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Press Briefing After NATO Working Luncheon

Secretary Colin L. Powell

NATO Headquarters
Brussels, Belgium
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SECRETARY POWELL: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I'm very pleased to be back at NATO Headquarters and I'd like to begin my remarks this afternoon by thanking my good friend George Robertson for four years of visionary leadership to the Alliance.

Two weeks ago President Bush recognized his leadership and honored him with America's highest civilian honor, the Medal of Freedom, which he richly deserved.

This is George's final Ministerial and his Scottish humor, I can assure you, will be missed. I'll never forget the day when he once observed to us that running a meeting of NATO Ministers was like transporting frogs in a wheelbarrow, and I've never know anyone to do a better job of it than George Robertson.

I'd also like to congratulate George's able successor Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, to whom we all look to continue NATO's historic transformation to meet the threats of today.

New threats to our common security have emerged. Just witness the tragic bombings in Turkey recently. With new members and new capabilities NATO is changing to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. It is an Alliance that is in action. Never before has NATO committed so many troops to so many missions so far from their homes.

In Afghanistan NATO has assumed command of the International Security Assistance Force and has decided to expand beyond Kabul. We must also consider the possibility of NATO taking over all military operations in Afghanistan at some point in the future.

In Iraq NATO is supporting the Polish-led sector. Eighteen present and future NATO members have soldiers on the ground. We are mindful of their sacrifices and proud that they, like us, remain determined to succeed. And we are open, as you heard from Lord Robertson earlier, to an expanded NATO role in Iraq.

In the Balkans, Bosnia is a dramatic success for the Alliance. We welcome the EU's offer of a follow-on force, should NATO decide to conclude its stability force mission. This could be a successful example of cooperation between NATO and the EU under the Berlin Plus arrangements that the United States strongly supports. We believe that such cooperation under Berlin Plus should be the rule, not the exception, for EU missions.

As NATO considers wider operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere, the Alliance must ensure that it can field the troops and equipment to do the job. Progress has been made but there is more to do to enlarge and enhance NATO's capabilities.

Next June the Istanbul Summit will be the Alliance's first meeting with 26 full members. It will also mark the ten-year anniversary of the Partnership for Peace and the Mediterranean dialogue. The Istanbul Summit will present a special opportunity to see how we can enhance these programs in areas like Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Mediterranean.

NATO's agenda is ambitious. It's a very ambitious agenda, but with ambitions that are up to the challenges before us.

We're moving ahead full steam with collective missions, new partnerships, and transformation. The shared vision of 26 like-minded nations points the way, points the way forward to Istanbul and beyond.

Thank you very much. I'd be delighted to take your questions.

MR. BOUCHER: We'll start with Associated Press.

QUESTION: George Gedda of AP. Mr. Secretary, Lord Robertson just said that there were some expressions of support for your idea of an expanded NATO role in Iraq. Could you elaborate on that?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yes, there were. As you know, it's about a year ago when Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz was here and made reference to the possibility of NATO operating in Iraq if it came to that. I made the same point when I was here in the spring, and Don Rumsfeld, my colleague, made it earlier this week. And, what strikes me today is that as we discussed about the possibility of NATO taking an enhanced role in Iraq, taking a new kind of role in Iraq, not a single member spoke against it or talked about reasons not to do it. The question really was: should we not in the interim, in the immediate near term, focus on Afghanistan and think about what we might be able to do in Iraq in the coming months, and sometime perhaps next year.

I remind you again that 18 of the 26 nations represented here are represented on the ground in Iraq now. And we are looking forward to consulting with our friends in the Alliance and with the Secretary General's office here as to options for enhanced NATO participation in the Iraq mission.

At lunch just now almost every NATO member or about to be NATO member at the table expressed support for considering an enhanced role for NATO in Iraq.

MR. BOUCHER: Let's try the gentleman down here, sir.

QUESTION: (Inaudible), NTV, Moscow. A few days ago in Maastricht you were extremely critical towards Russian policies in Moldova and in Georgia. Do you plan to keep same temperature of criticism in your discussions with Igor Ivanov, and what ways out do you see in this, so to say, conflict situation?

