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Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley on the President's Trip to the NATO Summit

Palace of the Parliament
Bucharest, Romania

1:45 P.M. (Local)



MR. HADLEY: There were a number of issues that were addressed in the morning session. I know [in a briefing this morning my colleague] gave a backgrounder that went through a number of the issues that got adopted and moved forward in the discussions this morning. So it was a fairly rich agenda.

Of course the issue that engaged attention this morning mostly was the issue of enlargement. That was a major focus this morning. The upshot was a robust agenda of enlargement for the Alliance. The process was a very good one. People dealt candidly with the issues of the day, and were able to come together, particularly on the MAP issue, for something that offers a very positive way forward for Georgia and Ukraine, clearly on the way to their membership in NATO.

Let me give you a little bit of what was agreed, and then give you a little bit of the color and process, and then be glad to answer some questions. There's a language that will be issued as part of the communiqué, a couple things I'd draw your attention to. It begins -- the section on MAP for Ukraine and Georgia begins with the phrase "NATO welcomes Ukraine and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO." So while the issue was a Membership Action Plan, the text agreed by heads of state and government welcomes their aspirations for membership in NATO. And then it says, we agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO. That's a very strong statement, giving them a clear prospect of NATO membership.

The statement talks about the contributions they have made to the Alliance, the democratic reforms they are pursuing. It says that MAP is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership. And finally, another important statement, "Today we make clear that we support these countries' applications for MAP." So this is a strong statement of a positive prospect for membership and MAP for Georgia and Ukraine.

Now, as you know, there are some questions that have been raised by a number of countries about whether today was the time to actually make an offer of a Membership Action Plan. As you know, the United States was of the view -- and I would say probably more than 50 percent of the members were of the view that it would be -- that they were ready to be issued a Membership -- an offer of a Membership Action Plan today. Some countries had some reservations about taking that action today, even though it is clear from this language that clearly all join in supporting their applications for MAP; that they will be a MAP, and they will become members. But the issue is really -- was one of timing.

And the resolution of it was to ask the foreign ministers to make a first assessment of progress at the December 2008 meeting of foreign ministers. Now, progress towards what? The declaration makes clear that as of today, NATO will begin a very -- a period of intensive engagement with both of these countries at a very high political level, to try and address the questions that some members have about their MAP applications.

And so there will be this intensive engagement process, beginning today. The foreign ministers then are going to make -- have been asked to make a first assessment of progress pursuant to that engagement at their December 2008 meeting, which is regularly scheduled. And then, finally, the heads of states and government made clear that foreign ministers have the authority to decide on the MAP applications of Ukraine and Georgia. So it does not have to come back to a NATO summit, but the foreign ministers are empowered to make the decision, and they have been asked to do a review of progress in this -- as a result of this engagement period at their December

2008 meeting.

Q Can I just interrupt? Does that mean that it's theoretically possible that they could get MAP in December and --

MR. HADLEY: Let me keep going. Now, obviously, for those countries who believe that Georgia and Ukraine were ready for MAP today, you can expect that, again, depending on what happens between now and then, you can probably expect that those countries will urge, in December, that MAP be extended to the countries at that time. Other countries that have reservations will obviously want to see some progress in those two countries between now and then. They will have the option of being persuaded by that progress, and joining in a desire to offer MAP in December of '08. They obviously have the right to say, in our view progress has not occurred.

Q Is that a majority vote then in December, or is it a consensus?

MR. HADLEY: It's a consensus. All of these decisions are made by consensus.

Q Can I just -- without seeming to be too cynical, which I'm sure you will, this would appear to give our President - it would make it possible for MAP to be extended while he's President, but it also gives Putin what he wants, right, that it's not going to happen on his watch. Is that a fair way to look at it?

MR. HADLEY: You can decide how Putin will react to these words: "NATO welcomes Ukraine and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agree these countries will become members of NATO." MAP is the next step, as we've said, and today we make clear that we support these countries' application for MAP. I think it's clear from this language that these two countries, in the view of NATO, are heading for membership. And I think it's also clear that the heads of state and government made this decision today on its own terms, without regard to any comments or statements from countries not in the room.

