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SUBJECT: A/S GORDON'S MEETINGS WITH POLICY-MAKERS IN PARIS:
A TOUR D'HORIZON OF EUROPE AND AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Ambassador Charles Rivkin, for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

Senior officials from both countries examine current international challenges, agreeing that Afghanistan is a major priority, fretting about Russian actions in Georgia, and agreeing to disagree about Turkey's EU membership bid. But on Iran, there is a full meeting of minds, with the French saying Tehran's response to Barack Obama's offer to talk is a farce. Key passage highlighted in yellow.

Read related article 1. (S) Summary. During Assistant Secretary Gordon's visit to Paris on September 11, he met with a number of French policy-makers including: Elysee Diplomatic Advisors Jean-David Levitte, Damien Loras, and Francois Richier, Assistant Secretary equivalent for Continental Europe Roland Galharague, and Acting Director of MFA Strategic Affairs bureau Jean-Hugues Simon-Michel. Discussions focused on Russia, upcoming developments in the Balkans (Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia and Kosovo), elections in Germany and Afghanistan, Turkey's EU Accession, NATO Enlargement and Strategic Concept, and Georgia and Ukraine. End Summary.

AFGHANISTAN: A MAJOR PRIORITY

2. (C) Jean-David Levitte noted that while public opinion in France is opposed to the war in Afghanistan, the situation here is much calmer than in the UK, Germany, or Italy. Angela Merkel's domestic political situation after the incident in Kunduz was particularly fragile, so that was part of the rationale behind the recent German-French-UK letter to UN SYG Ban Ki Moon to propose an international conference on Afghanistan by the end of the year. Levitte said that the goal of the conference would be to accelerate and improve the training of Afghan troops and police and to strengthen Afghan state institutions, which will help reinforce the importance of the international effort to skeptical publics. They are now waiting for Ban Ki Moon's response. Levitte emphasized that France remains "totally engaged" in Afghanistan with no limits or caveats on its troops. This autumn, France will complete a transfer of troops from Kabul to Kapisa and Surobi provinces (a presence that will be reinforced on the ground as France reassigns some sailors to other regional activities and replaces them with ground troops). A/S Gordon assured Levitte that the U.S. would soon

be able to share the elements of the McChrystal military review with Allies. Levitte responded by praising General McChrystal and saying that French forces have an excellent dialogue with him on the ground. He added that Germany and the UK are determined to stay in Afghanistan as needed, but we may need to convince the Netherlands to remain, and that President Sarkozy had recently reinforced this message in a meeting with Dutch PM Balkenende.

BOSNIA: FRENCH URGE TRANSFER TO EU AUTHORITY

3. (C) Levitte noted that of the five major conditions required to transfer authority in Bosnia from the UN High Representative to an EU High Representative, four have been fulfilled, and only the question of division of state property remains. This final condition should not alone "block all progress," especially as the current UN team in Bosnia is no longer effective. France wants to see the transfer of authority to a new EU team in November, as the rapprochement to Europe is an effective "carrot" to encourage the Bosniaks to continue progress in necessary reforms. A/S Gordon agreed that the current system is not working well, but noted that the international community will lose credibility if we move forward before all the necessary pre-conditions have been fulfilled. He added that the U.S. agrees that some form of carrot is necessary to urge Bosnian compliance. Levitte noted that they still have two months to urge Bosnian progress before a final decision is made. In a separate meeting, Assistant Secretary equivalent for Continental Europe Roland Galharague said that "transition is the number one objective," suggested the division of state property will take much time to resolve, and urged the U.S. to support early transfer of authority that would open the door to Bosnian aspirations for greater integration into EU institutions. He noted that the growing perception of divisions between the US and Bosniaks on one side who favored retaining the UN role and the EU and Serbs on the other created unhelpful opportunities for manipulation. A/S Gordon said this perception was inaccurate, but noted the U.S. is sensitive to the political need for Bosniak leaders to sell this decision to their publics. The USG needs to see a clear path ahead for transition in order to support it.

KOSOVO AND SERBIA

4. (C) Levitte noted that the EULEX mission is having diplomatic problems with the Kosovar government and public

PARIS 00001254 002 OF 004

after signing two technical protocols with Serbia. They are hoping to ensure continued calm as Kosovo heads into municipal elections. A/S Gordon stated that the Kosovars will have to accept the protocols but that it should be clearly explained that these are technical agreements that have no impact on Kosovo's independent status. Levitte also criticized Serbian FM Jeremic, saying that he is doing nothing to encourage Serb return or participation in Kosovo's government. Levitte noted that Jeremic "makes big promises" every time he comes to France, but doesn't follow through. Levitte no longer meets with him and does not consider him to be the "modern face of Belgrade" that he purports to be.

