

Remarks in a Discussion With Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany
and Young Professionals in Mainz
February 23, 2005

President Bush. Gerhard, thank you very much for your hospitality. I want to thank you all for coming. This is a good opportunity for me to really listen to what you have to ask and tell me about a lot of things. I'm interested in economy, the entrepreneurial spirit. I'm interested in attitudes about freedom and peace. I'm interested to know, obviously, what you think about or answer questions about policies that I've decided. I obviously know there's a lot of disagreement about some of the decisions I've made, and I'm interested in sharing with you why I made the decisions I have made.

I really want to thank you for your time, and I appreciate your willingness to come and speak to two old guys like me and Gerhard. Isn't that right, Gerhard?

Chancellor Schroeder. I'm the older man.

President Bush. Older man. [Laughter] But this is a fantastic moment. This is going to be one of the highlights of my trip to Europe, and I can't thank you enough for being here.

Gerhard, do you want to say a few things?

Chancellor Schroeder. No, you can—

President Bush. Okay, we'll start with the questions.

Democracy/Upcoming Meeting With

President Putin of Russia

Q. Okay, once again, welcome. Mr. President, you said in a recent interview with the Washington Times that if people want to get a glimpse of how you think about foreign policy, they should read "The Case for Democracy" by Natan Sharansky. In this book, as you know, Sharansky suggests the so-called town square test—

President Bush. Yes.

Q. —can a person walk into the middle of the town square and express his or

her views without fearing arrest or physical harm. My question for you: Did Sharansky's book have influence on your approach toward Russia?

President Bush. First of all, Sharansky's book confirmed how I was raised and what I believe, and it's essentially this, that deep in everybody's soul—everybody's soul—is this deep desire to be free. That's what I believe: No matter where you're raised, no matter your religion, people want to be free, and that a foreign policy, particularly from a nation that is free, ought to be based upon that thought. You know, you can't discriminate. Freedom is not a discriminatory thought, at least in the White House—[inaudible]—certain people should be free but others shouldn't free. It's a universal thought, as far as I'm concerned.

And therefore, our foreign policy is based upon this notion that the world is a better place when people are able to realize that which is embedded in their soul, because in that book, also, he talks about the idea that free societies are peaceful societies; democratic societies don't attack each other. And Europe is a classic example of countries which have embraced values based upon democracy and is peaceful.

And yes, this same principle applies to not only Iraq or Iran or America or Germany but also Russia. And as you know, there's a lot of focus on my meeting with Vladimir Putin tomorrow. As a matter of fact, Gerhard and I spent a lot of time talking about Russia today. He's got a close relationship with Vladimir, on a personal basis. I've got a close relationship with Vladimir, on a personal basis. I expressed some concerns at the European Union yesterday about some of the decisions, such as freedom of the press, that our mutual friend has made, and I look forward to

talking to him about his decisionmaking process.

One of the interesting things about being with a Chancellor or, in Putin's case, a President, is that we share something: We make decisions. And I like to learn from people how they make decisions. They say to me, "What's the President like? Give me a job description." The job description is "decisionmaker." And maybe we can talk a little bit about that later on. But yes, it applies to Russia as well.

Yes.

Energy Policy

Q. My name is Loretta Wuertenberger, from Blue Corporate Finance. Concerning Russia, the Iraq crisis has made quite clear to all of us how dependent we are on the oil resources from that region. And for the future, it is certainly necessary for us all to kind of look for strategies to become more independent of these resources.

President Bush. Yes.

Q. Does this aspect, for you, have influence on your relationship to Russia?

President Bush. That's an interesting question. The foreign policy of our country for years—I'm stepping back; I'm kind of going to branch out from Russia, and I'll get back to Russia. For years, there was this sense that we could tolerate tyranny for the sake of energy. And yet beneath the surface of that policy lurked this hatred and feeling of oppression and frustration and hopelessness, which lended itself to an ideology of hatred that ended up manifesting their hatred on America.