And President -- this, I think, is a clear statement of the direction going forward. We think it is a very positive statement and a good statement. I will say, the United States obviously had a role to play here, and our role was to take, as the President did, a very strong position that these countries should be offered MAP today. It was very important for the President to maintain that position consistently throughout this process. I think it's one of the reasons we came up with as positive a statement as we did.

But you may remember, the President, in one of the statements he's made over the last three or four days, said very clearly that the goal here was to have a clear statement that these two countries were destined to be members of NATO, and a clear path for these countries to get there. And I would say and maintain that this statement, adopted today, meets both of those objectives.

So would we have preferred to have MAP today? Of course. Do we think we achieved the strategic decision we needed from the NATO Alliance that these countries will be members of NATO? Absolutely.

Q Can you say with confidence or certainty that the Bush administration will push for MAP to be granted in December?

MR. HADLEY: I think -- what I would say is it's our position today. We would expect to see these countries making progress over the next several months, as part of this engagement program. And so our expectation is that they would even be more ready in December. Obviously, though, we will look at events, we will participate in that assessment. But our expectation, of course, and hope would be that these countries, now being clear that they're on a membership track, will be able to make the kind of progress that makes the case even stronger in December than it was here today.

Q And the U.S. position will be as strong and robust then as it is today?

MR. HADLEY: I've answered that question. We thought they were ready today. We think this process will accelerate progress in terms of political reform and other things, so our expectation is that they will be even more ready in December, and that we will be able to make even a stronger case in December than we are.

But again, this is a process. We will respect that process and be part of the assessment, be part of the December

meeting of foreign ministers, and we recognize that other countries have made clear they reserve the right to participate in this process and argue in December that they're not ready. And that debate will be played out in the foreign ministers, and it's clear from this that the foreign ministers have the authority to make a decision on that time whether to extend the MAP at that time, or decide that further time is required. But our expectation is, and our hope is that the case for MAP will be even stronger in December than it was today.

Q This will be the communiqué that's coming out?

MR. HADLEY: This language will be in the communiqué that's coming out. But it's a strong --

Q I wanted to ask you about something else --

MR. HADLEY: Yes, ma'am.

Q -- how the missile defense talks with the Russians are going, and what you expect to happen now on that issue in Sochi -- also given what's happened here -- but do you think you'll have a deal with them that will be part of that strategic framework agreement in Sochi? Or perhaps you just have a little placeholder there saying, we're working on this?

MR. HADLEY: Will, we had good discussions. We had good discussions. We think we've made progress. As you know, we have tried to get the Russians to agree that we will participate as equals in a system designed to provide protection to the United States, Europe and Russia, and to do that in a way where various countries can contribute assets in a context where there's great transparency and reassurance to everybody that this system is about dealing with threats from the Middle East, rather than anything else.

We think we've made progress on that issue. Obviously those negotiations have not concluded. There will be an opportunity for the two Presidents to talk about it at Sochi. But we think we've made good progress on missile defense in those discussions with Russia. We think we've made very good progress on missile defense here, as you heard from [my colleague] in what will -- language that will be in the communiqué coming out of this meeting.

The last thing I need to say is the heads of state and government agreed that membership would be offered to two of the three aspirant countries, namely Croatia and Albania. They also agreed that Macedonia clearly is qualified and -- clearly -- let me say it this way: clearly should become a member of NATO. As you know, there is an unresolved issue with one country involving the name. And the NATO heads of state and government made clear that they agreed -- agreed -- that an invitation to Macedonia will be extended as soon as a mutually accepted solution has been reached on the name issue.

And it was clear from a number of speakers, and certainly clear from our President, that that should happen as soon as possible, so that Macedonia, under the agreed name, can be part of NATO.

And finally I would say, agreed that Intensified Dialogue -- remember the sequence of moving toward NATO goes Partnership for Peace, Intensified Dialogue, a MAP -- Membership Action Plan -- and then membership. And it was agreed that Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro would move from Partnership for Peace to the next stage, Intensified Dialogue; and that an Intensified Dialogue is also open to Serbia, which is currently part of Partnership for Peace. And the NATO is open and would like to extend an Intensified Dialogue to Serbia, when Serbia is ready to request it.

