

Full text of The Globe and Mail's interview NATO with Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer

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Globe and Mail correspondent Alan Freeman: For several months now, you have been pleading for additional troops, equipment and commitments and I think it's fair to say that with some small exceptions — the French sending planes from Dushanbe down to Kandahar or the Slovaks adding some troops — your requests have been largely unsuccessful. Are you losing hope on this score?

NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: It's not correct to say that these requests have not been successful. If you compare the number of troops we have now, 40,000, and the number we had half a year ago, we have seen an important increase in the forces. I think you'll want to hear it in percentage terms. We have filled about 90 per cent of what we need. Nevertheless, that's 90 per cent and we need 100. There I can follow your question. I will continue with my pleas and my calls to fill everything we need. The military at a certain stage advise us that we need so and so many forces, that we need so and so many enablers, as we call helicopters, fixed wing aircraft. I will not be satisfied as secretary-general when the allies will not fill what is required, which is 100 per cent. But 90 per cent is not an alliance in crisis as I have heard in the preparations for this meeting. Of course, it is rather absurd to say that. We need to do more. That is correct.

Mr. Freeman: In terms of numbers of troops, you're close to your target? You have a fixed number?

Mr. de Hoop Scheffer: About 90 per cent. The total force is now at around 40,000, excluding of course the Americans The problems we are faced with, and they are not new, it is in the enabling sphere, helicopters, transport aircraft. And here again, it's one of my ambitions, not only for the informal meeting but for the immediate future. We are running behind schedule as far as the number of training teams. We need more OMLETS (Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams). We call them that in our jargon. There we can and should do much better. Because training the Afghan National Army is absolutely essential to be able to transfer more and more responsibility to the ANA. Do not forget. I think we are now in the most difficult phase in Afghanistan. We came in after the Taliban had been chased out of the nation for which every Afghan will be grateful still. A brutal regime. Human rights violators that the world had seldom seen before. That was the first phase. Now we are in the phase where we have to do two things: reconstruction and development. Also fighting, also combat, particularly in the south. That should develop into what I call a third phase. That why I make such an important point of training. Training, training, training. Training with a capital T. Because the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police — although the police is not the prime NATO responsibility — should be able to take over the responsibility for their own nation at a certain stage.



NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer speaks during a news conference at a NATO defence ministers meeting in Noordwijk Oct. 24. The United States will lead pressure on European allies to supply more troops and equipment to fight Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan at NATO talks on Wednesday but could come away frustrated, alliance sources said. (*Michael Kooren/Reuters*)

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Mr. Freeman: Are you more optimistic about will happen to Canada's deployment? Politically it's been a difficult issue in Canada. But we've had the naming of a special panel under Mr. Manley etc.

Mr. de Hoop Scheffer: I was in Canada shortly before summer. I was in Quebec. I visited the 22ieme Regiment. Of course, I follow the debate closely. I hope to be able to speak to the panel. I hope Mr. Manley and his co-panelists will find a moment to come to Brussels. If that's not possible, I'll speak to them any other place they might like but I hope to speak to them. I follow the debate in Canada closely. Before the summer I spoke to PM Harper in the summer for quite some time, to the other interlocutors, the defence minister, the foreign minister. I spoke to Minister MacKay yesterday night. I look forward to seeing him again in the Netherlands. I follow that debate. It's a sovereign Canadian decision which will be taken at a certain point in Canada on the government proposals, supported I hope by the Parliament. I say to the Canadians and to your readers: If you realize what this mission is? It is first of all, shielding and protecting people against brutality. Point No. 2 is building a nation. Canada with its long tradition ... Many, many Canadian graves are in the Netherlands, where I come from. Canadians came to Europe, came to the Netherlands to liberate us from another horrible regime, the most horrible I think the world has ever known. Point No 3: Let's not forget, perhaps Canada is not on the front lines of the fight against terrorism. And security in Afghanistan is directly linked to security in Canada, in the Netherlands, in Belgium in the UK And so on and so forth. If you take those three elements together, protecting against brutality, reconstructing and building a nation and the fight against terrorism. And you realize that we do this that with the full mandate of the United Nations, I think that

you do it with full legitimacy, I think you have strong arguments, to convince the full coalition. Apart from Canada we have 36 other nations, NATO partners and others.

Mr. Freeman: Canada and other countries have tried to sell the issue as a much softer mission, as helping Afghanistan, to help girls go to school. There has been an effort to de-emphasize on the threat issue. Are Canadians and Dutch people ready to see their soldiers die so that girls can go to school?

Mr. de Hoop Scheffer: My answer to those people would be that you need a climate of military security and stability to see those girls go to school. Six millions Afghans are going to school, one third of them girls. Eighty per cent of Afghans have access to health care. Thousands of kilometres of roads have been built. Power stations. There is a government. Let's also realize — and I have been there many times — that an awful lot has happened in Afghanistan since 2001. I think the answer to your questions is the three-tiered approach, that it is worth sending young Canadian boys and girls or the Dutch or those other 35 members of the coalition in Afghanistan. Every single fatality is one too many. And it is a drama. It is always a drama. But on the other had, we should realize the arguments I have used are not only from a legitimacy point of view and also from the point of view of solidarity ... It's very strongly embedded in the history of Canada and the history of the Netherlands.

Mr. Freeman: There is now talk now of an extension of the Canadian commitment until 2011. Can the job done by 2011?

Mr. de Hoop Scheffer: Let me start by saying that I'll be the last one, of course, as NATO secretary-general, to enter a debate which should be a Canadian debate, a sovereign decision by the Canadian people finally of what happens to this Canadian mission in Afghanistan. My hope of course is that it will be extended. It goes without saying. Development and nation-building is a matter of at least a generation, if not generations. Why am I stressing training, training, training so much? And why am I stressing so much in that we are lagging behind so much in sending those training teams.

My analysis is that NATO, ISAF, will have to be present in Afghanistan in the military sense for the foreseeable future. But I say at the same time I hope that, more and more, the NATO forces can take the background and more and more we see the Afghan National Army can take the front. The better we train them, the better we equip them, the better they can do, the better they can take their responsibility as any normal national armed force and any normal police force will do.

Mr. Freeman: Do you think the Canadians can remain in Kandahar beyond 2009 with a force that emphasizes training but no longer has a combat aspect to it.

Mr. de Hoop Scheffer: This is entering into the Canadian debate. I will not do that. Canada should decide for itself and by itself what the Canadians want to do, what the Canadian participation will be. I'm giving the answer indirectly when I say that I do that that probing the future as I can foresee, a combination of nation-building, reconstruction and military presence will be necessary, But I'm hoping that as we are more successful the Afghan National Army, my remarks about the forefront and the back will be relevant.

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