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't find that we are necessarily in a conflict situation with the Russians and I'm sure that Foreign Minister Ivanov and I will have a good conversation later this afternoon. It was not just the United States that expressed concern at Maastricht last week. It was almost every nation expressed concern about the situation in Georgia. We have had a transfer of power. President Shevardnadze stepped down. The constitutional successor took over and immediately called for quiet and stability in Georgia, and immediately set the stage for elections on the 4th of January for a new President. All done with no violence and all done in the spirit that I applaud. A spirit of accommodation, reconciliation within the country, and calling for elections. The OSCE and other nations have committed themselves to help the new leadership as they go through this challenging time.

I did call upon all nations to lend their good offices to the simple proposition that we should not encourage any cessationist elements or any cessationist efforts, and I'm sure that Foreign Minister Ivanov and I will have a good chance to talk about it later this afternoon.

We were not able to get an agreed-upon statement out of the OSCE, but I think the President's statement delivered by the Chairman in office, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, pretty much captured the view of almost everybody who was attending the meeting.

MR. BOUCHER: Okay, we'll try the lady over here.

QUESTION: Yes. When your country does some military operation somewhere in the world you don't tell NATO or the European members all the details about the operation, so why is it such a big problem that some European countries want to have that autonomy that we're talking about, (inaudible). That's one question.

And second question about Iraq. Is your country will accept a new U.N. Resolution in order to convince NATO partners to help you more in Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: On the first question, we are open and candid about what we are thinking about with respect to

a particular crisis situation that may be emerging. And we now have a process in place which has been reaffirmed in recent days, and reaffirmed again today, which we refer to in shorthand as Berlin Plus. As one of these crises comes along and it appears that there could be a role for the Alliance, the first call goes to the Alliance and NATO makes a judgment as to whether, as the Alliance, it wishes to involve itself. And if, for one reason or another, it believes it inappropriate for NATO to take on the mission, then the second tier is for the European Union to consider taking on the mission using assets provided by NATO. And, if that also does not seem appropriate and if the mission is within the capabilities of the European Union to do without drawing on NATO assets, then the European Union would act in an autonomous way.

We have seen all of these models at work over the past year. And the United States fully supports this approach to crisis management in dealing with the kinds of threats that we see around the world.

We believe strongly in the European pillar. We believe strongly in ESDP. We're having discussions about how best to operationalize that autonomous function of the European Union when they're acting alone. And we've had some interesting discussions about how best to put in place some planning elements that could make sure it's linked with NATO and to make sure that the EU is prepared to operate when the time comes. Those discussions will continue and I'm sure we'll find a satisfactory solution in the not too distant future.

On the second question, with respect to Iraq, there may come a time when another U.N. Resolution might be appropriate, with respect to Iraq. We always keep our options open, but we are not drafting one now. We see no need for a new U.N. Resolution at this moment. We believe that the last U.N. Resolution, 1511, provides ample additional authority beyond the original authority in 1483 for any other contributions that individual nations or any alliance might wish to make. It was 1511 that designated the force in Iraq as a multinational force, so anybody wishing to make a contribution certainly could do it under that authority.

MR. BOUCHER: Let's do Reuters, down here.

QUESTION: Arshad Mohammed of Reuters. Mr. Secretary, have you now nailed down whether you're going to meet the co-authors of the Geneva Mid-East Peace Proposals, and whether that's going to take place tomorrow? And there have been some conflicting reports about whether Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz and other Administration officials will meet them. Has the Bush Administration figured out just who is going to represent them in these meetings, despite the misgivings of the Israeli government?

SECRETARY POWELL: I will be meeting with them tomorrow, but let me put it in perspective. We are strongly committed to the Roadmap. Why? Because the Roadmap captures the vision that President Bush laid out in his June 24th speech of last year: creation of a Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with the state of Israel.

In his June 24th speech the President also spoke about the obligations that both sides had. And then when we had the Aqaba Summit meeting later that summer, both sides acknowledged that they had these obligations and we've carried forward with the accomplishment of their obligations in accordance with the Roadmap.

The President also intended in his speech to send a clear message to the Palestinians that terror must end. We will not go anywhere, either on a Roadmap or any other plan that someone might have, unless terror is brought to an end. And this is the clear and consistent message we have been giving to the Palestinian leadership ever since, and this is what we've been trying to get moving on.

He also made it clear in his June 24th speech, and it was inherent in the road map that transformation within the Palestinian Authority was a necessary feature of moving forward. Greater accountability, new institutions coming up that represented honestly and faithfully the will of the Palestinian people. That remains our plan. The President's vision as reflected in the Quartet road map.

