

The President's News Conference With Secretary General Jakob Gijsbert "Jaap" de Hoop Scheffer of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Brussels

February 22, 2005

Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer. Good afternoon. Very good afternoon to you. Let me start by—this press conference by echoing what was said many times around the table this morning, and that is, thanks to President Bush that he is here, showing the continued commitment to NATO so shortly after his Inauguration. I mean, I would be unfaithful to the discussion if I didn't start like this. So let me say once again on my own behalf, Mr. President, thank you for being here. Thank you for coming.

What did we discuss; what have I heard today? I have heard strong support for the Atlantic Alliance. I have heard strong support for the common values which bind us, in the past, in the present, and in the future.

I have heard strong support for NATO's operations and missions, strong support for what we are doing in Afghanistan and our further ambitions, strong support for the training mission in Iraq, where we have further ambitions in setting up the training academy and where we have now fully manned and financed what we committed to do. And you know it's the Iraqi Government's first priority, training the Iraqi security forces so that their dependence on others can be less than it is at the moment. I heard strong support for our continued presence in Kosovo and stability in the Balkans.

I've heard a discussion on the importance of a strong NATO-EU partnership. At length, government leaders, heads of state discussed the political role of NATO, the stronger political role of NATO, and there was a lot of support for what I have been saying over the past 8, 9 months: that this political role is important, that NATO is

a political-military alliance, and that we should not shy away from discussing political subjects of relevance.

Many remarks and interventions were made on the Middle East, the importance of NATO's Mediterranean dialog, which is being strengthened, the importance of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative for these activities of NATO in this very pivotal region where security and stability is not only important for the region but far beyond. Of course, the hopes for progress in the Israeli-Palestinian question were discussed, and I think it's important that, by out-reaching into the region, NATO follow this process, although it does not play a primary role.

Of course, let me come back to Ukraine this morning. There is strong support, strong support, first of all, for NATO's bottom line, which is NATO has an open door for those European democracies who fulfill the obligations, strong support for giving President Yushchenko, in his challenging endeavor to bring Ukraine closer to Euro-Atlantic integration—to support him in that respect.

In other words, because I want to be brief, it was an excellent summit. It was an excellent summit. It was an excellent idea of the President to come here, to have this summit here and now, because there is a daunting and challenging task and a daunting and challenging agenda waiting for NATO. And we'll go for that agenda. And I'll make proposals in the not too distant future on this political role for NATO. And the atmosphere was excellent, and that was the way it should be, because what binds us are the values. We'll discuss them; we'll have difference of opinion, yes, from time to time, but there is a lot more we

agree upon, and that is the bottom line. And that's the basis for this great Alliance, and that's the way I, in my responsibility, having this privilege of being Secretary General, I will run the Alliance.

Mr. President.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. It's good to be back here to the NATO Headquarters. This is my first trip overseas of my second term, and I'm proud to make the home of NATO my first stop. And I appreciate the invitation. You've done a fine job of running the meetings. You're doing a fine job of being the Secretary General, I want you to know, and I appreciate all our friends who were around the table today for their strong commitment to NATO.

It was a healthy dialog, and that strong commitment is important. After all, NATO is the most successful alliance in the history of the world—think about that, the most successful alliance in the history of the world. Because of NATO, Europe is whole and united and at peace. And that's a milestone in the history of liberty.

NATO is the home for nine former members of the Warsaw Pact. You know, the leaders of those countries, when they sit around the table, bring such vitality to the discussions that we have. See, it's still fresh in their memories what it meant to live in a society that wasn't free. I said in my remarks today that, you know, sometimes you can take a relationship for granted, and it was very important for us not to take the NATO relationship for granted. One thing is for certain: The newly admitted countries don't take NATO for granted. As a matter of fact, they add a vitality to the discussions that I find refreshing and hopeful. NATO is an important organization, and the United States of America strongly supports it.

I appreciate so very much the transformation of NATO that's taking place. In order for NATO to be vital, it's got to be relevant, and if it stays stuck in the past, it's slowly but surely going to fade

into oblivion. But it's not staying stuck in the past. We've created the NATO Response Force—and I want to thank you for your leadership on that, Jaap—and the chemical and biological and radiological and nuclear battalion. The NATO command structure is streamlined.

