

Remarks Following Discussions With Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of
Germany and an Exchange With Reporters
February 27, 2004

President Bush. There will be opening statements. We'll take two questions per side, alternating.

Mr. Chancellor, welcome back. It's good to see you. We've just had a really constructive dialog about our mutual interests, our mutual desires to work together. When Germany and America work together, the world is a better place. We're both committed to freedom. We're both committed to peace. We're both committed to the prosperity of our respective people. And this is an important visit, and I'm glad you're here. And I appreciate our ability to work together on a lot of fronts.

I told the Chancellor I was particularly grateful for German presence in Afghanistan. They're making a very constructive—playing a constructive role and making sure that country is able to survive in a—as a free nation. And it's important that Afghanistan succeed, and we really appreciate it.

We talked about Iraq, and we talked about the Middle East, and we talked about North Korea. We discussed a lot of subjects.

And so, Mr. Chancellor, welcome back.

Chancellor Schroeder. Thank you, Mr. President. Indeed, I'm very pleased to be here once again. And indeed, we talked about—not about the past; we very much agreed on that. We have to talk about the present and the future now. We both have a great interest in seeing a stable and democratic Iraq develop.

And you're right; you mentioned the important part that Germany is playing in Afghanistan. It is a contribution that we make. It is a contribution that we also make in the fight against international terrorism, and we intend to continue to make that contribution.

We also talked about international issues, especially a settlement of the Middle East

problems and the conflicts there. We very much agreed on that. Whenever one pursues a broader outline and a broader approach here, one has not to lose sight of the fact that a settlement of the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians is necessary if one wants to bring peace to this region.

It was indeed a very good meeting, Mr. President, and we very much agreed on that we now have to face up to the challenges of the 21st century.

Constitutional Amendment on Marriage

President Bush. Jennifer [Jennifer Loven, Associated Press].

Q. Thank you, sir. I'd like to ask you about gay marriage. What do you believe same-sex weddings—how do they actually threaten the institution of marriage in general? And also, are you concerned at all about being considered on the wrong side of the civil rights issue?

President Bush. This is a—yes, this is a difficult issue here for a lot of people in America. I believed it was important to act because the institution of marriage was being changed by courts. And it's an issue that's very sensitive. And the voice of the people need to be heard, and the constitutional process was the best way to do such.

I believe that marriage has served society well, and I believe it is important to affirm that, that marriage between a man and a woman is the ideal. And the job of the President is to drive policy toward the ideal. This is a sensitive debate, and it is important that people hold true to their beliefs without condemning anybody else. And so therefore, I call upon all sides in the debate to conduct themselves with dignity and honor and respect. But this is a debate that the Nation must have. And the people's voice must be heard in the debate.

Germany-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, your father mentioned Germany as partner in leadership. Is this still the case? And how would you describe the personal relationship between Chancellor Schroeder and yourself?

President Bush. The Chancellor has got a good sense of humor and, therefore, he is able to make me laugh. And a person that can make me laugh is a person who is easy to be with. And a person who is easy to be with means I've got a comfortable relationship with him. We have differences in the past. But there's nothing wrong with friends having differences. And we have both committed to put the differences behind us and move forward. Germany is an important nation, and Germany occupies an important place in Europe. And it's essential that America have good relations with Europe. Not only do we share values; we share economic interests. We have the capacity to help keep the peace. And so I would say our relations are good.

Q. Partner in leadership?

President Bush. Partner in leadership, that's right. We're partnering in leadership in Afghanistan. We're partnering when it comes to dealing with disease—

Chancellor Schroeder. The Balkans.

President Bush. The Balkans. There's no question we differed on Iraq; we don't differ on whether Iraq ought to be free and peaceful. And so, no, I look forward to good relations—continued good relations with Germany and Gerhard Schroeder.

Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Situation in Haiti

Q. Mr. President, would it help settle things in Haiti if President Aristide were to resign?

President Bush. The Secretary of State has made some comments. Let me follow up on those by saying that we're interested in achieving a political settlement, and we're still working to that effect. We're also, at the same time, planning for a multi-

national force that would go in and make sure that if aid needed to be delivered or there needed to be some stability, that it could go in, dependent upon a political settlement.

Freedom and Democracy in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, what do you expect Germany's cooperative role to be in the Middle East initiative that you plan to do at the G-8 summit?

President Bush. I think it's—the Chancellor and I were talking about the need to help promote the institutions for free societies to develop. We both understand that the office we hold is always bigger than the occupant. And whether it be in the Palestinian territories or elsewhere in the Middle East, it is essential, first and foremost, to put institutions in place that survive the whims of men and women.

And so we share this common belief that it's important to get the structure right in order for free societies to develop. That's why the Bonn Conference, for example, relating to Afghanistan, was so important, because it began the process of putting the institutions in place for a free Afghanistan to exist. And the Chancellor understands that.

There's a lot of work we can do. There's some skepticism as to whether or not people in the Middle East can self-govern. I strongly reject that skepticism, and I might call it criticism if people hold that attitude, because I believe that freedom is inherently a part of every soul and that if given the proper structure and proper institutions, people can self-govern. And a self-governing Middle East, one based upon freedom and democracy, will make the world more peaceful. It's a legacy that we need to work on in order to help change the habits of violence and fear and frustration that had spawned terror in the Middle East.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Chancellor Schroeder spoke in German, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

A reporter referred to President Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Haiti. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

The German-American Alliance for the 21st Century: Joint Statement by President George W. Bush and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder
February 27, 2004

Today, we pay tribute to the deep friendship between the German and American people. The sacrifices of two generations, and the visionary leadership of our forebears, created the conditions for a Europe whole, free, and at peace at the dawn of the 21st century.

We renew our determination to work together, and with our friends and allies in Europe and beyond, to achieve a more secure, prosperous, and just world. We are committed to strengthen transatlantic relations, and act in common purpose to address the challenges before us.

The foundation of German and American relations remains our shared commitment to the values of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law, and to economic opportunity and prosperity through free and open markets. These are fundamental to our own societies, and to our common efforts in meeting the great challenges of a new era: the nexus of threats posed by terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, tyranny, poverty, the lack of opportunity, and violent extremism.

In this spirit, we commit our nations to an ambitious goal, rooted in our shared values and experience: to promote freedom, democracy, human dignity, the rule of law, economic opportunity, and security in the Greater Middle East. Fear and resentment must be replaced with freedom and hope.

We must build a genuine partnership, connecting Europe and America with the wider Middle East, aimed at cooperating with the countries and peoples of that re-

gion to achieve these just objectives, and to live side by side in peace. Together with our friends and allies in Europe and the Greater Middle East, we will coordinate our efforts closely to respond to calls for reform in the region, and to develop specific proposals to put before the G8, U.S.-EU, and NATO Summit meetings, which will be held in June 2004.

At the same time, we reaffirm our commitment to the vision of two states—Israel and Palestine—living side by side in peace and security, and renew our commitment to the “Roadmap” as the best means of moving forward toward that goal.

We pledge to enhance the international effort to help the people of Afghanistan restore peace and security in their nation, including by the further expansion of NATO’s International Security Assistance Force. We will also work together to achieve success at the upcoming international conference on Afghanistan, hosted by Germany. We welcome the agreement on a new constitution for Afghanistan, and place particular emphasis on creating the conditions for free, fair and peaceful elections in Afghanistan later this year.

We are united in support of a free Iraq: a secure, unified, democratic, and fully sovereign nation, at peace with itself and its neighbors that will contribute to world peace and stability. We welcome and support the vital and growing role of the United Nations in Iraq, and look forward to the transfer of sovereignty to a new Iraqi government on July 1, 2004.