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In Germany, Clinton Voices Hope for Mideast Peace

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EISENACH, Germany, May 14 -- President Clinton, speaking to a group of auto workers here, said today that his most urgent foreign policy goal before leaving office was to secure "a peace agreement in the Middle East that will last for a long time."

Foreign travel -- which usually, as it did today, produces adoring crowds and splendid backdrops -- often puts Mr. Clinton in an expansive and even philosophical mood, as it frees him from sticky legal and political travails at home.

On the second of two cloudless days in Germany in the company of his friend, Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Mr. Clinton spent today reflecting on American accomplishments in Europe and reaping the gratitude of Germans. This morning, he celebrated the American role in the Berlin airlift at the start of the Cold War, then came here this afternoon to tour a General Motors plant and celebrate the American role in rebuilding Germany after the cold war .

Asked by one German auto worker at a forum beside the plant about his aspirations and achievements, Mr. Clinton reeled off a list of each.

He named "turning the American economy around in ways that benefit ordinary Americans" as his top domestic accomplishment. Abroad, he said, "I hope that putting America in the center of the future after the cold war will be a lasting achievement." He also described that achievement as "not letting America withdraw from the world."

As his top domestic goals, the President named helping the inner cities and protecting retirement and health-care programs.

Later, before a crowd of thousands packed into the cobbled square

here, in the former East Germany, Mr. Clinton seemed to revel in his role as a spokesman for democracy. "On this beautiful Thuringian day in the spring," the President said, "we are bathed in the light and the warmth of freedom."

Mr. Clinton acknowledged that Germany was still struggling to rebuild, but said: "Do not underestimate what you can do with your dreams as free people." To Mr. Clinton's slow, stately wave, the crowd responded with whistles and a blur of thousands of waving hands.

Mr. Clinton then toured the city with Mr. Kohl, despite sharp lower back pain he has felt since he injured himself stretching on Monday. "Motrin was the order of the day," said Michael D. McCurry, the press secretary. Next on Mr. Clinton's itinerary is England, where he will attend an economic summit meeting.

Mr. Kohl, who is campaigning for his own re-election and basking in Mr. Clinton's popularity, told the auto workers that he thought German taxes were too high and were discouraging foreign investment. But, with words that might not sound so inspiring to American workers, Mr. Clinton assured the audience that "most manufacturers in America are prepared to go anywhere there is a work force that can be trained," and will work hard in teams.

Before flying here, President Clinton appeared at Tempelhof Airport in Berlin to commemorate the eleven-month Western air campaign that kept West Berlin supplied with coal and food after Stalin cut off overland supply routes on June 24, 1948.

Mr. Clinton received thunderous applause from the thousands of invited German guests as he recalled President Truman's words in a White House meeting on June 28 of that year: "There is no discussion on that point. We stay in Berlin, period."

The crowd was gathered in a giant amphitheater formed by a semicircular hangar that was open to the runway. Mr. Clinton and Chancellor Kohl faced the audience from a podium on the tarmac, standing before a new American C-17 cargo jet christened The Spirit of Berlin today that was parked nose-to-nose with a gray C-54 transport plane.

It was the C-54 that flew most of the American missions into Tempelhof Airport. French and British planes operated from other airports. Flying no higher than 10,000 feet in every kind of weather, with windows open to thin the dust emitted by the cargo of coal and flour, crews made two round trips to Berlin every 16 hours from bases in Europe. They stayed on the ground in Germany for just half an hour.

"A plane every 90 seconds, at its height," Mr. Clinton said.

Mr. Kohl said that the airlift taught Germans "what it meant not to be alone in our hour of need," declaring that Berlin owed its survival and freedom to the United States and its allies.

In his speech this morning, Mr. Clinton committed a rare gaffe. He singled out an American pilot from the airlift, **Gail Halvorsen**, but mistakenly assumed that Mr. Halvorsen was a woman. "She is here with us today," Mr. Clinton said, "and I'd like to ask her to stand." Once Mr. Halvorsen stood, Mr. Clinton realized his error. "Thank you sir," he said. "Thank you. He's here."

Mr. Halvorsen, 77, flew 126 flights in the airlift and became known as the "Rosinenbomber," or raisin bomber, because he dropped dried fruit and candy for children. Before Mr. Clinton spoke, Mr. Halvorsen said of his experience: "It was a hard time, but a good time."

Photo: Chancellor Helmut Kohl, left, and President Clinton looked out of a window in the Wartburg, a castle in Eisenach, Germany, yesterday. (Associated Press)

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