Scheffer Stresses NATO Role in Restoring U.S.-Europe Partnership

On Sept. 20, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer visited the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) at the invitation of SIPA's Institute for the Study of Europe. His address provided a rare opportunity for an informative exchange on the future of what has thus far been mostly a step-by-step successful international organizations in history.

Scheffer, who was in New York for the UN summit, arrived at SIPA just after having met with Secretary-General Kofi Annan and various foreign ministers to discuss NATO’s role in the Middle East.

In his remarks to the Columbia audience, Scheffer outlined the challenges NATO faces in developing a security strategy in today’s complex international environment. He then addressed threats like terrorism that have confronted the international community with particular urgency in recent years. Terrorism have confronted the international community with particular urgency in recent years. The following is an edited excerpt.

"These are real dilemmas. And we have to choose how to act, with the understanding that action will be costs no matter what we decide. The Sudan is a good example. You all know the terrible humanitarian disaster that continues to take place there. There is every reason for the world to help the people there; who have suffered so much. Some academics and journalists have called on the West to take robust action, to deploy a brigade, or to establish a no-fly zone, to end the hostilities. And I understand why. But whether we like it or not, the political realities have required a different approach. The Sudanese government has made it clear they will accept only African troops, not forces from the West. The UN Security Council has not approved a mandate for any kind of intervention force. And the African Union believes there should be African solutions to African problems—whether it be by its own capacity or by the African Union to keep the peace.

NATO is airlifting African troops into Darfur from around the continent, at the request of the African Union. If we are helping to develop the African Union’s own capacity to manage larger crises. The African Union is doing its very best, and it is making a difference. Over the long term, this operation will help build African capacity to solve African problems, which makes sense for everyone. Nobody can be satisfied with the humanitarian situation in Darfur. But until now at least, this has been the only realistic way to help.