

# German-American Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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The reconstruction of the transatlantic relationship in the late 1940s and 1950s was a unique and extraordinary accomplishment. At the core of that accomplishment, perhaps one of the greatest success stories in modern history, was the German-American relationship.

The Marshall Plan was a vital element in rebuilding West Germany's war-torn economy. The North Atlantic Treaty was a guarantee of security against aggression. The Berlin Airlift was a demonstration of the commitment of the United States to the country that had risen from the ashes of World War II. And American support for reunification, despite significant opposition from some European nations, was essential in uniting a country once divided.

The bonds of unity and strength that united the United States and Germany, in the face of enormous challenges, form the basis for one of the most unique nation-to-nation relationships that the world has ever seen. As we look to the new challenges before us, no other experience is more relevant.

For it was out of those ashes of World War II that the United States and Germany forged a very special bond. One that was, yes, government-to-government, business-to-business but, most importantly, people-to-people. Since the end of the war, more than 13 million American soldiers and their dependents have lived in Germany, often on a first tour, accompanied by a young bride, maybe a young German bride, and frequently with young children. They have fond memories of their time in Germany and of the relationships and friendships they found here. Some of those young soldiers have gone on to a much higher calling. Just last week, I was in Washington with Secretary of State Colin Powell, celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the German-American Fulbright scholarship program. While Secretary Powell said he could not list himself as a Fulbright scholar, he did have a unique and special place in his heart for Germany because of his service here as a young Second Lieutenant, just out of school and infantry training at Fort Benning. Later, he returned to Germany as Commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps in Frankfurt. And now as Secretary of State he emphasized the relationship he enjoys with this remarkable country.

Countless scholars and exchange students, Fulbrighters and others, have crossed the Atlantic to study and learn from each other. Amerika Houses and German-American Institutes, fixtures in many German cities and towns, have provided the opportunity to listen to, to talk about, to read the ideas that provide the context for honest and productive dialogue. It is these ties, the people-to-people ties that will see us through difficult times and through differences of opinion. The people-to-people ties will stand—well into this new century and beyond—for a relationship that is important to both countries.

During the Cold War we shared a common goal and we faced a common adversary. In the end, we realized that goal, and the wall that divided the free world from the totalitarian regime came tumbling down—a remarkable triumph of the democratic ideals that we share. However despite the clarity of purpose, throughout the long years of the Cold War, there were frictions and differences of opinion—varying perceptions of tactics and solutions, of motives and goals.

Twenty years ago, in the spring of 1983, at a time when the debate regarding the placement of Pershing missiles on German soil almost had reached its peak, Arthur Burns, our Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany at the time, talked often about the importance of making sure that the common values that bind the Atlantic alliance were understood and appreciated. He talked about the importance of the world of international politics and diplomacy, describing it as “a world in which perception of facts often obscures the facts themselves.” He was concerned that the realities—the hard facts—of history were often forgotten, and that only perceptions remained. He was concerned, for example, that during the Pershing missile debate, young people seemed unable to differentiate between the moral and political order of the West and the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union. He was also concerned about respecting what he called the boundary line between “sheer opinion and true knowledge” and the value of historical perspective.

Today, we face, once again, overarching new challenges—the frightening explosion of worldwide terrorism, the threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the need to deal with states that act in defiance of international norms.

In Germany, the emotional and heartfelt expressions of solidarity in the immediate response to the events of September 11 were followed by concrete and positive examples of effective action—in some cases, representing major new policy directions. Despite the challenges posed by differing legal systems, together we made crucial advances in cooperation that now make it much harder for terrorists to operate. As in the United States, measures designed to strengthen internal security passed a concerned and watchful German Parliament. German military forces now are an important part of Operation Enduring Freedom and the Stability Force in Afghanistan. Previously, the German response to military operations had been colored, understandably, by a “never again” reaction. The decision to deploy troops out of area was thus as politically difficult as it was historically significant.

These decisions and these actions have been acknowledged and appreciated by a grateful America. President Bush personally expressed the gratitude of the American people on his visit to Berlin last May. But as we have tragically learned, despite our success in routing out the al-Qaeda terrorists in Afghanistan, winning the war on terrorism will be a long struggle, requiring patience, perseverance and resolve. As President Bush said in his speech to the German Bundestag, in addition to the terrorist threat, we are now threatened by states and organizations that actively pursue and in some cases may have already obtained weapons of mass destruction. We can no longer assume that the Cold War checks and balances of containment and deterrence will be effective in dealing with the adversaries of today.

And so, in recognition of this, we must define anew how we deal with those states that produce weapons of mass destruction, how we combat terrorism, and how we measure the efficacy of international organizations. We must look at new and better solutions to further the growth of democracy, prosperity and justice around the globe, to defend human rights and to bring war criminals to justice. Nations that share these goals must stand together—even if we don't always agree on the best way to achieve them. For synonymous with these common goals is a commitment to common values, ideals and interests—a common understanding of representative democracy, of human rights, the rule of law and of economic liberty. As we are slowly and painfully learning, only in standing together in support of each other can we be successful in dealing successfully with these new challenges.

When my wife, Marsha, and I returned from Washington in the fall, we were reminded once again of how much America has changed since that defining moment when the reality of terrorism shattered the misperceptions that Americans held. Americans thought that terrorism was something that happened somewhere else—that terrorism was another event, in another place, with, yes, disastrous consequences, and tragic loss of life. But it hadn't come to our shore, it hadn't impacted us where we live and where we work. September 11 shattered that misperception. As Arthur Burns said, "Sometimes perceptions have to be met with hard facts."

Captured documents and interrogations of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan clearly demonstrated al-Qaeda's attempt to obtain chemical, biological and even nuclear weapons capability. We cannot afford to wait for the next attack—an attack that might be a marriage of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. While the policies of containment and deterrence of the last half-century still have a place, these new risks and new threats require new thinking. The new reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an amorphous world network of terrorist cells and activities, funded and supported by states that provide them with equipment and sanctuary.

There are many ways, historic ways, in which Germany has responded to the events of September 11 and cooperated with us in the war on terrorism. There are also, now as in the past, varying perceptions of tactics and solutions, of motives and goals.

It is crucial, at this particular time in history, that, once again, in the face of a common enemy, we speak with a united voice in dealing with this threat, a threat to our very way of life. The adversary we face today has no respect for boundaries, does not separate militants from innocents, seeks to undermine the world order, the rule of law, and our democratic ideals. Even if we do not agree on methods, we share a common goal and a common purpose—and that must be made very clear.

Americans join President Bush in hoping and praying that it will not take a European September 11 to awaken Germany and Europe to the hard facts of our present age. We trust that we will be able to work together to find ways to successfully deal with this threat and to provide our people with security, peace and prosperity.

Let me conclude by referring to one more observation by Ambassador Burns, made twenty years ago: “The sense of a shared ethos that underlies the relationship between Europe and the United States...has been relegated to the background in recent years, possibly because it is less obvious than the power relationship and less tangible than national self-interest.”

We must bring back to the forefront that shared ethos—and re-focus our perceptions of our common values, our common agenda, and the challenges that face us today.