree.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Well, they can --

QUESTION: So you'll have a basis for --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: They can talk to the French, who actually have a very good mastery of both the French language and the documents that they negotiated. We think that the French know exactly what they did, and we think that their version is accurate. What the Russians think, I can't say.

QUESTION: Dan, did they agree on what is the best way to signal to the Iranians that the P-5+1 process is intact, or did they just say – you said –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: No, no, they did exchange some ideas and they agreed that we'll be – they agreed that Bill Burns and Kislyak will be in touch to follow up on that discussion.

MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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