NATO is involved in the Middle East, a world—a part of the world desperate for freedom. And I want to thank you for your leadership on that. And we had a lot—spent a lot of time talking about the NATO contribution to Afghanistan, and it is real and it is important and it is substantial. And more countries are committed to providing help for the RPTs [PRTs]* as well as the upcoming elections, and I'm most grateful.

And then we discussed the NATO contribution in Iraq. First, many member countries have sent troops into Iraq as a part of the liberation of Iraq. And I thanked them there, and I reminded them that every life is precious, and we appreciate the sacrifices being made by their citizens. But 26 nations sat around the table saying, "Let's get the past behind us, and now let's focus on helping the world's newest democracy succeed." And I appreciated the contributions. And the NATO training mission is an important mission, because, after all, the success of Iraq depends upon the capacity and the willingness of Iraqis to defend their own selves against terrorists.

So the discussions were fruitful. The Ukraine—the meeting with President Yushchenko was, I thought, historic. I thought it was really interesting to be sitting next to a person—the Secretary General put me right next to President Yushchenko—who had just led a revolution, a peaceful revolution, based upon the same values that we hold dear. And it was a remarkable moment, I thought.

And we—at least in my intervention and other interventions, we welcomed President Yushchenko and reminded him that NATO

* White House correction.

is a performance-based organization and that the door is open, but it's up to President Yushchenko and his Government and the people of Ukraine to adapt the institutions of a democratic state. And NATO wants to help, and we pledged help. I pledged my own Government's help to a fund that will help get rid of MADPADS—MANPADS and certain different types of weapons. In other words, the country has got work to do, but we want to help them achieve that work. It was a remarkable moment. I appreciate you inviting him, Jaap, to come.

We also look forward to working with Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia as these states participate in NATO's Membership Action Plan. All in all, the meeting was really important. I am really glad I came. It gave me a chance to say that the relationship between the United States and Europe is a vital relationship, a necessary relationship, an important relationship, and our relationship within NATO is the cornerstone of that relationship. So, Jaap, thank you for your hospitality. Glad to be here.

Arms Embargo on China

Q. Mr. President, European countries are talking about lifting their 15-year arms embargo on China. What would be the consequences of that? And could it be done in a way that would satisfy your concerns?

President Bush. Well, I talked about this issue with President Chirac last night and Prime Minister Blair, and I intend to talk about it here in a couple of hours at the European Union meeting. We didn't discuss the issue at NATO, by the way. And here's what I explained. I said there is deep concern in our country that a transfer of weapons would be a transfer of technology to China, which would change the balance of relations between China and Taiwan, and that's of concern. And they, to a person, said, well, they think they can develop a protocol that isn't—that shouldn't concern the United States. And I said I'm looking forward to seeing it and that they need

to make sure that if they do so, that they sell it to the United States Congress, that the Congress will be making the decisions as to whether or not—as to how to react to what will be perceived by some, perhaps, as a technology transfer to China.

But it was an important dialog. It was a very open dialog. There's no—it was very constructive. And so they will, as I understand it—and I don't want to put words in people's mouth, but I am told that there is a—that they've heard the concerns of the United States. They're listening to the concerns of the administration as first articulated by Secretary of State Rice, and they know the Congress's concern. And so they will try to develop a plan that will ease concerns. Now, whether they can or not, we'll see.

Q. So do you think it might fly?

President Bush. Pardon me? I don't know. It's all speculation at this point. The purpose of this trip has been to articulate concerns that are being expressed throughout the Government, both in the executive branch and legislative branch, about the decision—or the potential decision. And I've been listening. And you might call this a listening tour, that people have got things on their mind, and they want me to hear it, and part of what they've got on their mind is the dialog that's taking place with China and the European Union.

Role of NATO

Q. Mr. President, about a week ago in Munich, we have had the old and the new Rumsfeld—[laughter]—but the thing is—

President Bush. Same old Bush. [Laughter]

Q. But the new Rumsfeld is still saying the mission determines the coalition. What does that mean, exactly, Mr. President? Does that mean that for you, this Alliance, NATO, is just one tool in the American toolbox to face crisis?

