



Press conference given by M. Jacques CHIRAC, President of the Republic, following the NATO Summit - excerpts -

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Riga, 29 November 2006

THE PRESIDENT At the end of this summit, I'd like to begin by expressing my most grateful thanks to the President, Mrs Vaira Vike-Freiberga, and the Latvian authorities who organized it very considerately and efficiently. The organization was remarkable from every point of view at the end of the summit, everyone expressed their thanks to Latvia, who certainly deserved them and has given a fine impression of Latvia's hospitality and efficiency.

After Prague, the Riga summit symbolizes the new face of our continent, freed from the divisions of the past. It also shows everyone's commitment to the military alliance between Europe and North America, an alliance which has now been the guarantee of our security for 50 years.

AFGHANISTAN/CONTACT GROUP

Yesterday evening's dinner was devoted principally to NATO's operations in Afghanistan and Kosovo. As regards Afghanistan, I noted everyone's determination to make a success of the mission which has been taken on and launched. I personally argued in favour of NATO acting in the framework of a comprehensive strategy, an organized political process bringing all the players together. Indeed I think it was necessary to make it plain that it isn't just a military problem, it isn't only an economic and social problem. It's, at one and the same time, a military, security and development problem.

Also, and with this mind, I proposed the creation of a contact group of the same nature as the one which exists for Kosovo. This proposal was adopted and the NATO Secretary-General was given a mandate to implement it. I also expressed our willingness to adapt our military deployment, keeping, of course, the same number of troops, to the needs of NATO and the needs of the Afghans, particularly when it comes to training.

KOSOVO



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

On Kosovo we rapidly reached a general agreement on maintaining the NATO deployment during the sensitive, very sensitive phase of the status negotiations which Mr Ahtissari is conducting. I pointed out that the EU's operational priority is the establishment of the civil mission which will be the most important the European Union has ever conducted.

NATO TRANSFORMATION

This morning we talked essentially about the Alliance's transformation. France supports the process of military adaptation initiated at the Prague summit in 2002. In this context, I was pleased to see NATO's response force, the NRF, in which France has participated from the outset, now declared operational. On the political level, I drew attention both to our wish to build a strong relationship between the Alliance and Russia and to take into account the EU's growing role in promoting peace. Let me remind you that the European Union is engaged in the Balkans, Africa and Lebanon.

THIRD-COUNTRY PARTNERSHIPS

As regards the partnerships with third countries which were discussed, without calling into question the special nature of the link between North Americans and Europeans, we agree on involving more closely, on a case-by-case basis, States which are ready to commit troops on the ground with us.

UN

Finally I made it plain and this is France's consistent position that the United Nations must remain the only political forum with a universal remit.

That's a summary of yesterday and today's discussions.

(...)

AFGHANISTAN/FRANCE

Q. Did you discuss the caveats on the forces in Afghanistan? Were there a lot of additional offers of troops? What's the position with respect to France?

(...)

THE PRESIDENT First of all, what decisions has France taken regarding her participation? I spoke, in the context of our participation and the forces we've got in Afghanistan, about a number of improvements, keeping the same number of troops. I said that we would deploy in Kabul two Cougar transport helicopters and that the detachment of combat planes based in Dushanbe, which could have been relocated, will be maintained in 2007. I referred to the ad hoc participation of the naval aviation group in air-support missions to assist ISAF or Operation Enduring Freedom. I said that our contribution to the training of the Afghan army would be strengthened. Fifty or so instructors will work within the Afghan battalions. Finally, I mentioned the possibility, on a



case-by-case basis, of deploying French units outside the Kabul zone. That's what was proposed. I gathered that this satisfied our partners.

(...)

SYRIA/LEBANON

Q. You have talked to President Bush on the telephone and I imagine you did so here too about Syria and Lebanon. You are very involved in the issue. Are the European partners who want to talk to Syria putting pressure on the Americans to resume the dialogue with her? Secondly, does the fact that Hezbollah has gone into opposition worry you?

THE PRESIDENT First of all, don't say that all the Europeans are seeking a dialogue with Syria. Generally speaking, I have always advocated dialogue as the basis for relations between peoples and between countries. But the dialogue still has to be able to lead to something and be based, I'd say, on honesty and commitment. A dialogue means that you are discussing and that subsequently you do what's been decided jointly. As things are at the moment, this is in no way the case for the dialogue initiated between two European countries and Syria. I regret it. But that's how it is. As I understand it, the American President's position was totally the same as France's.

On the second question, I'm calling for the national dialogue to be maintained in Lebanon. It's the best guarantor of Lebanon's integrity and independence and, above all, of the peace and security of all the Lebanese. This security is fragile, permanently so. And, irrespective of their origin and faith, all Lebanese have the right to security. They have the right to peace. Every politician, everyone with any responsibility in Lebanon must always bear in mind that their primary responsibility is to contribute to peace, i.e. in no event succumb to aggression, but behave cordially. In this respect, France expressed the wish that Hezbollah, since you talked about it, play its full role in Lebanese political life. It's a political formation, with an important place, particularly in the Shia community, and has, absolutely normally, to play its role, one, I repeat, of moderation, like all the other political formations, and one aimed at bolstering security.

(...)

AFGHANISTAN

Q. I come from Pakistan. Did you discuss other options, other than the military option for Afghanistan? Second question: is France ready to commit more combat troops in Afghanistan? And in your opinion how long is it going to be necessary to pursue this mission in Afghanistan and do you think a solution is possible in our lifetime?

THE PRESIDENT In the first place, I don't think that the solution is an exclusively military one. Afghanistan has made some significant progress in



recent times, with respect to human rights and women's rights, in the economic and social spheres and particularly in education and health, public health. Unfortunately, Afghanistan is still one of the world's poorest countries which has substantial needs and is, it has to be said, undermined by a drug economy, which poses problems for everyone, but especially Afghanistan.

With that as the starting point, the military solution, albeit necessary, isn't enough. The military solution essentially involves tackling the issues of the capabilities the Afghan army and police need to be able to shoulder these responsibilities increasingly effectively. This isn't enough. A development aid policy is necessary too. And as the two are in fact intermingled in Afghanistan, the requirement for close cooperation between those with responsibility for security and those responsible for development aid has to be clearly understood. This is why, I repeat, I have proposed the creation, as was done for Kosovo, of a contact group allowing us to have greater harmony between development action and security action. I repeat: this decision was adopted and approved. The Secretary-General is going to make proposals for the creation of this contact group.

You ask me if France intends to increase her military participation. No. We're making a significant military contribution, of around 1,100 troops, essentially in Kabul, since we command the Kabul region. Taking into account the changes in our military cooperation I described just now, we don't intend increasing the number of our troops.

(...)

ENERGY SECURITY/NATO REMIT

Q. You said that energy security wasn't on the meeting's agenda. But do you share the Secretary-General's position that NATO has to concern itself with new issues like this?

THE PRESIDENT I have never been very keen on an enlargement of NATO's mission to include issues which don't come within its initial remit. NATO's remit is to give a guarantee of military security provided by the Americans, in the broad sense of the term, and the Europeans. NATO must constantly take on board any developments relating to this cooperation and deal with that and not anything else. (...).

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