

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at a Welcoming Ceremony for Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany

June 7, 2011

President Obama. Good morning, everybody.

Audience members. Good morning.

President Obama. Chancellor Merkel, members of the German delegation: On behalf of Michelle and myself, it is our great pleasure to welcome you back to the White House, and on behalf of the American people, it is our great honor to welcome you back in the United States.

Today marks the first official visit and state dinner for a European leader during my Presidency. It's only fitting. The transatlantic alliance is the cornerstone—is the heart—of our efforts to promote peace and prosperity around the world. And Germany—at the heart of Europe—is one of our strongest allies. And Chancellor Merkel is one of my closest global partners.

Our alliance, at its core, is a partnership between our peoples: the generations of German Americans who helped build a strong America; the Americans who, during a long cold war, helped to defend a free Germany; and citizens of both our countries—entrepreneurs, innovators, students, scientists, and soldiers—who work together and forge the future every day.

At a time when some have asked whether the rise of new global powers means the decline of others, this visit reaffirms an enduring truth. Our alliances with nations like Germany are more important than ever. Indeed, they're indispensable to global security and prosperity.

As two of the largest and most dynamic economies, the United States and Germany can show that the prosperity we seek is best achieved when nations invest in our greatest resource: our people and their ability to compete and innovate in the 21st century.

As members of the most successful alliance in human history, our commitment to our common defense is also a pillar of global security, from completing our mission in Afghanistan to preventing terrorist attacks to achieving our vision of a world without nuclear weapons.

And finally, as people around the world imagine a different future, the story of Germany and our alliance in the 20th century shows what's possible in the 21st. Wars can end. Adversaries can become allies. Walls can come down. At long last, nations can be whole and can be free.

Madam Chancellor, the arc of our lives speaks to this spirit. It's obvious that neither of us looks exactly like the leaders who preceded us. [*Laughter*] But the fact that we can stand here today, as President of the United States and as Chancellor of a united Germany, is a testament to the progress, the freedom, that is possible in our world.

Chancellor Merkel, to the members of the German delegation: We are honored to have all of you here: as allies, as partners, but most of all, as dear friends. So *herzlich willkommen*.

Chancellor Merkel. Mr. President, dear Barack, dear Michelle, Mr. Vice President, members of both Cabinets, guests of honor, my fellow countrymen, ladies and gentlemen: Thank you very much for this very warm and very moving reception that is overwhelming. I am

indeed delighted—and I say this on behalf of all of the members of my delegation—to be back in Washington, DC, again.

About 20 months ago—and this was almost 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall—I had the great honor and privilege to address both Houses of Congress, a wonderful moment. And I'm certain this day today shall be another such unforgettable moment.

Mr. President, receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom from you tonight is something that I consider to be not only an exceptionally gracious gesture of appreciation, and I see this as a gesture of appreciation for the whole of this united Germany. It is also a testimony of the very, very close ties that bind our two countries together.

We Germans know that America has always been a true friend to us. Our friendship has grown and matured throughout the decades, and every day it is filled with new life. More than 600,000 Americans are working for German companies here in the United States. And the reverse is also true: More than 600,000 Germans work for American companies in Germany.

There are many and diverse exchange programs at schools and universities, and they help us to win over numerous young people to serve as bridge builders between our two countries. Seventeen million members of the Armed Forces of the United States and their families have lived in Germany ever since the Second World War. And they have served their country with honor and distinction and rendered an inestimable service to their country and to us. The more than 50,000 American soldiers who are currently stationed in Germany are more than welcome every day.

I could mention many more examples of the close ties that bind our two countries together, but let me underline one thing in particular. When Germany and Europe were divided by the wall and barbed wire, America consistently stood on the side of freedom and resolutely stood by us Germans as we made our way towards unity and freedom, and this we shall never forget.

Today, we are just as closely linked to each other by the bonds of friendship as we were those 20 years ago. We are standing on a firm foundation, and standing and supported by this firm foundation, we tackle the current challenges we both face. Germany and the United States are partners, sharing responsibility for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. We are pulling in the same direction trying to keep Iran from following its course of developing a nuclear forces capability. In North Africa, we support the struggle for freedom. And in the Middle East, we support efforts to fill the peace process with new life. Together, we mastered the aftershock of the global economic and financial crisis.

Yes, Germany and the United States do share the same values; democracy and freedom, rule of law, and the universality of human rights. And it is for this very reason that a close partnership with the United States is just as much part and parcel of Germany's *raison d'etre* as is European integration. Both belong together. Both are and remain the pillars of German foreign policy.

[At this point, Chancellor Merkel concluded her remarks in English.]

Mr. President, dear Barack, in Berlin in 2008, you spoke to more than 200,000 people. And in your address, you said America has no better partner than Europe. And now it's my turn to say Europe and Germany have no better partner than America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:36 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, where Chancellor Merkel was accorded a formal welcome with full military honors. Chancellor Merkel spoke partly in German, and those portions of her remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Categories: Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Germany, Chancellor Merkel.

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Names: Merkel, Angela; Obama, Michelle.

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