But that is not to say there are not other ideas out there that people have. This is a very difficult issue. So, as ideas emerge from whatever source it seems to me not inappropriate to listen to the authors and proponents of these ideas to see what they are saying and to take it into account. I think it's a quite reasonable thing to do, a quite appropriate thing to do for me as the Secretary of State, and I'll be doing it tomorrow.

With respect to who else will be seeing the gentlemen who are coming, there will be other members of the Administration--staff-level people who will be seeing them. I don't know what Mr. Wolfowitz's schedule is.

MR. BOUCHER: Let's go to the second row, here.

QUESTION: Barbara Slavin of USA Today. Mr. Secretary, I'm still a little confused on the Iraq question. Lord Robertson said that, made it sound as though you were told quite firmly that the Alliance is going to focus on Afghanistan and is not interested in any greater role in Iraq at the present time. And, I'm wondering if that is indeed the message. And was it France and Germany, in particular, saying that they were certainly not about to contribute? One other point on that: are they waiting for sovereignty to be transferred to an Iraqi government before they're willing to...

SECRETARY POWELL: No, and I....

QUESTION: ...before they're willing to provide more assistance?

SECRETARY POWELL: I heard Lord Robertson's answer. What he said was nobody spoke against a role for NATO to play beyond the kind of support it's giving to the Polish Division. But, he also said that our principal focus right now has to be in Afghanistan, because NATO is there now and is assuming added responsibilities with command of the ISAF, and with the expansion outside of Kabul, and with more PRTs hopefully being created.

So, the point was NATO is busy, it's got a lot of things going on. Eighteen of its 26 member states, or states to be, have troops in Iraq. We're focusing on setting up an expanded mission in Afghanistan, so let's not lose sight of that particular vital mission.

And at the same time, let's begin examining what we might be able to do in Iraq beyond support of the Polish Division. Various options are well known and out on the table. Maybe at some point we can consider that NATO will take over the responsibility for the sector that the Polish Division is currently managing. But, that's at some point in the future. There may be broader things that NATO could do.

And, so the important point is that NATO, not one single NATO member here today, or including the new countries that are about to become members of the Alliance, spoke against the possibility of an expanded role for NATO in Iraq. And that includes the two you mentioned, France and Germany.

MR. BOUCHER: We have time for one or two more. I think there is one on the side.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) from My News, Egyptian Division. Mr. Colin Powell, do you have a specific request that you did ask NATO to help in Iraq? Do you have an idea exactly what you need them to do in Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: We did not put a specific request to NATO today. I just wanted to let my colleagues know that we believe that there are opportunities for NATO to do more in Iraq and everybody is anxious to continue the discussion as to what might be done.

One alternative is the one I mentioned, which is to take over the divisional sector that the Poles have. But nothing was decided. What you heard and from Ms. Slavin's previous question, focus on Afghanistan and now let's start doing the contingency thinking and planning as to what we might be able to do in Iraq. And as the various options are examined then it will be brought back, they will be brought back to the NATO authorities for consideration.

MR. BOUCHER: Okay, we've got to do the last question down here.

QUESTION: (Inaudible), NTV, Macedonia. Mr. Secretary, do you think that it's the right time for a power country, just like America, to if you want honestly help the small country, just like Macedonia, to save the economy because it's a very deep recession. Because the track for NATO is Utopia for Macedonia now. Not just the promises and the words in proxy. We need supporting financial support to bring investment in Macedonia. Afterwards we can [inaudible] at the reform because we have to sacrifice our economy. Thank you.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you. I have been deeply involved in the situation in Macedonia since my first week as Secretary of State in 2001, in January during a very, very difficult time. And I'm so pleased at the progress that has been made in Macedonia over the past almost three years, and how you've come through a period of crisis, and by the middle of this month there will be no longer foreign troops, per se, in Macedonia. Macedonia can stand on its own two feet.

But as you quite rightly note, people now want to see will their lives be better? Will they have jobs? Will the economy

improve? So I think the United States and all of the nations that have a capacity to help should help with AIDS, should help with working with international financial institutions on loans and debt relief and other problems that may exist.

So, the simple answer to your question, without getting into specific details, is yes. Now that we are on the move in Macedonia and we've gotten past the crisis of the past few years, we have to focus on improving the economy, making sure the institutions of democracy are firmly rooted and are thriving in order to give hope to the people of Macedonia that they have moved in the right direction and they have done the right thing.

Thank you.

MR. BOUCHER: Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen.

(3:00 p.m. local time)
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