



THE WHITE HOUSE: Remarks by the President and Chancellor Kohl at airlift remembrance ceremony

2,389 words
15 May 1998
M2 PRESSWIRE
MTPW
English

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CHANCELLOR KOHL: Mr. President, my good friend; my Lord Mayor; Excellencies; ladies and gentlemen; schoolboys, schoolgirls, and all you students out there -- (applause) -- I would like to welcome you, Mr. President, here to the Tempelhof Airport in Berlin.

This airport in the heart of the German capital symbolizes in a special measure America's bond with Berlin. It stands for one of the most spectacular relief operations history has ever seen. The 50th anniversary of the day of the Berlin airlift is due in a few weeks' time. When the Soviet Union, Stalin, in June 1948, ordered a blockade of all the overland routes to Berlin, it was the Western allies, especially our American friends, who for months on end kept people in the free part of Berlin supplied from the air.

Day in, day out, those planes, soon fondly dubbed Rosinenbombers by the people of Berlin, and one of the most spectacular achievements of aviation and technology, secured the freedom of Berlin. The Berlin population, but all other German citizens, too, learned what it meant not to be alone in the hour of need. We know that this city owes its survival and freedom during the Cold War to the firm resolve of the United States and our other Western allies. (Applause.)

Here, in Berlin, Mr. President, Germans and Americans after the second world war once again experienced a mutual bond and commitment. And here in the course of time, victors in war became protectors and partners; adversaries became allies and friends. The airlift came to symbolize the unshakable strength of Western democracies. And the whole world will never forget this -- the steadfast determination of the Western allies not to yield an inch in the face of the communist threat. (Applause.)

This experience generated a desire to join together on a firm and long-term basis in the Atlantic Alliance. And in this alliance, we have been now working for many decades together. The extraordinary help we received from the Western allies only a few years after the end of the second world war was by no means a matter of course, and it took its place as one of the great memories we have experienced in history.

It was an aid which also took its toll in human life. Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, a few meters from here you have the monument to the airlift. It reminds us of the 87 people who gave their lives in the service of freedom.

I am very pleased that today so many members of the American forces are with us here. (Applause.) And I would like to give a very special welcome to those veterans who participated in the airlift at that time. (Applause.) In a very particular way, in a very personal way, you made your contribution to German-American friendship, and for this I thank you on behalf of the citizens of Berlin and behalf of all Germany. (Applause.) And to you, the veterans of the airlift, I would like to assure you that we will always honor the memory of your comrades. And at this hour, our thoughts go to the families of those who did not return.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, over the past decade, some seven million American servicemen and servicewomen have been stationed in Germany to defend our freedom. (Applause.) Together with their families, it makes about 15 million Americans who, faraway from their own home, served in this country to maintain peace and liberty, together with our allies and together with the servicemen and women of our Bundeswehr. (Applause.)

In their day-to-day contacts with their German neighbors, they were able to make many close personal ties and we are very grateful because this was one of the fundamentals of the close friendship between our peoples. It is not least these personal encounters and everyday impressions and experiences which make German-American relations a meaningful part of daily life. (Applause.)

I would like to emphasize that the American servicemen have made an essential contribution to the friendship across the Atlantic. This friendship and partnership, Mr. President, with the United States is one of the carrying pillars of German foreign policy. In a particular way, as Germans, we have experienced this when we received the gift of unification. (Applause.)

When these dramatic changes in the East of Europe unfolded, and finally the wall came down, we Germans received so much help and support from no one else but our American friends. And this is something we will never forget. (Applause.) While others hesitated and some people were full of doubts, the United States, without ifs and buts, took the lead and encouraged us and supported us on the road to German unity. This unswerving commitment of our American friends -- to this we owe our thanks for the fact that the wall, the barbed wire, that divided Berlin for such a long time could finally be overcome. (Applause.)

You, Mr. President, and your administration, have constantly worked together to strengthen the German-American partnership. And all of us will never forget that day four years ago when we walked together through the Brandenburg Gate. In the moving speech you made at that time, you emphasized that America would continue to stand for the citizens of Berlin and the German people. You said, "now and for always," at the time. For this we thank you again, Mr. President. (Applause.)

Let me assure you, Mr. President, that here in Germany you will have true friends and reliable partners in future. Our close relations are built on three pillars: First of all, our common values, which link us politically, spiritually, and morally. Secondly, on our common interests. And third, our common commitment to a world economic order based on the principle of liberty, which is extremely important for the world economy.

Mr. President, sir, today, we are experiencing a time of dramatic change, and together, Germans and Americans, Americans and Germans, must face the challenges of the new century which starts in two years time in a spirit of partnership. And this means that we Germans have a particular responsibility. And, of course, we will accept this responsibility.

For us, at this time of change, it is extremely important to know that we have you as a friend and partner in the White House. And my personal thanks go to you for this. (Applause.)

Yesterday, together in our speeches, we made this clear: We see our tasks as overcoming once and for all the divided Europe during the decades of East-West confrontation. We need to give the young democracies in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe a helping hand to help themselves so that they can become part of our common future. This, for us Germans and for our American friends, is extremely important. Our target, Mr. President, is to complete the building of the European house, but we want our American friends to have a permanent right of abode in this house. (Applause.)

