

NATO secretary general speaks on alliance's role in modern world

by Oleksandr Khapatnyukovskyy

WASHINGTON – The North Atlantic Treaty Organization's 11th secretary general, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, met with students at American University on March 2 to speak about the role of NATO in the modern world.

The event, organized by The Atlantic Council of the U.S., was also interactively broadcast online to students from the universities of California, Michigan and Texas.

Mr. de Hoop Scheffer became the 11th NATO Secretary General on January 5, 2004, succeeding Lord George Robertson, who held the post from 1999 until 2003. Prior to joining NATO, Mr. de Hoop Scheffer had dedicated his career to the foreign affairs of the Netherlands.

During the one-hour conversation at American University, Mr. de Hoop Scheffer answered a broad range of questions regarding the role of the NATO,

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which today mainly focuses on the humanitarian missions. To make his point, the general secretary mentioned the current operations under the auspices of NATO in Kosovo and Darfur. The essential role NATO plays is in the rebuilding of the post-war Iraq, in particular the training of the Iraqi National Army. However, NATO is still regarded as a key actor in the "war on terror" and in failed states, which are a threat to stability, international peace and security.

As for the future expansion of NATO, Mr. de Hoop Scheffer stated that its borders could not be unlimited. However, he underlined the bid of Ukraine for NATO accession and expressed hope that the final decision on this issue will be made during the upcoming 2008 NATO Summit in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Upon conclusion of the meeting, the secretary general explained to the students their important role for the NATO. He asked them to become advocates of NATO and to explain to all people the ideas and the mission of the organization. NATO, he underscored, is first of all a political, and then only, a military defensive alliance.

Quotable notes

"... there's a distinct difference between the populations of Russia and Ukraine. In Russia, more than 50 percent of the people regard Stalin as a positive historic figure, as the founder of a powerful Soviet state. In Ukraine, Stalin is a fallen idol; he is identified with forced collectivization, famine and repression. The defeat of Ukraine's Communists, who failed to get even 4 percent in the parliamentary elections, marks a final break with the Soviet past."

– Viktor Erofeyev, writing in the March 31 issue of the *International Herald Tribune*, in a commentary titled "Whose Ukraine?"