MACEDONIA AND CROATIA

5. (C) Levitte expressed optimism that a new Greek government would be "more solid" and allow greater flexibility for progress in the Greek-Macedonian name dispute. A/S Gordon agreed that either a more solid Conservative government or a Socialist government would be a stronger, more flexible partner in the negotiations. He expressed hope that if the international community could convince Macedonia to abandon the idea of a referendum and get Greece to abandon the necessity of changing passports, then progress could be made.

On Croatia, Levitte observed that the border issue with Slovenia is making progress. He hoped that the upcoming September elections in Germany would also allow the new German government to be more open to EU enlargement to include the Balkan countries. Paris wants the door to enlargement to remain open, even if the accession process takes time.

CONCERNS ABOUT TURKEY

6. (C) Levitte informed A/S Gordon that there had been no change in the French position advocating a "privileged partnership" between the European Union and Turkey, in lieu of EU membership. However, he emphasized that France was not preventing accession negotiations from progressing on all the EU chapters that do not pre-suppose membership. There remain plenty of chapters of the acquis to open, so if progress is not being made, the fault lies with Turkish intransigence on Cyprus. Unfortunately, Ankara is not completing the required necessary reforms and progress has stalled. Levitte anticipated a negative report this fall on Turkey's failure to fulfill the Ankara Protocol. A/S Gordon said that Turkey was caught in a vicious cycle and it is not completing necessary reforms because the Turks do not believe that their EU candidacy will be allowed to progress, and at the same time, their

negotiations are not progressing because they aren't completing the required reforms. He noted that in the latest German Marshall Fund polls in Turkey, fewer than 30% of the Turkish public believes they will succeed in getting EU membership.

7. (C) Levitte agreed, but noted that Paris hopes that it will be the Turks themselves who realize that their role is best played as a bridge between the two worlds of Europe and Asia, rather than anchored in Europe itself. He stated that Turkey is in a difficult position as it wants to enter the EU but has refused to accept one of the other EU member states. Levitte predicted that a worse case scenario would be if Turkey finally manages to complete the acquis and end negotiations and a public referendum is held in France which is finally opposed to their membership. Despite all of these problems, Levitte claimed that President Sarkozy is a friend of Turkey and has visited the country at least 10 times in his life.

RUSSIA AND GEORGIA

8. (C) A/S Gordon described the challenges and frustrations of the U.S.- Russia relationship, which is based on finding areas where we can work together on our common interest. He noted progress at the July summit meeting on such issues as START talks and transfer of lethal material through Russia to Afghanistan. Galharague described Russia as a state with the trappings of democracy but without any mechanisms for the public to influence government decision-making. "The root of the problem is the regime," he said. Presidential advisor Loras added Russian leaders lacked sufficient, long-range vision for their country and instead, focused on a six-month time horizon and their business interests. Galharague

PARIS 00001254 003 OF 004

described the French strategy as finding a balance between treating Russia as if it is too important or treating it like an enemy. The French observed that some in Russia have concluded their interests are served by keeping the west "tied down in an Afghanistan quagmire" and by sustaining the status quo in Iran. He elaborated that a solution that thwarts Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions and restores Iran as a normal member of the international community could undermine Russian regional and energy interests. Loras noted of late the Russians have been unhelpful on Iran. Moreover, they appear to have concluded they can pocket a projected U.S. decision to scale back or abandon the Bush administration's Missile Defense initiative without paying any cost.

9. (C) Looking ahead on the energy front, Loras predicted that substantial Russian under-investment in energy extraction infrastructure was such that Russia would not be able to meet European demand in four or five years. He observed this created an opportunity for Russia to have even more leverage over a Europe that has not prepared to diversify its energy supplies. In response to a question on Russia's decision to suspend negotiations on

World Trade Organization membership in favor of a customs union with Kazakhstan and Belarus, A/S Gordon replied the U.S. would continue a policy review on Missile Defense to take the right decision based on the merits. On Russian actions regarding the WTO, he said that Moscow's decision was likely supported by Russians whose interests were not advanced by opening markets. Galharague observed that failure to advance WTO membership for Russia had negative implications for EU-Russian trade relations as progress in this EU effort pre-supposed progress on Russian accession to the WTO. Loras reported the coming year will involve substantial Franco-Russian interactions. This engagement would include a visit by French Prime Minister Fillon to Russia in September, a visit to France by Putin in November, a state visit to France by Medvedev in March, and a Sarkozy visit to Russia in 2010 on the margins of the St. Petersburg forum. These visits would occur under the auspices of reciprocal "Year of France" events in Russia and "Year of Russia" events in France.

