

## Change in the White House?

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSATLANTIC CO-OPERATION

*Check against delivery!*

Professor Neuss, Deidre, Mr. Child, Ladies and gentlemen,

What better place to discuss the transition of the American presidency and the transatlantic relationship than here in Schoeneberg Rathaus from the place -- and I am told from the same lectern -- that President John F. Kennedy used to address the people of Berlin in June of 1963. The thought is, I must confess, electrifying for me. Thank you for this opportunity. One of the things that are special about the passing on of power in the American political system is the optimism about the opportunities for leadership that a new president brings to office, when at the end of a long campaign, Americans move forward as one nation.

Looking back at past presidencies -- although no two are alike -- President Kennedy's inaugural address inspired America. "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country."

Those words reflected a commitment and vision symbolic of the American spirit that Alexis de Tocqueville, writing nearly two centuries ago, said "put liberty within peoples' reach."

President Kennedy's vision for world peace was based on the same kind of commitment. Nowhere else was the evidence of a commitment to the values of freedom, justice and democracy more obvious than here in Berlin. This is no reason to think simplistically about the German Democratic Republic, as I know from the two years I lived in East Berlin. But, let us be clear -- it was not free, not democratic, and was imposed from

the outside. For as long as one German out of four was denied the basic right of making a free choice, real, lasting peace in Europe could never be assured.

That was President Kennedy's message when he visited Berlin that June day forty years ago. At that time, the international political situation was tense. Some in America questioned the wisdom of the President's visit. President Kennedy asked former U.S. High Commissioner to Germany John McCloy for his opinion.

McCloy responded that, if the President could not visit Berlin at this critical moment, he should stay away from the Federal Republic altogether. The President took McCloy's advice. He went to Berlin and spoke the now famous words: "Ich bin ein Berliner." With those words, President Kennedy prophesied the day when Berlin -- East and West -- would be joined as one, a symbol not of division, but one of unity and hope.

I served in East Berlin at our old Embassy on Neustaedtsche Kirchstrasse. It was the mid-1980s. The Cold War dominated our thinking and political reality. From careful conversations with some East German citizens, it was obvious that change was underway but, as historian John Lewis Gaddis wrote in 1987, the Cold War had become a "way of life." In many ways, it did not occur to us to, and I quote, "think about how it might end or, more to the point, how we would like it to end."

Ronald Reagan admitted that when he declared, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" in Berlin in June 1987, he never

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.

**BERLIN**

JOHN M. KOENIG  
CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, A.I.

**8. Dezember 2008**

[www.kas.de](http://www.kas.de)

dreamed that in less than three years the wall would indeed come down. But courageous members of the reform movement in former East Germany did not give up on democracy and freedom. They had indeed thought about how they would like the Cold War to end. This is a part of this story of reunification and renewal that we too often forget in America, and sometimes, I believe, here in Germany as well.

As we look forward to the 20th anniversary of the miraculous events of 1989, I hope we will all renew our appreciation and understanding for the East German citizens who led the protest movement and helped guide this nation toward a peaceful unification and a new Berliner Republic.

Common purpose and resolve brought the Cold War to an end – on the part of committed citizens, as well as nations. This summer, we moved into our new Embassy on Pariser Platz, leaving the building on Neustaedtische Kirchstrasse that I had known both as a junior officer and then as Deputy Chief of Mission.

Our Embassy's return to its pre-war location beside the Brandenburg Gate closed a circle in the German-American partnership that extended through a time when we were enemies at war, through the long Cold War years of division and the process of unification, to today, where we stand together as global partners.

German reunification was the seal on one of the greatest success stories of modern diplomacy. It was also the beginning of a new era in which Germany became the center of a rapidly changing, democratic Europe and what continues to be America's most important foreign relationship.

Many believe that we are now at the start of another era in the American story. Certainly President-elect Obama has inspired American voters, and millions of interested observers, around the world.

As President Bush said the day after the election, "No matter how they cast their ballots, all Americans can be proud of the

history that was made yesterday.... They showed a watching world the vitality of America's democracy, and the strides we have made toward a more perfect union.... Many of our citizens thought they would never live to see this day. This moment is especially uplifting for a generation of Americans who witnessed the struggle for civil rights with their own eyes -- and four decades later see a dream fulfilled."

In terms of the policies that an Obama administration will put in place, it is not my role to offer predictions or advice. Many other individuals and organizations outside of government are doing that. Here at this conference, I am sure there will be some very interesting discussion. I think we have all been impressed by the team he has assembled to handle America's foreign and security affairs. I look forward to working for them when they take the reins of government next month.

Within the government, I can say that the transition is running smoothly and efficiently, in fact as President Bush promised, the best ever.

President-elect Obama and his team are being briefed regularly. For example, just last week the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism briefed Vice President-elect Biden and designated Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Napolitano. The bipartisan commission was mandated by Congress to assess, on an urgent basis, the United States' efforts to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction and their use by terrorist groups.

