



For Immediate Release  
Office of the Press Secretary  
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## Press Gaggle by a Senior Administration Official

Aboard Air Force One  
En route Zagreb, Croatia

2:42 P.M. (Local)

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SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There were two meetings this morning. There was the meeting of the -- and my colleague, you'll give me the name. What was the formal name?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: NATO-Ukraine Commission.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: My colleague says the NATO-Ukraine Commission. It was of course Yushchenko meeting with the various NATO members. You heard his statement for the press. They then went into a private meeting without the press. Yushchenko made an opening statement, comments were made by members from around the table, then President Yushchenko made a summary statement. Obviously it was a positive day for Ukraine, given the actions that had been taken yesterday on MAP. So it was a very positive and constructive day; people were expressive of and thankful for the Ukrainian contributions. As you know, Ukraine contributes into - is the only non-member state that contributes to all of NATO missions; a recognition of the progress that Ukraine has made in terms of reforms and also the way that it has to go.

But I think the spirit around the table was -

MS. PERINO: I'm sorry; I made the mistake of not actually saying that you wanted to be on background.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: On background.

MS. PERINO: It was a private meeting, it was on background.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Ever since "hello."

Q Senior admin official?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Senior admin official.

MS. PERINO: Sorry, guys.

Q It's okay.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: And I think the other thing that was interesting is that all sides in the -- both sides or all the sides of the prior discussion on Ukraine and Georgia joining MAP joined in expressing support for Ukraine and satisfaction with the outcome. So it was a positive day for Ukraine and also I think a positive day for NATO in that respect.

We then went on to the meeting of the NATO-Russia Council at heads of state and government level. A number of speakers spoke. Initially Putin was -- President Putin was given an opportunity to speak. I'm not going to go into the details of that at all. I understand he's been on the record with a press conference. But I think his tone was very -- very constructive, matter of fact, straightforward. And I think the spirit was really captured by what he said at the beginning and by what he said at the end. He said at the beginning that it was important and useful to have

a dialogue on issues that are progressing well, and on issues requiring further work.

And at the end he acknowledged that there would -- in conclusion, he said, there will be a new Russian President beginning May 7th. I think -- he said, we've been able to do some positive things, and to the extent we have been able to do something positive in international affairs, it has been due to the productive work that we have done together, and I thank you. And I thought it was a very classy way to end his comments.

That's what I've got.

Q What do you make of that? What -- is he sending being a nice fellow, or what --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: As you know, he was one of the founders of the NATO-Russia Council. The others were -- of the surviving members of -- of the people in the meeting who were present at the time of the Council being formed there were only three: President Putin, President Bush and Prime Minister Rasmussen. And so in some sense it was President Putin's ability to give a little bit of an assessment of that institution, in which he founded it. I think it's pretty clear he wanted to end his tenure as President of Russia in that forum. He chose to come to that forum, it was something he wanted to do. And he wanted to end it in a positive, constructive spirit. And that's what he achieved.

Q Did the President -- our President -- speak at all during this meeting?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He did. He did.

Q And what did he say?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It was positive, informal, as you'd expect from our President. He welcomed President Putin, thanked him for coming, indicated he was going to Sochi; said, you know, we're too old warhorses and we're both getting ready to step down from our positions; that he emphasized some themes he's made before, of course, that the Cold War is over and Russia is not the enemy, and that he believes that NATO is a force for good and building democracies is a good thing because democracies and strong democratic states are really the only way to deal with the challenges we have today.

And he hopes that these efforts to build democracies of course will continue into the future.

Q Discussion of missile defense in --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He said he appreciated the comments that Putin had made and he acknowledged that we have more work to do to convince the Russian people that NATO is not a threat, but is a tool to deal with the challenges of the 21st century, challenges that face the United States, Europe and Russia. That was his comment.

Q Doesn't he have more convincing to do to Putin --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'm sorry?

Q Doesn't he have more convincing to do to Putin, also, because Putin came out at the news conference and said that the emergence of NATO on its borders would be viewed as a direct threat -- he used those words today in his news conference.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, you know, the President has said many times that it is not a bad thing to have democracies on your border. Democratic states are stable, are prosperous states and that's exactly the kind of states you want to have on your border. And the other thing the President has said many times is enhancing of the capabilities of NATO is a good thing, not a bad thing for Russia, because we increasingly face common threats that are a threat both to Russia and NATO states. And therefore the capacity of NATO to deal with those challenges is a capacity to deal with challenges to Russia, too.

Last question.

Q What did Putin say to the group about Ukraine and Georgia, and about missile defense? What did --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: As I said, I'm not going to talk about what Putin specifically said on those issues - that's something for Putin to say. He spoke about them I think in his press conference; you ought to look to his comments there.

Thanks a lot.

Q Is there any significance to this over-flight that they've apparently agreed to allow for a non-military -

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It's basically to facilitate the operations -- the support to the Afghan government, and is evidence of Russia stepping up and doing more to help the effort in Afghanistan, and that's a good thing.

Q Thank you.

END 3:50 P.M

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