10. (C) Levitte and A/S Gordon discussed the "dangerous" precedent of ships being intercepted in Georgian waters. Sarkozy Advisor Damien Loras noted that President Saakashvili has a French advisor who has informed Paris that Georgian ships have orders to respond if fired upon. This can escalate and the French message has been to emphasize that Georgia must not respond to provocation, as that would only play into Russia's hands. Levitte stressed the importance of maintaining the Geneva process, while noting that it may take a generation before the Russian public will be able to accept their loss of influence, from Poland and the Baltics to Ukraine and Georgia. Unfortunately, the Russian tendency is to view "good neighbors" as totally submissive subordinates. On the other hand, Paris is closely watching Medvedev, who is more frequently taking public stances in opposition to Putin. Medvedev is more open to the occidental powers and more open to modernization and rule of law issues that Russia must face. A/S Gordon observed that President Obama had spent a good deal of time with Medvedev on his trip to Russia, and had specifically targeted Russian youth in his public outreach event. In his meeting with Galharague and others, A/S Gordon noted that the U.S. pursues a policy to support Georgia in the face of Russian pressure without encouraging President Saakashvili to act in ways that are unhelpful.

IRAN: NEXT STEPS

11. (S/NF) Levitte noted that the Iranian response to the overture of President Obama and the West was "a farce," although Russia had received it as a real initiative. The current Iranian regime is effectively a fascist state and the time has come to decide on next steps. Levitte stated that this is why Paris is advocating a meeting of the EU3 PLUS 3 on the margins of the Pittsburgh G20 meeting. The French hope to approve a two-paragraph statement laying out next steps on negotiations or sanctions. He noted that German Chancellor Angela Merkel shares the view of the French President and is willing to be firm on sanctions, but that FM Steinmeier was more cautious. The Iranian regime must understand

that it will be more threatened by economic harm and the attendant social unrest than it would be by negotiating with the West. Unfortunately, the P-3 cannot remain passive until Russia and China finally lose patience;

PARIS 00001254 004 OF 004

this is why a high-level political meeting is important to advance this discussion (and Levitte cited President Sarkozy's frank and direct style, saying that he would pinpoint Medvedev to explain his position). Levitte said that he informed the Chinese FM that if they delay until a possible Israeli raid, then the world will have to deal with a catastrophic energy crisis as well. At the same time, the debate over stopping the flow of gasoline into Iran will be very sensitive and would have to take into account which countries would be only too willing to step in and replace European companies. Levitte informed us that they would like President Sarkozy to talk to President Obama by telephone in the coming days to discuss the G20 and Iran. The French are proposing two possible windows to schedule the call.

NATO'S ENLARGEMENT AND STRATEGIC CONCEPT

12. (C) Levitte said that France was very pleased with the selection of Madeleine Albright to chair the "Group of 12," which will launch the process of reviewing NATO's Strategic Concept. Bruno Racine will be the French participant on the panel, and Levitte stressed that there is already strong agreement between France and the United States on the basis of exchanges that he has had with NSA General Jim Jones. Levitte noted that Paris agreed with Jones on suppressing the Membership Action Plan (MAP), which had become an obstacle rather than an incentive. A/S Gordon responded that we must not change the process in a way that would be interpreted as suggesting an end to NATO enlargement and eliminating MAP might do that. Levitte agreed and added that French President Sarkozy was "convinced" that Ukraine would one day be a member of NATO, but that there was no point in rushing the process and antagonizing Russia, particularly if the Ukrainian public was largely against membership. The Bucharest summit declaration was very clear that NATO has an open door and Ukraine and Georgia have a vocation in NATO (even if Georgia remains very unstable at the moment). Levitte added that Paris was very pleased with the ceremony on September 9 transferring the Allied Command Transformation (ACT) to French General Stephane Abrial.

VENEZUELA

13. (C) Levitte observed that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is "crazy" and said that even Brazil wasn't able to support him anymore. Unfortunately, Chavez is taking one of the richest countries in Latin America and turning it into another Zimbabwe.

14. (U) Assistant Secretary Gordon has cleared this message. RIVKIN