And let me say something about September the 11th. I think this will help frame the conversation as we go forward. For some, September the 11th was a passing moment in history. In other words, it

was a terrible moment, but it passes. For me and my Government and many in the United States, it permanently changed our outlook on the world. Those two attitudes caused us, sometimes, to talk past each other, and I plead guilty at times. But as this conversation goes on, I want you to remember that point of view.

As a result of feeling like—that my main obligation is now to protect the American people and to confront an ideology of hate, we are no longer—our primary objective is the spread of freedom.

The best way to diversify, at least for my country—and I don't want to raise a sore subject here—but diversify away from dependence on foreign sources of energy is for us to take advantage of new technologies and expand safe nuclear power in the United States of America.

To me, that would achieve several objectives. One, it's a renewable source of energy; two, it's a domestic source of energy; and three, it would help us meet our obligations to clean air requirements. Unfortunately, it's an issue that's hard to get through our Congress. I mean, there's a lot of people still fearful of nuclear power, and it's a debate I've engaged in. It's a subject I brought up in my State of the Union Address, and it's a subject I'll continue to talk about because I think it is a way for the United States to be less dependent on foreign sources of energy, which is good for our economy and, frankly, helps us with foreign policy.

[*At this point, the open portion of the discussion ended.*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:40 p.m. at the Electoral Palace.

Remarks to United States Troops at Wiesbaden Army Airfield, Germany February 23, 2005

Thank you all. Thank you very much. Thank you for the warm welcome. Laura and I were in the neighborhood—[laughter]—and we thought we'd just drop by to say hello. Howdy. [Laughter]

It's an honor to be here with so many outstanding soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines from this base and others in Germany. Laura and I are proud to be with you. I'm glad to be with the men and women of the 3d Support Command and the 421st Medical Evacuation Battalion. I see a lot of "Big Red Ones" here in the crowd. I know you're just back from Iraq. I'm pleased to say, "Job well done." It's good to be at the proud home of the 1st Armored Division. Some of you "Iron Soldiers" might have seen me before. I was the guy serving turkey.

I arrived this morning from Brussels, where I was meeting with some of our vital allies in the war on terror. I came to Wiesbaden to meet the men and women fighting on the frontlines of that war. You are carrying out challenging duties with skill and honor, and today I bring you a message from back home. The American people are grateful to you. Your communities are proud of you. And as you defend the cause of freedom, America stands with you.

I also want to thank all the military families who are here today. They tell me the quality of life here is really good—[laughter]—but it's a long way away from home, and it can be lonely when your loved ones are deployed on dangerous missions in distant lands; I know that. You built a strong, close-knit community here. You support all those who wear the uniform, and you support each other through difficult times. The service and sacrifice of America's military families is vital to our success in the war on terror, and your President is here to

tell you I'm proud of our military families as well.

I appreciate Major General Marty Dempsey's introduction, and his wife, Deanie. I appreciate their leadership. Today we've got General Jim Jones, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and his wife, Diane, with us.

I'm traveling in some pretty good company. I like to be around strong women. I want your men listening to your wives just like I listen to mine. Laura is a fabulous First Lady for our country. I'm proud of her. This Nation has got a great Secretary of State in Condoleezza Rice.

I appreciate Ambassador Dan Coats and wife, Marsha. Dan has been our Ambassador from the United States to Germany, and both have done a spectacular job on behalf of our Nation.

I want to thank Diana DeGarmo for helping to entertain you. I don't know if you know this, Laura and I were raised in west Texas. Three boys were raised right down the street from us there in west Texas. Those were the Gatlin boys, and I'm proud they're here. Thanks for coming.

The 1st Armored and 1st Infantry Divisions are two of the oldest, proudest units in the United States Army. You predecessors fought the great battles of World War II, stood vigil through the decades of the cold war, and served with distinction in Vietnam and Bosnia and Kosovo. And on this day 14 years ago, soldiers in both your divisions spent their final night in Saudi Arabia before charging into Iraq to crush the army of Saddam Hussein.

On September the 11th, 2001, history brought new responsibilities to our Nation, new challenges. That morning, America witnessed the violence and grief that terrorists can inflict. We had a glimpse of the greater destruction the terrorists intend. On behalf of our Nation, I made a pledge: