

GESPROKEN WOORD GELDT!

Introduction by the Minister of Defence of The Netherlands, E. van Middelkoop at the 2007 Defence Leaders Forum, 23 April 2007

[1400 woorden, 12 minuten]

Ladies and gentlemen, dear “Defence Leaders”,

Welcome to the Netherlands. Welcome also to this forum devoted to peace, openness and development.

Let me begin by extending sympathy to the family and the colleagues of BBC reporter Alan Johnston, who was seized at gunpoint in Gaza City on March 12 and is still held. His as yet uncertain fate adds urgency to the issues to be discussed in this forum.

This forum is organised by an unlikely threesome: the Microsoft Corporation, the British Broadcasting Corporation and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. A software company. A broadcasting station. An international security alliance. Three of the world’s premier brands in their respective areas. At first glance, however, they appear to have little in common.

One might perhaps regard NATO as a multinational dealing in security. But I would hesitate to put it on the market as such. I would not want NATO to become subject to a hostile take-over. Least of all if the result would be a split up in different parts – let us say into an American branch and a European branch. Transatlantic security, unlike banking, is indivisible. In some sectors of society it is better to retain state control.

Yet the fact that this forum *is* organised by Microsoft, the BBC and NATO, is an indication that they have more in common than at first glance. The joint venture is less farfetched than it might seem. Indeed, I would argue that they are all indispensable and highly capable contributors in a truly comprehensive approach to the subject of this forum: promoting peace, openness and development.

So what do Microsoft, the BBC and NATO have in common?

They are, first of all, in the vanguard of globalisation.

I hasten to add that globalisation is not a *new* phenomenon. The story of mankind is also the story of globalisation. It is a story of the human web that becomes wider and ever denser.

Humans have been drawn together in patterns of interaction and exchange, cooperation and competition, since earliest times.

From the thin, localised webs that characterised agricultural communities twelve thousand years ago,

through the denser, more interactive metropolitan webs that surrounded ancient Athens and Rome and the more modern Venice and Amsterdam,

through the colonial webs woven in the nineteenth century, to the electrified global web that today envelops virtually the entire world. The growing web of interactions – weaving together hunter-gatherer bands, then civilizations and finally the whole world – is one of the motors of history.

As it binds ever more people ever more tightly, globalisation both brings them into conflict and lets them share and build on each other's achievements. Thus extension by Christopher Columbus of the web to

the Americas led to conquest and the disastrous introduction of smallpox among native Americans, but also to the exchange of New World potatoes, and maize for Old World horses. It gave us Microsoft! And computer viruses!

Whether small or large, loose or dense, these webs have provided the medium for the movement of ideas, goods, power, and money within and across cultures, societies, and nations. What is more, they have given rise to an increasing need for bringing international order to international chaos – and to try to provide security to all those who participate in the web.

The American President Teddy Roosevelt declared more than a century ago that [quote] “more and more the increasing interdependence and complexity of international and political and economic relations render it incumbent on all civilized people to insist on the proper policing of the world.” [unquote]

I am not saying that NATO should try to be a global cop or that all civilised people happen to be living on its territory. The twentieth century fortunately has endowed us with global organisations such as the United Nations to deal with the issue of international security. And civilised people happen to live across the globe.

But I *am* saying that, ever since 9/11, NATO has become a truly global contributor to international security. The emergence of international terrorism of an unprecedented scale and nature has jolted the Alliance into the league of global players, where Microsoft and the BBC were already active.

Secondly, NATO shares with Microsoft and the BBC the sense that international society is faced with a broad range of challenges. If there is one trend inherent in globalisation it is that security becomes more broadly defined and that security at home begins far away.

The broadening concept of security is, for instance, one of the mainstays of the important report put out by the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, in March 2005, entitled: *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all*.

Please allow to me quote one important passage from Annan's report: [quote] "We will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and will not enjoy either without the respect for human rights. Unless all these causes are advanced, none will succeed." [unquote]

Annan's report moreover pointed out that security is not only affected by classic threats but increasingly also by terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, pandemic disease, environmental hazards, the absence of governance, transnational crime, and social and economic instability.

More recently, even climate change has been brought forward as an issue that might present new and very different types of security challenges across the globe.

In a globalising world, security is therefore multifaceted. Ensuring security thus requires an equally multifaceted approach – an approach that necessarily involves a broad range of actors. The issue of security no longer rests solely within the precinct of states.

Again I would like to quote from Annan's report: [quote] "States cannot do the job alone. We need an active civil society and a dynamic private sector." [unquote]

This brings me to my third and final observation, which is that Microsoft, the BBC and NATO each possess important capabilities. These capabilities are needed in the context of a truly comprehensive approach to achieving a better and safer world. The point is not that we can organise a forum discussion together. The point is that together we can reinforce the goal of peace, openness and development in the real world.

I will attempt to be a little more specific. I believe the case for joining efforts is particularly strong in respect of weak states. These states and societies need support in a great variety of areas.

The situation in Afghanistan is one important case at hand.

As you may know, the Netherlands is currently heavily involved with its military in bringing stability to that country in support of the elected central government. We have deployed a significant troop contingent to the Southern province of Uruzgan. Our soldiers are well-trained and well-equipped. They are in good spirit. Their mission is complex and involves frequent military encounters with the Taliban. As professional soldiers, however, they can cope with the situation.

And yet they will achieve little if their military mission is not part of a far more comprehensive approach that empowers the Afghans to take their destiny in their *own* hands.

Our forces therefore provide training to the Afghan army and to the Afghan police, so that Afghans learn how to take care of *their* security. Our diplomats provide direct support to Afghan government authorities to help them run *their* country. Our development assistance workers are in the field, identifying projects that can help the Afghan people to increase *their* standard of living through efforts of *their* own. We are even

supporting a radio station transmitting in Uruzgan so that common Afghans can make *their* voices better heard.

But Afghans need support from many corners, not just from the corners of government.

This is why we have strengthened our dialogue with non-governmental organisations that are active in Afghanistan. These organisations can make important contributions, such as in improving health care, developing a livelihood other than poppy cultivation, and building up education.

We are also discussing with Dutch companies how they can become active in Afghanistan, as part of a broader program designed to encourage private sector involvement in the areas where we operate.

What is true for the Dutch government is true for our allies and for the Alliance as a whole. I emphasise that NATO alone can not provide the solution to the problems in Afghanistan. The Afghan people need the support of the international community and of international civil society as a whole.

This is why I found it truly heartening to learn of the efforts of Microsoft and the BBC in empowering the Afghan people to overcome the decades-long legacy of war. Efforts like those of NATO, Microsoft and the BBC are indispensable building blocks of the comprehensive approach that is needed to succeed in promoting peace, openness and development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have now given you three reasons why it is important that you are here to participate in this forum. One should have been enough. The floor is yours.

Thank you.