So bottom line, a very robust agenda on enlargement going forward; a resolution in a very positive way on the issue of MAP; a very good process within the room; a lot of discussion around the table. A text that had been worked by a number of folks was circulated. The Secretary General broke the meeting for about 45 minutes, maybe even an hour, to allow groups to talk and review the text. At one point, the German Chancellor was seated at a table with probably 10, maybe 15, foreign ministers around her, talking through the text, talking about language.

It was a very spirited and very good process, and in the end of the day, we walked away with a text that is a strong endorsement of membership for these two countries, Georgia and Ukraine, and that reflected a consensus.

Q That's what you were just talking --

Q What is the basic --

Q Was that -- the Merkel and the 15, was that -- that was about Ukraine and Georgia, that text?

MR. HADLEY: Yes, it was about that.

Q Is it -- can you say a little more about what the basic concern is that's being expressed? Is it over just basic political stability in those countries or is it --

MR. HADLEY: There are really two issues. There is, one, are the democratic reforms -- have they taken root and are the political systems stable? That's a question that had been raised by -- with respect to both countries. And secondly, the unresolved disputes within Georgia with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

And as [a colleague] said to some of you last night, it was a very spirited discussion, and one of the big issues -- which was mostly an issue between Europeans -- is, if you want to address those issues, is the best thing to sort of hold off and say, well, make more progress and then we'll give you MAP? Or, as a number of countries, particularly countries that have been through the PFP, Intensified Dialogue and MAP process argue, the best way to get them resolved, if you want to make progress on those issues, is to give them MAP now. So it was a very spirited debate and resulted in a very good outcome.

Q Have you concluded your deal with the Czech Republic on their radar, and how is it going with Poland?

MR. HADLEY: When I left -- did we announce something, Sully, do you know? When I left Washington it was very, very close. I don't -- I have not been in touch in the last 48 hours, and I can't tell where we are on the Polish agreement. We've been making progress, but I can't tell you because I've been doing other things for the last couple days.

Q What have you been doing? Has it been all Ukraine and Georgia?

MR. HADLEY: Well, it's been pretty active. You know, we had a good day in Ukraine. We had a good day here. I've been spending a fair amount of time on that issue. Secretary Rice has also been very instrumental to it, and at one point when Chancellor Merkel was sitting among those 10 or 15 foreign ministers, at one point Condi said, well, I think I'll go over and lend a hand. And so I walked over about 10 minutes later, and there was the Chancellor sitting down and Condi at her elbow and a circle of foreign ministers working language -- a very constructive process. She did a great job.

Q Can you say what the sticking points were in the language? I mean, what was it that -- was it the --

MR. HADLEY: Just details in language, real details in language.

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MR. HADLEY: I want to elaborate a little on my answer about Putin. I think -- I said in response and made clear that this is a strong statement that these two countries, as I say, will become members of NATO. The point we have been trying to make to Russian authorities, and the President has tried to make with President Putin, is whatever -- that that is not a bad thing; that is a good thing in terms of Russia's interests.

The President has said many times to President Putin that democracies on your border that are secure, stable and based on freedom and democracy are the best neighbors to have. They do not threaten Russia as a -- on the contrary, they can be good neighbors for Russia. And we really believe that.

And one of the things that's very interesting is that during the discussions here last night and today, a number of countries pointed out that getting on a membership track with NATO was actually something that gave them the confidence to be able to engage with Russia, and actually was the starting point for an improvement in their

relations with Russia. This is the experience of a number of the countries who've talked about what's happened when they were on the NATO track.

So we would say that this is not in any way -- this was a decision taken by NATO without regard to any third parties, but it was not in any way a decision aimed at any third parties. On the contrary, it is part of a project of building a Europe that is whole, free and at peace. And that is, at bottom, a Europe that is in Russia's interests -- a stable Europe that can be a collaborator, a partner with Russia -- economic, politically, diplomatically -- and that in fact can give Russia stable, democratic and sound neighbors, as a part of a Europe whole, free and at peace.

That's what we believe, that is what we have said to President Putin, and that's why he should draw no offense from the decisions that were taken today.

END 2:09 P.M. (Local)

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