



## Interview With Brian Whitmore and Akbar Ayazi of RFE/RL

**Kurt Volker, Acting Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs**

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**Mr. Whitmore:** I'm Brian Whitmore from the Central Newsroom. I just got a couple of questions from different services. The first I want to ask is regarding Georgia and Ukraine you alluded to it in your discussion before. What I wanted to ask is there some middle ground between a Membership Action Plan and an intensified dialogue that could be offered to these countries at, in Bucharest. Is there something in the middle or is it all or nothing so to speak?

**Acting Assistant Secretary Volker:** Let me put that a different way. What you have are countries, Georgia and Ukraine, that have established their desire to become closer to the transatlantic community, closer to NATO. And we support those aspirations so there's got to be a yes from our side, saying we welcome the aspirations of Georgia and Ukraine. That is the, you know, the directional aspect of this. NATO has an intensified dialogue on membership issues. Both countries are taking part in that now. NATO also has a Membership Action Plan, which is a way of helping countries that want to draw closer. It doesn't have any formal tracks that exist one way or another, but whether or not there is a formal track like that, the directional aspect to this--that Georgia and Ukraine want to move closer to NATO and we want to help them do so. That remains clear. So the issue really is at Bucharest do we offer them a membership action plan? That's a decision that NATO needs to take by consensus. If it's not at Bucharest, the directional aspect remains the same. They have indicated their desire to come closer, and we want to help them.

**Mr. Ayazi:** Yes, this is Akbar Ayazi from the Afghan Service again. Thanks again. The question I would like to ask you is--I am interested in the Bucharest Summit. It says Afghanistan enlargement. If I were to put it in bullet points, what does this mean for the Afghans--enlargement? What does this mean? What should I tell my listeners?

**Acting Assistant Secretary Volker:** Okay. It doesn't mean that we're offering NATO membership for Afghanistan. That's *not* one of the issues that's on the table. What it does mean is that Afghanistan is one of the principle issues that NATO leaders are going to have to discuss and deal with when they meet in Bucharest in just a few weeks.

**Mr. Ayazi:** Yea, what will come out for Afghanistan?

**Acting Assistant Secretary Volker:** NATO will be--

**Mr. Ayazi:** I'm sorry. What will come out of the summit for Afghanistan?

**Acting Assistant Secretary Volker:** What we hope is. Well, we more than hope--we will. We'll have a meeting at NATO, or at Bucharest, with NATO and President Karzai and the UN, including the new envoy who's just been named by the UN, Kai Eide, the EU, and international financial institutions. This will be a gathering of leaders from NATO and more broadly to talk about how do we help further in Afghanistan? There are troop commitment aspects to this. We hope that some countries will be making some announcements on their decision to deploy new forces to Afghanistan. There are counter-narcotics aspects to this--how are we working together on counter-narcotics? More broadly, there's a sense of the vision and direction of where are we trying to go together with the Afghan government in Afghanistan. What we call a comprehensive approach or a strategy, a vision document. And we hope that NATO will be issuing such a document at Bucharest that gives a broad context so people see that it's not just a military effort, but a strong effort at reconstruction and development that's supporting the Afghan government, at good governance, at counter-narcotics--all of the aspects that are necessary to produce stronger peace, stability, security, development in Afghanistan.

**Mr. Whitmore:** This is Brian Whitmore again. I'm going to broaden it out a little bit to the region. It's a question for a larger story I'm working on. Some of the analysts I've talk to have described the struggle for influence between Russia and the West in the former USSR as a cold war fought with soft power. Now I'd probably, we'll probably want to shy away from the language of cold war, but the soft power part is what I want to zero-in on. With the CSTO, Russia is trying to establish an alternative political security architecture in the region and is presenting its own sort of political model. Is NATO engaged in this in a sort of soft power way? And how is NATO countering this because it's certainly a different environment in the last couple of years?

**Acting Assistant Secretary Volker:** Thanks for asking that question. Clearly there are some people who look at these things in zero-sum terms. You know, is it Russia's advantage or is it NATO's advantage? We don't. We look at it in terms of human development. What can we do to strengthen democracy, market economy, rule of law, human rights, security, integration in international institutions, global economy, and cooperation on transnational issues that are very important and very difficult, like proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, like terrorism, like trafficking in persons and so forth. So, what we are doing as a country, as the United States, and what NATO is doing, and what the EU is doing, and what these countries are doing for themselves is working out ways to introduce reforms, to strengthen governance, to build stronger, healthier, better societies and countries through institutions, through economic growth, through integration, and so on.

We believe that doing this makes the region better, makes the region safer and more stable, and is ultimately in Russia's interest, as well--that Russia having countries like this will find that they are good neighbors to have. So we don't view this as a competition with Russia in the first instance. Now obviously, there are areas where Russia is engaged, such as in energy for example, where it is essentially a controlled energy sector that is often used to apply political pressure, as well as economic pressure. That's a concern. But our objective there is not to squeeze Russia out by any means. Russia is going to be an energy supplier to these countries. What we want to do is introduce healthier market mechanisms so that it's a healthier economic relationship for everybody. So rather than viewing it in those kind of zero-sum terms that your question was thinking of, I would put it in terms of positive human development.