President Bush. No, you're going to have to ask Secretary Rumsfeld what he meant by that when he said it. I'll tell you what

I think, and since I'm his boss, it's probably pretty relevant. [Laughter] I think it is the vital relationship for the United States when it comes to security. And it is a relationship that is—has worked in the past and is adjusting so that it works in the future. It's a relationship and a organization that needs to make sure that its capabilities meet the threats of the 21st century. And so this is a vital relationship.

And as the Secretary General mentioned, that there needs to be a political component, a place for us to come and have a strategic dialog. He has raised that issue; Chancellor Schroeder raised the issue. And everybody heard Chancellor Schroeder loud and clear; everybody heard the Secretary General loud and clear, and that is, is that in order for NATO to be relevant, it has to be a place where people feel comfortable about talking about strategic issues.

And we do talk about strategic issues. And what Jaap has just said—and you're welcome to clarify what you just said, if you feel like it—but as he said, he's going to come back with an action plan to make sure that NATO's relevance is strong, not only to have the capabilities necessary to defend our respective securities but as a place for us to have meaningful dialog. Isn't that what you said?

Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer. I could start by adding, of course, it's young Bush and young de Hoop Scheffer who are talking here. [Laughter] I mean, that goes without saying. [Laughter]

To come back to your question, it is, indeed, as President Bush has said, it is—NATO is a political-military organization. And when we want—in the areas where we operate, be it Afghanistan, be it Kosovo, in Iraq—if NATO wants to go on keeping the public, parliamentary support for its operations and for its missions, we really need to discuss the key political questions surrounding those operations and missions.

And you cannot deny that when NATO is reinforcing its Mediterranean dialog, when NATO is reaching out into the broad-

er Middle East—and you know that the reactions have been very positive up until now—it is relevant for the NATO Alliance to discuss these issues in the broadest sense. You can't do the one without the other. And as President Bush was saying, this is the path. I'll try to lead, because a vital Alliance means that this Alliance is a vital political-military organization. That is the object of the exercise, to say it like this.

NATO Contributions in Iraq

Q. Thank you, sir. Some of the contributions on Iraq involve only a few people, modest amounts of money. Is this going to be enough, or is largely symbolic?

President Bush. Well, first of all, when you look around the table, Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters], that you see countries that have made enormous contributions, and the biggest contribution of all is when they've sent a person into combat and that person lost their life. That is a significant contribution. And the United States of America is grateful for those contributions, and we honor every life. The key is to make sure that those lives that were lost don't go down in vain, that a free and democratic and peaceful country emerges. Every contribution matters.

Twenty-six nations sitting around that table said it's important for NATO to be involved in Iraq. That's a strong statement. And NATO is involved in Iraq, and NATO is doing a vital mission, which is to help an officer corps emerge. The truth of the matter is, in order for Iraq to be a secure country, there has to be a chain of command that is effective and works, so that commands go from a political body to a military, and the military commands goes down so that people enact the orders in order to keep the people safe. That is what has to happen. And NATO is providing an officer training mission, which is vital.

Every contribution matters, and every country ought to be proud of the fact that they're contributing to the world's newest

democracy. This organization is an organization that's based upon values, values that have stood the test of time, values that are universal, and values that are necessary for the world to be peaceful. And the contributions made into Iraq are based upon those values. And I am grateful.

Europe-U.S. Relations/Democracy

Q. I have two questions, one for the President and one for the Secretary General.

President Bush. Finally, he got a question. [Laughter]

Q. Well, I'll put my question first to you, Mr. President. The wider European audience, it won't be a surprise for you, is still skeptical about the policies of your administration, often being considered as dictating or unilateral. Now, on this trip, you have launched a sort of major charm offensive—at least the Europeans will see it that way. [Laughter]

President Bush. Well, thank you. I appreciate it. First time I've been called charming in a while. [Laughter]

Q. But the question is, what are you going to do really differently in your second term to improve transatlantic relations?

And for the Secretary General, the question is, what should the Europeans do to improve transatlantic relations?

President Bush. Well, our bilateral relations are very strong with many countries, like your country. We've had 4 years, great relations. And matter of fact, last night, my dinner with President Chirac reminded me that except for one major issue, and that being Iraq, we've done a lot together in my first 4 years. If you think about it, we've participated in Afghanistan together; we've participated in Haiti; we're working on the Global Fund to battle AIDS. I mean, there's a lot we have done together.