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, close cooperation between our two countries remains an important foundation for a positive future. Our common commitment to human dignity, freedom, and democracy, our support of a policy of peace throughout the world is the basis of our joint activities.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen -- and I say this in particular to the many young people who I am pleased to see here today -- let us continue along this path together, looking back on what we have achieved, and convinced of our vision that we will live in peace and freedom. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Chancellor Kohl, members of the German government, Mr. Mayor, members of the Diplomatic Corps, the veterans of the Luftbruecke, and to the people of Germany: Fifty years ago this air strip was a pivotal battlefield in a war that had not yet been named. In 1948 the world could not yet speak of another war.

World War II had left Europe devastated and divided. Nowhere was the crisis more acute than here in Berlin. People were hungry and homeless. A hundred years earlier, Karl Marx had declared that a specter is haunting Europe, the specter of communism. In 1948, the specter's shadow fell across half the continent. The edge of that shadow was the runway here at Tempelhof Airport. The last European battlefield of World War II became the first battlefield of the Cold War.

On June 24, 1948, Stalin threw down a gauntlet, refusing to allow supplies to be sent to Berlin. It was war by starvation, with more than 2 million lives hanging in the balance. The blockade stymied the British, the French, the American allies. Some saw no solution and reluctantly advised evacuation.

The fate of free Berlin hung by a thread -- the thread of air support. No one really thought it was possible to supply a city by air. A few visionaries, however, were convinced it could be done. They had no precedent, just the simple rules of conscience and ingenuity that determine all our best actions. And they had a President. On June 28, in a small meeting at the White House, Harry Truman said, there is no discussion on that point, we stay in Berlin, period. (Applause.)

From the moment the largest airlift in history began, the Western allies became protectors, instead of occupiers of Germany. There are so many stories from that proud period -- the leadership of General Clay and General Thomas; the American, British and German casualties we must never forget; the countless acts of individual kindness, like **Gail Halvorsen**, the famous Rosinenbomber who dropped tiny parachutes of candy to Berlin's children. (Applause.) She is here with us today, and I'd like to ask her to stand. Thank you very much. (Applause.) Thank you, sir. Thank you. He's here.

Thank you, sir.

If the communists could fight with fear, then we would fight back with friendship and faith. (Applause.) Today I salute, along with the Chancellor, all the American veterans who came back to celebrate today. I would like to ask any of them who are here to please stand. (Applause.)

And I salute the people of Berlin. Thousands of Berliners from doctors to housewives rolled up their sleeves to help Americans expand this airfield, building Tegel Airport from scratch, unloading and maintaining the planes. Your fearless Mayor, Ernst Reuter, inspired Americans and Germans alike when he stood before a rally and said, "We cannot be bordered, we cannot be negotiated, we cannot be sold." (Applause.)

And finally I salute the 75,000 people from all around Europe who helped the airlift in some capacity and made it a triumph for people who love freedom everywhere. (Applause.)

Between June of 1948 and May of 1949, over a quarter million sorties were flown around the clock, day and night, in weather good and bad -- roughly, a plane every 90 seconds at its height. But the most precious cargo did not come in the well-named care packages. It was instead the hope created by the constant roar of the planes overhead. Berliners called this noise a symphony of freedom, reminding you that Berlin was not alone and that freedom was no flight of imagination. (Applause.)

Today, a new generation must relearn the lessons of the airlift and bring them to bear on the challenges of this new era. For the Cold War is history, a democratic Russia is our partner, and we have for the
Page 4 of 6 © 2014 Factiva, Inc. All rights reserved.

first time a chance to build a new Europe, undivided, democratic, and at peace. Yet we know that today's possibilities are not tomorrow's guarantees. For all the promise of our time, we are not free from peril.

That is why I hope both Americans and Germans will always remember the lesson of what happened here 50 years ago. We cannot relinquish the responsibilities of leadership, for the struggle for freedom never ends. (Applause.)

In the heat of the Berlin crisis, General Clay wrote, "I believe the future of democracy requires us to stay." Well, that was the best investment we could have made in Germany's future. It would be difficult to imagine a better friend or ally than modern Germany. (Applause.)

How proud those who participated in the airlift must have been when Germany reunified, when Germany led the effort to unify Europe, and when the modern equivalent of care packages were sent to Bosnia, Afghanistan, and other places ravished by war -- when the people of Germany were among the first to send them. It was a good investment in democracy to stay. (Applause.)

Now, we must continue to build bridges between our two peoples. The Fulbright Program between Germany and the United States is the largest in the world. This fall the American Academy in Berlin will open, bringing our leading cultural figures here. We will be working hard to expand our support for the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange, which has already given more than 10,000 German and American students the chance to visit each other's countries. The next century of our cooperation for freedom has already begun in our classrooms. Let us give our young people the chance to build even stronger bridges for the future. (Applause.)

In his Song of the Spirits Over the Waters, Gunther wrote, "Man's soul is like the water. From heaven it descends, to heaven it rises; and down again to Earth, it returns, ever repeating." To me, these lines express the heroism of the airlift. For more than food and supplies were dropped from the skies. As the planes came and went and came and went again, the airlift became a sharing of the soul -- a story that tells people never to give up, never to lose faith, adversity can be conquered, prayers can be answered, hopes realized. Freedom is worth standing up for. (Applause.)

My friends, today, and 100 years from today, the citizens of this great city and all friends of freedom everywhere will know that because a few stood up for freedom, now and forever Berlin lack talk Berlin -- Berlin is still Berlin.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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