

**Transcript of Press Conference with Assistant Secretary Daniel Fried and
Ambassador Steven Mann
March 16, 2006
U.S. Embassy, Armenia**

Assistant Secretary Fried: Sorry to keep you waiting. Ambassador Evans, Ambassador Mann and I have just finished a meeting with President Kocharian. We met earlier today with Foreign Minister Oskanian and we met with the Defense Minister as well. We arrived last night from Tbilisi and had dinner and a very interesting discussion with leaders of political parties, both pro-government and the opposition. Steve Mann and I have been on the road for about a week now, starting in Baku and then going to Tbilisi. We also are here with Colonel Mike Anderson of the American Army's European Command. He is one of the chief experts on this part of the world in the United States military. Colonel Anderson has been with us from the beginning. We have come here, to the South Caucasus, with three purposes. One, in Baku and Yerevan, to discuss the way on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute after Rambouillet. Secondly, to discuss issues of energy security in this part of the world after the difficulties with gas supplies in January. And third, to discuss the future of the South Caucasus and to look beyond the urgent problems of the present to a future in which the regional disputes such as Nagorno-Karabakh or South Ossetia or Abkhazia have been resolved. And to look to a future in which all of the countries can develop in peace and security to deepen their democracies and advance their economic reforms. And on that basis, choose their place in the world without pressure from anyone on the outside, but to choose their place in freedom working with a wider world in a constructive way. It's a pleasure to be back in Yerevan after five months. I only regret that I am here for too short a time. I look forward to coming back. I look forward to working with the government here on our common program of support for Armenia and Armenia's future. The next opportunity for high level U.S.– Armenian cooperation will be during the signing of the Millennium Challenge Account program and I look forward at that time to sitting down with my friend Vardan Oskanian to continue our discussions here. Now with that Ambassador Mann and I are happy to take your questions and again thank you for coming.

Public Radio: Mr. Fried, before your visit to Armenia you stated in a private conversation that the Russian and American positions on the frozen conflicts are different. In Armenia it was viewed that there is no accord between the U.S. and Russian Co-Chairs of the Minsk group on the Karabakh conflict settlement.

Assistant Secretary Fried: I don't think I used those precise words, but in any event, I will say that before we left Washington, Steve Mann and I met with the other co-chairs of the Minsk group including the Russian co-chair. We consulted with them about this trip; the other co-chairs supported our taking this trip. They agreed that we would be going to Baku and Yerevan for discussions on how to advance the process and we came out here with the full support of the Minsk Group co-chairs. On the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, I am not aware of differences, but I am aware of the strong support of the Minsk Group.

Ambassador Evans: The time is very short for Ambassador Fried and I'd like to ask that people ask only one question and try to keep it short.

Interfax news agency: Two short questions. Why is the meeting scheduled to be held in Istanbul? And second, our Minister has stated that Armenia has already agreed to compromises, and now it's time for Azerbaijan. Can you confirm that Armenia has already agreed to enough compromises?

Ambassador Mann: What kind of answer do you expect me to give for the second question? The process of negotiations must continue. Why Istanbul? Because as part of our planned trip we are going to Ankara and I was looking for a convenient place to brief my colleagues on the results of our visit. So there is no policy significance to it.

Public TV: My question is addressed to Ambassador Mann, but Ambassador Fried may also answer it. Now that you have met with the leadership of Armenia and Azerbaijan, can you tell that there are some tendencies or directions in which the settlement process will continue, or is it in stagnation now?

Assistant Secretary Fried: It is not in stagnation. We are confident that discussions and talks can continue. Both sides – both the Armenian and Azerbaijan governments – are strong defenders of the national position. Our discussions in both capitals were serious. Both governments take this seriously because it is a process about something that is real rather than just marking time or a waste of time. And that's why we are in discussions.

Mediamax News Agency: I would like you, Mr. Fried, to elaborate on the topic of energy security. Recently, Deputy Assistant Secretary Bryza mentioned that energy security, gas, is not the primary focus, but also there are other sources including nuclear energy. Does this mean that the United States might be interested in making investments in nuclear energy in Armenia?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Europe and the United States are looking hard again at the diversification of energy sources and obviously nuclear energy has to be looked at again in light of the new situation we are in. I can't say at this point definitively how this debate will come out either in general or with respect to Armenia, but I did hear from the Armenian interlocutors expressions of interests in safe, commercially viable and secure nuclear energy and I am going to take that back to Washington and we will look at this.

Ambion newspaper: Ambassador Fried, in January during your speech in Maryland, you talked about freedom and democracy as being not just tactics, but part of the national security strategy of the United States, and you mentioned former Soviet Union countries. You talked about democracy in those countries, but you did not mention Armenia. Can we assume that democracy in Armenia is not within the national interests of the United States?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Thank you for that question. Democracy in Armenia and democratic development in this country is very much on our mind and it is very much an issue of interest of the United States.

A1-Plus news agency: My question is addressed to Ambassador Mann. A co-chair of the Minsk Group has mentioned that if the talks in Rambouillet had succeeded, the Karabakh conflict settlement would have sped up. So, what is the status of this issue?

Ambassador Mann: Well, what we are trying to figure out in this trip is where we go from here. It's a difficult fact that we did not move ahead at Rambouillet. But what the Assistant Secretary and I have found from each president is that there is interest in moving forward and trying to see what the sides can negotiate. And the United States is going to support this in a very best way that we can.

168 Zham: This question is addressed to Ambassador Evans. Is it true that you have given President Kocharian documents stating that you are being recalled and documents that provide the name of your successor? There was a statement saying that ambassadors serve at the pleasure of the president. Does it mean that the use of the word "genocide" is not something that is for the pleasure of the president?

Ambassador Evans: I serve at the pleasure of the President. Period.

Assistant Secretary Fried: The position of the U.S. administration on this issue is well known and you can read each of President Bush's statements on the terrible events and the tragedy that befell the Armenian people at the end of the Ottoman period. These statements are issued every April 24. President Bush has issued a statement each year he has been president. I fully expect there will be another statement. Those are the definitive expressions of the president's views, and you are welcome to consult those. Those are our views and I must say, Ambassador Evans and I have worked together for 20 years and I have enjoyed my work with him and continue to.

168 Zham: Will you work with him in Armenia?

Assistant Secretary Fried: As long as he is Ambassador, I will work with Ambassador Evans in Armenia. He serves here, he enjoys the confidence of the administration, and we are working together very closely. Thank you.