



Remarks Following Meetings of the U.S.-Russia Counterterrorism Working Group

R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs
Sergey Kislyak, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister

Osobnyak
Moscow, Russia
December 2, 2005

DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER KISLYAK: I suggest using the headsets. Dear friends, my name is Sergey Kislyak, Deputy Foreign Minister. As the host, with the permission of Nicholas, I will speak first.

We spent the whole day in consultations between the delegations of the two countries on the struggle against terrorism. This is the 14th meeting in this series. This is a well-established channel of interaction between our countries on one of the most important issues. This interaction meets the interests of both Russia and the United States, and I would hope it meets the interests of other countries as well, because the capabilities of our countries may prove useful in fighting terrorism as a global threat.

Unfortunately, I cannot say that we will tell you all the details of our discussion because of its nature. Many of the things that were discussed in this room will remain among the specialists. But what is important and what the Russian side wanted to emphasize is that we think it was a successful meeting because it was very specific and practical. The meeting showed the improved, and I would say maturing, quality of interaction between relevant agencies of the two countries on problems that are facing us.

We had a broad dialogue that covered the struggle against terrorism, the narco threat in their regional dimensions; we discussed functional collaboration in fighting this evil both through counterterrorist agencies and agencies that are supposed to suppress unlawful cash flows that can be used by terrorists or drug dealers. We also discussed transportation security and a number of other important and concrete issues.

The result: we agreed to continue working on the basis of our achievements and enhancing our cooperation that we can see in the joint work of our relevant agencies. We believe that Russia and the United States have very good prospects for cooperation in this field. We think all citizens in our country and the U.S. and wherever we can be of use will feel the benefits of this cooperation.

Nick, if you would like to say something on behalf of your side, please go ahead and do so.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Sergey, thank you very much and thank you for your hospitality here in Moscow. I am Nicholas Burns, the United States Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. I am here with Ambassador Bill Burns, United States Ambassador to the Russian Federation. And I just want to thank the Russian government for its hospitality and for the excellent nature of the discussions we have had both yesterday evening and also today. This is the 14th meeting of a Counterterrorism Working Group that was set up many years ago by our two governments.

We find this group to be highly relevant to our global objective of trying to contain and defeat terrorism. There is no question that the United States and Russia, both as powers of the world, face this threat together. It's a common threat, and we do rely upon each other to work closely, to develop effective solutions -- as much as we can do that -- and to be communicating every day, as we do through our embassies, to make sure that we are working well together.

I agree with Deputy Foreign Minister Kislyak on his assessment of what has happened. I thought today's meeting was an excellent meeting because there was serious discussion on both sides, of a very high quality, in some respects quite detailed. And we're pleased by the cooperation that our federal services have together on the counterterrorism fight around the world. We are pleased by what we will try to do now to enhance the level of our counternarcotics cooperation. We had a very good meeting yesterday with the Federal Director, Mr. Cherkessov, about what the United States and Russia can do, especially to try to be partners together in interdicting the flow of narcotics from Afghanistan into the Russian Federation, into other neighboring countries, in transportation security, terrorism finance, in weapons of mass destruction, and in other areas. This is a very important relationship for us, and it mirrors the fact that we are partners of Russia, that we have a wide-ranging relationship, and that the state of this relationship is in very good shape. As you know, our two presidents recently met and I think they said that. And so, we are pleased to serve them because they're the ones who are the sponsors of this group and we report to them, and look forward to reporting to them at the end of this month in written form about the progress that we have made. Thank you very much.

DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER KISLYAK: We will take a few questions.

QUESTION: Mr. Burns, Reuters News Agency. Did you discuss, as was expected in the press, the new Russian law or bill on NGOs? And did America raise any problems with that?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I would be happy to say a few words and perhaps Ambassador Burns would like to as well. I would just say it was not part of the formal agenda of the Counterterrorism Working Group. This group works on a very specific set of issues having to do with the agenda that the Deputy Foreign Minister and I have described. So it's not part of the formal agenda. I will say that I have, since arriving in Moscow, of course I had a chance to meet with some of the NGOs and I'll be having discussions with other officials of Russian government.

Let me just say that obviously we are aware of the debate here. But I do think it's best that any specific comments be left for a private diplomatic exchange. That's the best way for friends to discuss matters like this. In our case, some of the NGOs in question are American NGOs who have been working here as friends of Russia, and of course we think that, in our own experience in the United States, NGOs play a very positive role in our country, as they do in many parts of the world. And so we hope very much that both here and elsewhere NGOs can continue to contribute to society. But I really think it's best for any specific comments to be left to our private exchanges.

AMBASSADOR WILLIAM BURNS: I would add only that in Russia I think it's obvious that nongovernmental organizations make some very valuable contributions across a range of areas, not just in the development of modern economic and political institutions, but education, and in health and in many areas in which Russians are trying to create more opportunities and improve their own society. So what we hope, as Nick said, is that the outcome of the debate that is going on amongst Russians about this new draft legislation will be something that facilitates the role of NGOs, enhances their ability to contribute in Russian society, not complicate it.

DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER KISLYAK: I would like to say a few words. While fully agreeing with Nick that the topic of NGOs is not the topic of our consultations and we dealt with other issues, as for Russian legislation in the field of NGOs, this is a process that develops within the framework of the Russian Constitution and the development of civil society. I am absolutely confident that as our parliament elaborates legislation, based on our laws, it will create such conditions for civil society that will help it contribute to the development of our country in a calm, confident, predictable and transparent manner. I view this process with big optimism and, frankly

speaking, do not quite understand all this fuss. These are normal political debates in our country among Russian political forces. The outcome of these debates will mirror the opinion of the entire range of political parties in our country. Thank you.