The major issue that irritated a lot of Europeans was Iraq. I understand that. I can figure it out. And the key now is to put that behind us and to focus on helping the new democracy succeed. It's in our in-

terests—it's in your country's interests; it's in my country's interests that democracy take hold in the greater Middle East.

The policy in the past used to be, let's just accept tyranny, for the sake of—well, you know, cheap oil or whatever it may be and just hope everything would be okay. Well, that changed on September the 11th for our Nation. Everything wasn't okay. Beneath what appeared to be a placid surface lurked an ideology based upon hatred. And the way to defeat that ideology is to spread freedom and democracy. That's what NATO understands, see. That's one of the reasons why—NATO is one of the reasons why Europe is whole and free and at peace, because democracies defeat hatred and suspicion.

And so I will explain—continue to explain as best I can to skeptical people about my policy, that it's based on this concept that we all share, no matter your views on Iraq or not. And that is, every human being deserves to be free and that human dignity is vital and that free societies are peaceful societies. And I will make a commitment again to you, just like I made yesterday and will continue to make, that I'll take those values into the Middle Eastern peace process. As I said in my State of the Union, peace is within reach—that's right about here. And we've got to work together to achieve that.

And so my message is, is that the past is—I made some hard decisions, as did other leaders, by the way, in Europe, about how to enforce 17 different United Nations resolutions on Iraq, not one resolution but 17 different resolutions. And we liberated Iraq, and that decision has been made. It's over with, and now it's time to unify for the sake of peace. And I believe that message—I believe—forget the charm part. I believe that message is a message that people can understand. And they're beginning to see that the strategy is working.

Millions of people of voted in Afghanistan. I doubt many of you here were writing articles about, "Oh, gosh, the elections

in Afghanistan are going to be incredibly successful.” It didn’t seem like it was possible, did it? But yet there’s something in everybody’s soul, in my judgment, that desires to be free. And the people of Afghanistan showed that by the millions—not by the handfuls but by the millions—when given a chance to vote. Same in Iraq. And there was an election in Ukraine—two elections in Ukraine. And then there was the election in the Palestinian Territory. Freedom is on the march, is the way I like to put it. And the world is better off for it. And I look forward to continue to articulate how we can work together to keep freedom on the march.

Thank you all very much.

Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer. Let me—

President Bush. Oh, I’m sorry.

Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer. No, no, no—

President Bush. He gave me a hand signal that said he didn’t want to answer. [Laughter] You don’t know what this means. [Laughter] That means, “End the press conference.” [Laughter]

Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer. I signaled to the President this was too difficult a question, but I nevertheless answer very briefly.

NATO is 26—not 25 plus one or 24 plus 2. NATO showed today that these 26 Allies in Europe or the United States of America or Canada will and must strengthen this Alliance, this very successful Alliance,

which is doing—with the West and European participation—all the things I started to discuss in my introduction.

Second remark would be that European integration, including in security and defense matters, is important. But in that area, it’s of the utmost importance that, also, that process takes place in complementarity with NATO and without duplication. That’s important for NATO; it’s important for European Union. That’s why I want this wide NATO-EU agenda that’s relevant. European integration is a great process, and I always say I’m an Atlanticist and I’m European. But here is the point, where we are now standing in NATO Headquarters, where we see the primary forum for transatlantic security cooperation, and we’ll do that at 26 and not at 24 plus 2 or 25 plus one.

Thank you very much.

President Bush. Now we’re finished. [Laughter]

NOTE: The President’s news conference began at 2:45 p.m. in the Joseph Luns Press Theatre at NATO Headquarters. In his remarks, he referred to President Viktor Yushchenko of Ukraine; President Jacques Chirac of France; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany. He also referred to Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), a component of NATO’s International Security Assistance Force operating in Afghanistan.

Joint Statement by the United States and the European Union: Announcement on Iraq Conference February 22, 2005

The United States and Europe stand together in support of the Iraqi people and the new Iraqi government which will soon come into being. To that end, should the new Iraqi government request it, the

United States and the European Union are prepared to co-host an international conference to provide a forum to encourage and coordinate international support for Iraq.