

Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs
Remarks to Press Following Opening Session of
Extraordinary Conference on the CFE Treaty
Hofburg Congress Centre
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Assistant Secretary Fried: I wanted to give you a brief characterization of the meeting that just ended. This was the first part of what will be the opening session. Only about half the delegations that wanted to speak did. But I can characterize the interventions.

The Russian intervention was, needless to say, rather different from all the others. They focused on their problems with the CFE Treaty and talked about the need for ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty. Some of their problems had to do with issues that will be solved if the Adapted CFE Treaty is brought into force. And as I mentioned earlier today, a major difference between the current and the Adapted CFE Treaty is that the Adapted CFE Treaty does away with the block structure and many of the Russian complaints had to do with the block structure. They spent time talking about and complaining about NATO enlargement in fairly familiar terms.

If any of you are familiar with the Russian arguments, you can pretty much imagine what they are. But a couple of important things: they did not announce suspension in their statement. They noted that Putin had said that Russia was considering it or could suspend its obligations, but they did not announce suspension and this is what we expected. We did not expect them to suspend.

They did say they were willing to listen to responses to their complaints and whether or not they are truly willing to work with us will be tested in the next few days and after the conference.

The response from almost all the other states parties, particular NATO allies, was very consistent. I would say very restrained in rhetoric. This was not a hot session of shouts and mutual accusations, but very clear that: 1) the CFE regime is important to European security; 2) we remain committed to it; 3) we look forward to entering into force the Adapted CFE Treaty when that is possible.

Most speakers from NATO called upon the Russians to help make that possible, the fulfillment of the Istanbul commitments. There were various expressions by the various important NATO allies about willingness to work with the Russians to solve some of the problems. There was not time in this meeting for back and forth so I can't say how the Russians responded to what they heard, but there was again considerable allied solidarity, though not expressed in a polemical or confrontational way.

Again, all the allies that spoke were restrained and at pains to stress the positive, but very clear.

Finally there was a general sentiment expressed that Russia should not suspend its obligations. That was stressed by many allies.

I can also add that a couple of countries, not allies, one country spoke more or less supportive of the Russians, but it's a country that usually does.

I think that summarizes it. The question that is fair for you to ask that I cannot answer is well, what happens next and are the Russians going to be interested in working seriously on resolving these things? I don't know yet. We will find out tomorrow and in the days to come. There is nothing in [Russian chief delegate] Antonov's remarks that precludes this. It was very much as expected, and now we have to see whether having made those remarks he's willing to work with us. We all remain ready to do so.

So, very much is expected. No dramatic surprises. And considerable allied solidarity in defense of the CFE regime and in defense of our approach, which is the Istanbul commitments and taking a step toward ratification of the adapted regime.

With that, a couple of questions: again, I won't be able to answer a lot because all that happened today were half the delegations making their statements.

Question: How do you describe the tone of the Russian delegation?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Critical. It was a series of a statement of grievances without necessarily shutting doors. We will all be able to judge what he said by what they do next. So I said without shutting doors, and I mean there was nothing in what he said that precludes the possibility of working together. That doesn't mean it will happen. It means that he did not slam the door shut to working through the problems.

Question: How do you see a possible breakthrough this week considering positions and the calendar, the agenda topic? You saying, we're saying, the Russians have to first comply with the commitments; B, there will be a meeting and then a ratification; and then we'll [inaudible]. The Russians say no, we have to [inaudible] obligations. We don't want to talk about [inaudible]. How do you go forward?

Assistant Secretary Fried: We will see whether the Russians are willing to work through these various problems based on some of the constructive ideas that various allies put forward, and various allies – I will only speak for myself here – put forward what we consider to be constructive and creative ways forward.

By the way I should mention with respect to the flank agreement that this is an issue on which all allies are concerned and many countries, I said so in my statement. This came up in a number of interventions. The flank regime's of concern to all the allies.

