

Charge D 'Affairs Thomas Navratil interview with A1 TV

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Question: Secretary Rice arrived in Georgia today to press Saakashvili to sign a peace agreement with Moscow. Do you think that good will is going to prevail? Are you optimistic?

Thomas Navratil: I would say that the situation in Georgia is a very very serious concern to the United States and we believe that it should also be an equally strong concern to all democratic countries throughout Europe and throughout the world. And for that reason President Bush has directed Secretary Rice to go to Georgia to work on finalizing a peace document very urgently. He has also directed Secretary of Defense Gates to conduct a humanitarian relief mission in Georgia because of the tragic and terrible humanitarian crisis which the Russian military encouraged and has produced there.

Question: I want to quote Secretary of Defense, Mr. Robert Gates. He said: "I believe that Russia decided to punish Georgia for daring to try integration with the West." Is this the true reason for this war?

Thomas Navratil: It is our belief that every country has its own right to decide its future - to have a democratically elected government, to join international organizations as it chooses and not based on the will of some larger and more powerful neighbor. I certainly cannot explain the Russian behavior and Russian decisions here, but I can certainly say that it is not acceptable to the U.S. and we do not think it should be acceptable to any other countries that believe in the founding principles of the United Nations Charter and the founding principles of self-determination and freedom. All countries, regardless of how small they may be should have this.

Question: Can we compare striving of Ossetia about independence with Kosovo?

Thomas Navratil: There is a very big distinction here. In the case of South Ossetia, the Russian military peacekeepers have been there for many many years. So, South Ossetians did not have any security concerns from an aggression from the Georgian government. Kosovo was in very different situation in which the Milosevic regime conducted a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Kosovar population. The international community, for humanitarian reasons, had to step in and stop that slaughter and stabilize the situation there.

Question: I am going to quote now Edward Joseph. According to him in International Herald Tribune he said: "By inviting Macedonia now, NATO will send a message to Russia announcing to Macedonia, and Tbilisi and its neighbors that NATO is determined to continue the path of enlargement and not let spoilers deter the process." Is this the right time for an invitation?

Thomas Navratil: Absolutely. The United States would like to see NATO enlarged to include the Republic of Macedonia. We supported that position at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, we supported it before and we continue to believe that is the right course for our Alliance. In that context, we very much support the United Nations talks that Ambassador Nimetz is leading between Greece and Macedonia over the name dispute. I would call attention to the comments that Secretary Rice made earlier this week in which she pointed out that the very process of engaging with NATO and participating in the membership action plans of NATO has had a very positive effects in other parts of Europe in resolving disputes, for example between Romania and Hungary, between Turkey and Bulgaria. That in fact is one of the real benefits that NATO continues to bring to Europe; it does promote positive relations among neighboring countries in a wider community of a mutual security guarantee which unfortunately, as this week's actions in Georgia show, remains very much of a vital interest for Europe and for North America.