The commission has just released a report titled, "World at Risk," which concludes that the world is more likely than not to experience a WMD attack during Obama's term in office, particularly one involving biological agents. The country's "margin of safety" is shrinking, not growing, because of the spread of technology and scientific knowledge, the report said. And, regrettably, this threat faces many countries, including Germany and our other European allies and partners.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.

**BERLIN**

JOHN M. KOENIG  
CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, A.I.

**8. Dezember 2008**

[www.kas.de](http://www.kas.de)

In the case of my country, hard-to-detect biological pathogens and the decentralization of al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda-inspired extremists are increasing the risk of WMD attacks faster than the U.S. has been able to secure dangerous materials. Before the private briefing by the Commission, Governor Napolitano called the elimination of global terrorism the top priority of the incoming administration.

So while there is much excitement around the world in anticipation of the President-elect's inauguration, the international challenges that we have faced – and perhaps some of the approaches that the Bush Administration developed in response – could endure into the Obama presidency.

President-elect Obama often has said that America is strongest when it acts alongside strong partners, such as Europe. He laid out his broad vision for the transatlantic relationship when he spoke in Berlin this past summer. "America has no better partner than Europe," he said. "The burdens of global citizenship continue to bind us together. A change of leadership in Washington will not lift this burden. In this new century, Americans and Europeans alike will be required to do more – not less."

International cooperation is vital both to strengthen old partnerships and build new ones to confront the challenges of the 21st century. President Bush and Chancellor Merkel have offered constructive leadership in addressing the challenges that face both our two countries. Their language of common purpose – of a strong Europe in partnership with America – is the reality of our cooperation today and I am convinced that that will continue to be the case under our new President.

At the start of the Obama administration, a number of international meetings are planned. The G20 that met last month in November to discuss the current financial crisis will re-convene in April.

The November summit of major developed and emerging market economies emphasized coordinated or collective action to ad-

dress the market turmoil. The meeting produced a good set of principles for financial sector reform — including more transparency and accountability. Both domestically and internationally, the focus will be on how to get regulation right. The G-20 gathering also highlighted the quest for new arrangements of global consultation and governance. This is likely to be a major feature of the transatlantic dialogue in coming years, as we find ourselves in a new, formative period of global affairs.

The transatlantic community of values and aspirations will remain a cornerstone of American policy. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization will remain a vitally important forum for strategic consultation with our allies and a crucial framework for common action.

In April, the 60th Anniversary NATO Summit will be hosted jointly in Strasbourg, France, and Kehl, Germany. As in the Bucharest Summit last year, the terms for future membership, including the eventual membership of Georgia and Ukraine, and cooperation with Russia will remain important issues for discussion.

The NATO of the Cold War, a security alliance of 16 countries that had never conducted military operations, has changed enormously. We need to evolve further, and enrich our strategic dialogue and our capacity to fulfil joint commitments for our common security.

While posted at the U.S. Mission to NATO in Brussels from 2003 to 2006, I saw the new NATO in action - a NATO of 26 members and 31 partners working effectively and providing security in eight different operations. We made great strides, but we have further to go. No where is this clearer – both the progress made and the need for more – than in our ISAF mission in Afghanistan.

NATO is proof of the strength and vitality of the community of values that champions the rule of law, democracy, and the free market. I hope, at the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit and beyond, President-elect Obama

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.

BERLIN

JOHN M. KOENIG

CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, A.I.

8. Dezember 2008

[www.kas.de](http://www.kas.de)

and other allied leaders will be able to reinforce our shared appreciation for the challenges and opportunities we face and redouble our sense of common purpose.

The European Union is a second, equally important element in our transatlantic relationship. As the union develops its capacity for joint decision-making and autonomous action, the United States will be able to rely more and more on a capable European partner. It is not easy for Europeans to develop new institutional arrangements and powers, as we have seen. There are sometimes bumps in the road. Nor is it always easy for Europe's partners, such as the United States, to adjust to the evolving nature and capacities of the union. In the long run, however, the enhanced decision-making and implementing powers of the union make Europe a more valuable and valued partner for America in our transatlantic community of values.

That community of values has influenced successive American presidencies since the end of World War II. The German-American partnership was at the center of those policies. Looking back again to candidate Barack Obama's visit to Germany last summer, it is clear that the President-elect recognizes the importance of our bilateral relationship.

As he said then in Berlin, "This city, of all cities, knows the dream of freedom. And you know that the only reason we stand here tonight is because men and women from both of our nations came together to work, and struggle, and sacrifice for that better life." True partnership and true progress, however, he went on to say, require constant work and sustained sacrifice and sharing the burdens of development and diplomacy, of progress and peace. Most important, they require allies who will listen to each other, learn from each other and, most of all, trust each other. What a better way to start a new administration. This conference is a good start.

On behalf of the United States Embassy, thank you to the conference organizers, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Ameri-

can Jewish Committee, as well as the many organizations that are represented on the panels for the contribution you all make to transatlantic dialogue.