QUESTION: (Inaudible).

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you very much. I think you know that our State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack said the other day that at the appropriate time we will have a comment on the media allegations, and I think I should allow the State Department in Washington to decide when we will respond to those allegations in the media.

DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER KISLYAK: Are there any more questions?

QUESTION: (Inaudible) News Agency. I was just wondering, Mr. Burns, if you discussed Chechnya at all, and what your assessment of the situation is after the parliamentary elections?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: As the Deputy Minister said, this Working Group has a very specific agenda. It is focused on counterterrorism issues, counternarcotics issues, and all the various permutations of both of those major challenges. And so, we do regularly have a discussion of a broad variety of foreign policy issues with the Russian government, but we don't do it in this group. And so, we had dinner together last night, and we focused on the issues that we've talked about. And we had seven hours of discussion today, maybe a little bit less, and we focused on those issues. I think it's important for purposes of this exchange to focus on those particular issues.

DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER KISLYAK: The last question. Two questions.

QUESTION: Is Chechnya not in some respect a counterterrorism issue? Surely from the point of view of your Russian colleagues there are counterterrorism operations going on down there, and I would be surprised if it didn't come up in some form.

DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER KISLYAK: The problem of fighting terrorism in Chechnya certainly exists. But this is one of the issues that I said we cannot discuss outside this room because these issues are for relevant agencies to work on. We cooperate on the entire range of regional problems quite well. We can take one last question.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I just wanted to be able to do your question some justice and explain that, obviously, and Ambassador Burns may want to comment on this...but of course we have discussed for many years the question of Chechnya but in the appropriate channels. In this working group we're focused on the challenges largely outside the borders of both of our countries and the terrorism threat which is common to both of us. And so what we have tried to develop is two things: an ability to exchange opinions and information about both counterterrorism and counternarcotics, first. And second, we have tried to focus on what we can do together in terms of joint action to be effective. For instance, I gave you the example of Afghanistan. Here, I think all of us around the world, friends of Afghanistan, are concerned about the narcotics production problem, and also the narcotics trafficking problem. And as you know, the United States has been involved with the United Kingdom and other countries to try to help the Karzai government to lower the level of opium production, but also to help stem the tide of, the flow of narcotics outside of the borders of Afghanistan. It's there that Russia and America have a common interest not just in discussing the problem but in common actions. So that's what we focused on, issues like that. Of course we discussed Chechnya in a wide variety of meetings with Russian officials, but we don't do that here. We have a very specific agenda in this particular joint working group.

QUESTION: Did you discuss any forecast for terrorism in particular regions?

DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER KISLYAK: The assessment of trends in the development of terrorist threats is naturally a normal subject of exchange between our specialists. As for what can happen and where, I don't think this is something that should be discussed publicly.

I must say that the exchange of assessments is a well-established process. This is a process that based on the changing circumstances, on the joint or parallel exploration of factors that influence different actions of potential terrorists. I must say that discussions on all these issues are very broad in terms of scope and very deep in terms of substance. And we are pleased by how these discussions proceed.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: We had a wide-ranging discussion about future challenges, future terrorist challenges to both of our countries, not just speaking from an American perspective. This is a global phenomenon. We see terrorism on all continents of the world. We are particularly focused obviously on terrorism where it is most pronounced. And so, in the Middle East we continue to be focused on – this is a U.S. view now – the issue of Iranian support for Hizbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas. We believe that, and we have said this many times, it's a leading supporter and funder of those terrorist groups. We are very much focused on trying to prevent terrorism in Afghanistan. We saw last year and during 2005 an increase in the number of attacks from the Taliban, and some of those attacks were directed at Afghan civilians or Afghan leaders or Afghan military forces. Obviously they were directed at the military forces of the United States and some of our partners who are there with us as part of the peacekeeping contingent.

There is obviously a lot that we can do to stem those attacks. And we are working very closely with the Afghan government in that regard. But obviously we've shared our own views with the Russian government on that. We are concerned about terrorism, obviously, in Europe and in our own country because it is a global phenomenon. So I think we had a wide-ranging discussion on the future challenges. And there is no question that this issue remains for us one of our major foreign policy objectives, to protect our own people from terrorism, from terrorist attacks, innocent civilians. We were horrified by the attacks on the Russian schoolchildren in Beslan, for instance, and on the citizens of Beslan. And we gave full support to those people and the Russian government, and we still do.

So we need to all have a common view that terrorism can't be excused, that there cannot be political justification for terrorism, and that you have to oppose it in all of its forms, and wherever it is, it is the defining global challenge of our times. That's why President Bush and President Putin have put this group together, and we report to them in writing, and will be doing so by December 31st as the co-chairs, we'll send them a document saying here's how we (inaudible) problem and here's what we are doing, the two governments together. And I have invited Deputy Foreign Minister Kislyak and his entire delegation to come to Washington in the spring of this year for the next formal meeting of this working group. But between now and then I know that he and I, and certainly Ambassador Burns working every day, are going to be having lots of discussions with the Russian government about these issues.

DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER KISLYAK: Thank you.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you.

Released on December 2, 2005

