

'I Could Never Be as Convincing'

Article by Corry Hancké in Christian-Democrat De Standaard (12/3)(circ.92,000)

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Ten to two a.m. Brussels was empty. The police agents who guard the residence of the U.S. Ambassador warmly welcomed us. Ambassador Gutman has invited a few Belgian journalists to watch the President's speech live on TV with him.

'I could obviously organize a briefing tomorrow morning on what the President has said, but it would never be as convincing as when he says it himself. This is the reason why I have invited you here.'

In a portable fridge were some cold soft drinks, and there were cookies on the table. The Ambassador sat in front, close to the TV set. He held fact sheets in his hands. No, he has not received an advance copy of the speech. The latter was a very well kept secret.

During the entire 45 minutes of the speech, Gutman took notes and nodded in approbation, never turning his attention from the TV screen. It is really obvious that he likes Obama a lot.

After the speech and after the cadets of the West Point Academy applauded, Gutman turned to us.

'He has done it again! Each time Obama is facing an important challenge, he is there. Obama never surprises me but he always astonishes me!'

For the U.S. President, it was not easy to make U.S. people understand why additional troops are needed in Afghanistan, but according to Ambassador Gutman, the President has done 'a perfect job.' 'He is so convincing because he believes in what he says.'

The meeting at the Ambassador's residence concluded shortly after three. Was Howard Gutman still going to e-mail to his President 'you were great?'