There was certainly in the allied statements both commonality of tone and consistency of substance, and enough for the Russians to work with if they are so inclined. In other words, we will have firm defense of the principles that I had laid out earlier, but I think we did offer enough that if the Russians want to take us up on some of the offers there are ways forward that do not compromise our principled position.

Question: Like what, sir?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Oh, ways to address the Transnistria issue by internationalizing it. I mentioned that earlier. The fact-finding mission, not an inspection, fact-finding mission of the base in Georgia about which there is some concern.

Those were American ideas. There were other ideas from other allies, which I don't want to characterize. It isn't fair of me to talk about other positions outside the room. But they were similarly created and obviously developed with goodwill and we will see whether this is taken.

Question: I know that the Russian delegation has now mentioned six problems which they consider to be acute for the treaty. Could some of these problems be solved during this conference or not?

Assistant Secretary Fried: If you are familiar with the Russian paper and the six problems you will know that many of those problems would be resolved instantly if the adapted treaty came into force. So a lot of time was spent in talking about problems that were resolved when the Adapted Treaty was negotiated, that is the groups, the problem of the groups of states. And once the Adapted Treaty does away with the groups of states so at one point in the meeting there was some puzzlement.

Question: But nowadays six NATO members are still, remain still in the --

Assistant Secretary Fried: That's quite right. And we agree that the bloc to bloc structure of the treaty, the original treaty, is completely outmoded and that's why we negotiated an Adapted Treaty that does away with it.

So if Russia is concerned about the bloc to bloc structure, let it help us ratify the Adapted Treaty which solves the problem.

Question: But do the Russian [inaudible] partners now like the Adapted Treaty or --

Assistant Secretary Fried: We are not obligated to apply the Adapted Treaty, but in fact I think they are all acting consistent with it.

Voice: I think we'll obviously implement the treaty that's in force, but I think really basically what we do is consistent --

Question: According to this treaty there remains still Eastern and Western groups. Eastern including Poland --

Assistant Secretary Fried: And we quite agree --

Question: -- counterbalance to the other --

Assistant Secretary Fried: We think the bloc structure is outmoded which is why, I repeat, many years ago in 1999 we all signed a treaty that does away with it. The fact that that treaty has not been put into effect is, those reasons are well known.

For those of you not familiar with this, that gets to the heart of some of the Russian concerns. Again, to be instantly taken care of once the Adapted Treaty is ratified as we hope it will be.

There are other concerns expressed, and we simply disagree with the Russian assessment of the problems. We think that another concern the Russians have expressed is that some countries, including the Baltic countries, aren't in the CFE regime. Again, they cannot join the current CFE Treaty. They're prohibited from doing so. They could join the Adapted CFE Treaty, and we hope for its ratification because once it's ratified the problem is solved.

Therefore we go back to our original view that the key to resolving many of the Russian problems lies in taking advantage of some of the offers that have been made to resolve the problems of the Istanbul commitments so we can ratify the Adapted Treaty, so we take care of the problems the Russians have identified.

There is a way forward and we hope that Russia helps us get there.

Question: Is there some connection to missile defense and Russian connection to missile defense versus the CFE Treaty?

Assistant Secretary Fried: I have not heard this raised once. Never. Some journalists have raised it, though not Russian journalists of which I'm aware, and it did not come up today.

I think some Western journalists have conflated the two. But in the Russian list of problems at CFE missile defense has never been raised. What has been raised is the training facilities in Romania and Bulgaria which will involve rotation in and out for relatively brief periods of basically brigade-sized U.S. forces, but those forces would not be stationed permanently in those countries and we have made clear to the Russians, and I said so today. That the Russians have complained about, but they have not raised missile defense, ever, in this context.

Question: Just hypothetically, if a battalion did go to Bulgaria --

Assistant Secretary Fried: A brigade.

Question: Brigade. Would there be [inaudible]?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Our understanding is, in fact it is our position that we will be in compliance with the Adapted CFE Treaty and therefore I do not believe so. I do not believe so.

