

Remarks Following Discussions With North Atlantic Treaty Organization Secretary General Jakob “Jaap” Gijshert de Hoop Scheffer and an Exchange With Reporters

November 10, 2004

President Bush. It’s my honor to welcome the Secretary General of NATO to the Oval Office. This is the first meeting I’ve had, since my reelection, with a leader from overseas. I’m proud you’re the person, Secretary General, because, first of all, I’ve got a very close personal relationship. I’ve come to admire his leadership and his fortitude. And secondly, my Nation is committed to a strong and vibrant NATO.

NATO is playing a very constructive role in Afghanistan. Today we had a chance to revisit one of the great moments of modern history, when millions of people went to the polls to vote for a President in a country that had been ruled by the Taliban only 3 years ago. And we were rejoicing in the fact that the first voter was a 19-year-old woman, and NATO is playing a very active role in Afghanistan.

And NATO is playing a role in helping to train Iraqi citizens so that they can become the people that defend their country against those who are trying to stop freedom. And I want to thank you for that, Mr. Secretary General. We talked about the need to make sure NATO is relevant, that NATO is constructed in a way that is not only effective but one that continues to foster free societies and democracy around the world.

And I thank you for your vision and your commitment. Welcome to the Oval Office.

Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer. Thank you very much. Well, thank you very much, Mr. President. The fact that I am sitting here now in the Oval Office as the first foreign visitor is the best proof, I think, for the full commitment of the United States of America and this President Bush to NATO. And that’s of the utmost importance, because NATO is the unique transatlantic forum where everything we have, the big challenges of the world we are facing in the world today should be discussed, and NATO is the only organization which can deliver.

We delivered, as the President said, in Afghanistan. Less burkas and more ballot boxes, that’s what it’s all about. We are delivering in Kosovo. We are delivering by setting up a training implementation mission in Iraq. There is no second forum. There’s no second organization in the world like NATO, where 26 democracies are defending values, democracy, respect for human rights, freedom of religion, and all those basic values which are at the heart of all these 26 societies.

And it gives me pleasure to have the full support—I knew that already, of course—to have the full support of President Bush for this endeavor. Of course, I think NATO has a very challenging agenda, and I’ll make sure that we can deliver—NATO can deliver, that we can face all those challenges successfully.

Thank you so much, and it’s a great pleasure to be here in the Oval Office once again.

President Bush. Welcome back.

We’ll be glad to answer a couple of questions. Scott [Scott Lindlaw, Associated Press], why don’t you start it off.

Future Cooperation With the Palestinian Authority

Q. Thanks, Mr. President. In June 2002, you urged the Palestinian people to replace Yasser Arafat with a leader, in your words, “not compromised by terror.” Arafat today is gravely ill. In fact, Palestinians have already selected his successor. Do you see a new opening for peace here?

President Bush. I do. There will be an opening for peace when leadership of the Palestinian people steps forward and says, “Help us build a democratic and free society.” And when that happens—and I believe it’s going to happen, because I believe all people desire to live in freedom—the United States of America will be more than willing to help build the institutions necessary for a free society to emerge, so that the Palestinians can have their own state. The vision is two states, a Palestinian state and Israel, living side by side in peace. And I think we’ve got a chance to do that. And I look forward to being involved in that process.

Adam [Adam Boulton, Sky News].

Secretary of State Colin L. Powell

Q. Mr. President, today you met with your Secretary of State. Do you want him to stick around to lead your efforts to revive the Middle East peace talks?

President Bush. I'm proud of my Secretary of State. He's done a heck of a good job.

Heidi [Heidi Pryzbyla, Bloomberg News].

Troop Levels in Iraq

Q. Yes, sir. Can elections in Iraq be free and fair without the participation of Sunnis? And you've also said you'll give the commanders in Iraq what they need. Does this mean that you're open to substantially increasing the level of troops?

President Bush. That is a loaded question, and I don't blame you for asking it. The commanders on the ground will have that which they need, and they have yet to say, "We need a substantial number of troops." As a matter of fact, I met with the commanders on the ground today—General Casey, and he—a commander on the ground, General Casey, the commander on the ground. And he said that things are going well in Fallujah and they're making very good progress in securing that country.

But I haven't changed—the job of the Commander in Chief is to set the strategy and to set the direction of policy and say to those who are in charge of implementing the policy, "You'll have that which you need." And I have said that ever since we've begun operations in Iraq, I said it when we began operations in Afghanistan, and it's still true. And if the commanders were to bring forth a request, I would look at it—I would listen to it very seriously and implement the request. They have yet to do so.

Sunni Participation in Iraqi Elections

Q. Do you need Sunni participation to make the elections free and fair?

President Bush. Well, I'm confident when people realize that there's a chance to vote on a President, they will participate. People want to be free. This is tough right now in Iraq because there are people that are willing to commit violent acts to stop elections. But as I reminded our citizens prior to the Afghanistan elections, there's a

deep desire in every soul to vote and to be free and to participate in the Presidential elections, which is precisely what happened in Afghanistan in spite of the doubt of some and in spite of the violence that took place in Afghanistan prior to the vote. I believe that a lot of citizens in Iraq will want to vote for their leaders. And I believe that because I believe deep in everybody's soul is a desire to be free.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:52 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. George W. Casey, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq. A reporter referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority.

Remarks on the Nomination of Alberto R. Gonzales To Be Attorney General

November 10, 2004

Good afternoon. I'm pleased to announce my nomination of Judge Al Gonzales to be the Attorney General of the United States. This is the fifth time I have asked Judge Gonzales to serve his fellow citizens, and I am very grateful he keeps saying "yes."

A decade ago, when I was elected Governor of Texas, I asked Al to be my general counsel. He went on to distinguished service as Texas's secretary of State and as a justice of the Texas Supreme Court.

Since I arrived in Washington 4 years ago, he has served with skill and integrity in the White House as Counsel to the President. I have counted on Al Gonzales to help select the best nominees for the Federal courts, one of the President's most important responsibilities.

His sharp intellect and sound judgment have helped shape our policies in the war on terror, policies designed to protect the security of all Americans, while protecting the rights of all Americans. As the top legal official on the White House staff, he has led a superb team of lawyers and has upheld the highest standards of Government ethics. My confidence in Al was high to begin with; it has only grown with time.