**Mr. Whitmore:** If I can follow up and thank you for that answer--that was what I needed. If I could follow up on that--do you see a different environment in the last, I'd say year, year and a half, two years, where, where Russia is more assertively kind of presenting this alternative model? Has NATO felt the need to adapt or adjust to that?

**Acting Assistant Secretary Volker:** Well, I think you're right that Russia is feeling more assertive. You can see that in the way that it has handled some issues, such as Missile Defense, or suspending implementation of the CFE treaty, or the way it has handled gas issues with countries in this region. NATO, I think, is actually acting in a very steady way, though.

If you look back to the mid-nineties, NATO talked about the democratic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, an approach of enlargement to help countries both strengthen their own institutions and become part of a larger community. That's been both to the benefit of 100 million people, who now live in societies that are free, economically prosperous, and secure, compared to where we were a decade ago. And it's also worked to strengthen NATO, and it strengthened the European Union. That is very much the approach that we are still taking when we look at countries like those in the Membership Action Plan--today, Albania, Croatia, Macedonia or looking ahead to countries like Georgia and Ukraine. So, I see there's actually a steadiness in NATO's approach.

**Mr. Ayazi:** Mr. Secretary, I have to bring it back to Afghanistan. Like you have said in your speech, that security and development go hand in hand, the civilian death in the NATO operation and also the violence that is taking place is not earning and gaining the heart and mind of people in Afghanistan, and I think people are suggesting that if there is more development, reconstruction, and others involved and give good examples, it will really help the situation. Is there a specific plan? Is there something

we can do different, to do this?

**Acting Assistant Secretary Volker:** Let me start with the first part of your question: NATO, and the NATO forces, and the United States go to extraordinary efforts to avoid and prevent civilian casualties. The Taliban and al-Qaeda deliberately kill civilians—that's an important distinction for the people of Afghanistan to understand. That we are there to try to help protect them and help them build a society. The Taliban is trying to kill them. The second part of your question is about how we do better at reconstruction and development, and I accept the premise of that question. We need to do better, at reconstruction and development. We need greater resources put into this from the international community, but I'd also say that we need to have reconstruction development following more closely behind military operations, where we're able to clear the Taliban or al-Qaeda from a given area.

We need to very quickly and nimbly support reconstruction, development in those areas so that we can better withstand further efforts by the Taliban or al Qaeda to retake those areas. As far as an overall plan goes, it is the Afghan government and the UN that put these together, and we have a new UN envoy named to help coordinate international civilian reconstruction and development, that's Kai Eide. And we hope that he's able to make a difference in putting together a more coherent and stronger international contribution to the Afghan government's efforts.

**Mr. Ayazi:** I will ask my last question, it relates to Afghanistan. Pakistan is an important ally of, of NATO and the United States and war on terror. These changes recently that took place in Pakistan, would it change the strategy of the United States and NATO as far as the operation of al-Qaeda and how to suppress all this?

**Volker:** Well, we've been talking about Afghanistan, but you're right to bring up Pakistan. That's a country that faces its own challenges with extremists and with territories that are used by extremists to carry out attacks. It was you know militants within Pakistan who assassinated Prime Minister—or candidate Bhutto—Benazir Bhutto, so Pakistan faces its own challenges.

What we've seen is a political development in Pakistan of an election that was far more open than most observers expected it would be that has produced political negotiation among some of the parties. We have a military that I think has new leadership and is looking at how it can strengthen its own efforts to fight extremism within Pakistan. That's what's needed in Pakistan to strengthen actions on that side of the border and that contributes to our efforts in Afghanistan, as well—that we are fighting the same kinds of extremism. We need to make progress on both.

**Mr. Ayazi:** Thank, yea, thank you, sir, as far as Afghan questions--that's enough for me.

**Mr. Whitmore:** How are we on time? Do I have time for another one?

**Acting Assistant Secretary Volker:** One more.

**Mr. Whitmore:** Okay, great. This is from our colleagues in the Armenian service. [inaudible] With regard to Mr. Ter-Petrosyan, and there have been threats that he could be arrested, how would that affect U.S.-Armenian relations, if something like that were to happen?

**Acting Assistant Secretary Volker:** We have been working to urge both sides in Armenia. The government, which has implemented a harsh crack-down now, suspending freedom of the media, imposing a state of emergency, threatening arrests, just as you've talked about, as well as the opposition, which had engaged in large scale demonstrations.

We've been working with both sides to try to urge a process of political dialogue domestically in Armenia, a roundtable set of discussions with government and opposition figures so that they can begin to unwind some of the political standoff and tension that has developed. We don't believe that further crack down, further arrests, are the right way to go. We think that what needs to be done is to move toward lifting the state of emergency, assuring freedom of the media, assuring freedom of assembly, assuring the operation of political parties so that Armenia can walk back from this political crisis.

**Mr. Whitmore:** Thank you.

**Mr. Ayazi:** Thank you, sir

**Acting Assistant Secretary Volker:** Thank you.

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