Question: [Inaudible].

Assistant Secretary Fried: We would adhere scrupulously, and that is our policy. The President has said so.

Question: And one last question. I don't understand if there's such a problem with Georgia, why can't you put in inspectors? Who's blocking --

Assistant Secretary Fried: First of all, the base itself is located in Abkhazia, which is part of Georgia but not under the control of the Georgian government.

Secondly, obviously, to go into a base which is still in Russian hands, we need Russian permission, and we're not going to go charging in, we're not going to show up and ram the gates. This is a proposal; it's for a fact-finding mission, not a formal inspection. And there are various ways in which it could be arranged. We're not rigid about this, so we hope it will be taken up.

Question: Will Georgia [inaudible]?

Assistant Secretary Fried: I don't know. But the Georgians do support this. And I think it could be done in a way, this could be designed in a way to make it as easy as possible for all sides. We're not looking to design it in a way that enforces a rejection; we're trying to design it in a way that allows for acceptance and forward movement.

Question: You said the Russians didn't announce a suspension.

Assistant Secretary Fried: They did not.

Question: They did talk about the possibility of a suspension. Can you tell me exactly what [inaudible]?

Assistant Secretary Fried: I won't talk about the exact wording. You should really go to them.

They referred to President Putin's statement. They said more or less that this is out there as a possibility. They did not indicate that it was imminent. I do not have the impression that they're about to announce one this week, but it is certainly on the table as a possibility. That's my characterization. I don't want to put words in my Russian colleagues' mouth. But I think that they were, let us say, careful in their use of words, not sloppy.

Question: What I understand is under the Adapted Treaty no country, including Czech Republic or Poland, are allowed to have foreign forces within its territory.

Assistant Secretary Fried: No.

Question: That's not correct?

Assistant Secretary Fried: That is not the case. The issue that the Russians have raised, occasionally, dates from 1997 when NATO made a political commitment that as an organization it would carry out its defense mission through reinforcement and other [inaudible] other than the permanent stationing of significant combat forces. Additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces. Which means basing. It means the kind of military presence we had

in Germany during the Cold War of corps-strength units would not be moved wholesale, and that we have kept that commitment.

Question: [Inaudible] facility in Czech Republic or Poland --

Assistant Secretary Fried: No. It doesn't even come close.

Question: Any talks about platforms today? Like the Russians demanded there were some of the Polish F-16s now in Eastern Europe, new weapons --

Assistant Secretary Fried: No. I don't believe this came up. I didn't hear anybody mention F-16s.

Question: I said F-16s, but they mentioned the rearmament of one of the group in Eastern European states before a conference that was something that [inaudible].

Assistant Secretary Fried: I don't remember that. I don't think so. Again, it's hard to prove a negative, it may come up again. But no, I don't remember that.

Question: What NATO is doing in the Baltic states [inaudible], if these three Baltic states did become signatories of the CFE, they actually then would be subject to CFE [inaudible] process.

Assistant Secretary Fried: Yes. I believe they would be normal members and there would be certain limits, and the Russians have always been interested in this, and reasonably enough. In fact, the Baltic states have said that when it is possible for them to do so, that is when the adapted CFE Treaty is in effect, they will join it.

Question: Do you think the Baltic states are reluctant to join it because of Kaliningrad?

Assistant Secretary Fried: But they're not reluctant. They've said they will join it as soon as it's possible.

Question: -- which would the Russians [inaudible] under the treaty then move around forces into [inaudible]?

Assistant Secretary Fried: They can do this now, is my understanding. Kaliningrad is covered by the treaty, but I do not believe there is a separate Kaliningrad limit. Sometimes the Poles and others have expressed concerns about this and I'm sure that if, I'm not sure, but I imagine it is possible that if there are discussions on the treaty the issue of Kaliningrad will come up again, or it could come up again. But it is not an acute problem at the moment. At least as far as I'm aware. It's been a chronic issue that has come up before, as we all know.

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