

Address to a Special Session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France

May 8, 1985

The President. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. It is an honor to be with you on this day.

We mark today the anniversary of the liberation of Europe from tyrants who had seized this continent and plunged it into a terrible war. Forty years ago today, the guns were stilled and peace began, a peace that has become the longest of this century.

On this day 40 years ago, they swarmed onto the boulevards of Paris, rallied under the Arc de Triomphe and sang the Marseillaise. They were out there in the open and free air. And now, on this day 40 years ago, Winston Churchill walked out onto a balcony in Whitehall and said to the people of Britain, "This is your victory." And the crowd yelled back, in an unforgettable moment of love and gratitude, "No, it is yours." Londoners tore the blackout curtains from their windows, put floodlights on the great symbols of English history. And for the first time in nearly 6 years, Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, and St. Paul's Cathedral were illuminated against the sky.

Across the ocean, a half a million New Yorkers flooded Times Square and laughed and posed for the cameras. In Washington, our new President Harry Truman called reporters into his office and said, "The flags of freedom fly all over Europe."

On that day 40 years ago, I was at my post in an Army Air Corps installation in Culver City, California. Passing a radio, I heard the words, "Ladies and gentlemen, the war in Europe is over." I felt a chill, as if a gust of cold wind had just swept past, and even though for America there was still a war in the Pacific front, I realized I would never forget that moment.

This day can't help but be emotional, for in it we feel the long tug of memory. We're reminded of shared joy and shared pain. A few weeks ago in California, an old soldier with tears in his eyes said: "It was such a different world then. It's almost impossible to describe it to someone who wasn't there. But when they finally turned the lights on in the cities again, it was like being reborn."

If it is hard to communicate the happiness of those days, it is even harder to communicate, to those who did not share it, the depth of Europe's agony. So much of it lay in ruins. Whole cities had been destroyed. Children played in the rubble and begged for food.

And by this day 40 years ago, over 40 million lay dead, and the survivors -- they composed a continent of victims. And to this day we wonder: How did this happen? How did civilization take such a terrible turn? After all the books and documentaries, after all the histories and studies, we still wonder: How?

Hannah Arendt spoke of the "banality of evil" -- the banality of the little men who did the terrible deeds. We know they were totalitarians who used the state, which they had elevated to the level of a god, to inflict war on peaceful nations and genocide on innocent peoples. We know of the existence of evil in the human heart, and we know that in Nazi Germany that evil was institutionalized, given power and direction by the state and those who did its bidding. We also know that early attempts to placate the totalitarians did not save us from war. They didn't save us from war; in fact they guaranteed war. There are lessons to be learned in this and never forgotten.

But there is a lesson, too, in another thing we saw in those days, perhaps we can call it the commonness of virtue. The common men and women who somehow dug greatness from within their souls, the

people who sang to the children during the Blitz, who joined the resistance and said no to tyranny, the people who had the courage to hide and save the Jews and the dissidents, the people who became for a moment the repositories of all the courage of the West -- from a child named Anne Frank to a hero named Raoul Wallenberg. These names shine. They give us heart forever. The glow of their memories lit Europe in her darkest days.

Who can forget the hard days after the war? We can't help but look back and think life was so vivid then. There was the sense of purpose, the joy of shared effort, and later the impossible joy of our triumph. Those were the days when the West rolled up its sleeves and repaired the damage that had been done, the days when Europe rose in glory from the ruins. Old enemies were reconciled with the European family. Together, America and Western Europe created and put into place the Marshall plan to rebuild from the rubble. And together we created an Atlantic alliance, which proceeded not from transient interests of state, but from shared ideals. Together we created the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a partnership aimed at seeing that the kind of tyrants that had tormented Europe would never torment her again.

NATO was a triumph of organization and effort, but it was also something very new and very different. For NATO derived its strength directly from the moral values of the people it represented, from their high ideals, their love of liberty, and their commitment to peace. But perhaps the greatest triumph of all was not in the realm of a sound defense or material achievement. No, the greatest triumph after the war is that in spite of all of the chaos, poverty, sickness, and misfortune that plagued this continent, the people of Western Europe resisted the call of new tyrants and the lure of their seductive ideologies. Your nations did not become the breeding ground for new extremist philosophies. You resisted the totalitarian temptation. Your people embraced democracy, the dream the Fascists could not kill. They chose freedom.

And today we celebrate the leaders who led the way -- Churchill and Monnet, Adenauer and Schuman, De Gasperi and Spaak, Truman and Marshall. And we celebrate, too, the free political parties that contributed their share of greatness -- the Liberals and the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats and Labour and the Conservatives. Together they tugged at the same oar, and the great and mighty ship of Europe moved on.

If any doubt their success, let them look at you. In this room are those who fought on opposite sides 40 years ago and their sons and daughters. Now you work together to lead Europe democratically; you buried animosity and hatred in the rubble. There is no greater testament to reconciliation and to the peaceful unity of Europe than the men and women in this chamber.

In the decades after the war, Europe knew great growth and power, amazing vitality in every area of life -- from fine arts to fashion, from manufacturing to science to the world of ideas. Europe was robust and alive, and none of this was an accident. It was the natural result of freedom, the natural fruit of the democratic ideal. We in America looked at Europe and called her what she was -- an economic miracle.

And we could hardly be surprised. When we Americans think about our European heritage, we tend to think of your cultural influences and the rich ethnic heritage you gave us. But the Industrial Revolution that transformed the American economy came from Europe. The guiding intellectual lights of our democratic system -- Locke, Montesquieu, and Adam Smith -- came from Europe. And the geniuses who ushered in the modern industrial-technological age came from -- well, I think you know, but two examples will suffice: Alexander Graham Bell, whose great invention maddens every American parent whose child insists on phoning his European pen pal rather than writing to him -- and he was a Scotsman -- [laughter] -- and Guglielmo Marconi, who invented the radio, thereby providing a living for a young man from Dixon, Illinois, who later went into politics. I guess I should explain: That's me. Blame Marconi. [Laughter] And Marconi, as you know, was born in Italy.

Tomorrow will mark the 35th anniversary of the Schuman plan, which led to the European Coal and Steel Community, the first block in the creation of a united Europe. The purpose was to tie French and German and European industrial production so tightly together that war between them `` becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible." Those are the words of Robert Schuman; the Coal and Steel Community was the child of his genius. I believe if he were here today, I believe he would say: We have only just begun!

I'm here to tell you that America remains, as she was 40 years ago, dedicated to the unity of Europe. We continue to see a strong and unified Europe not as a rival but as an even stronger partner. Indeed, John F. Kennedy, in his ringing declaration of interdependence in the Freedom Bell city of Philadelphia 23 years ago, explicitly made this objective a key tenet of postwar American policy; that policy saw the New World and the Old as twin pillars of a larger democratic community. We Americans still see European unity as a vital force in that historic process. We favor the expansion of the European Community; we welcome the entrance of Spain and Portugal into that Community, for their presence makes for a stronger Europe, and a stronger Europe is a stronger West.

Yet despite Europe's economic miracle, which brought so much prosperity to so many, despite the visionary ideas of the European leaders, despite the enlargement of democracy's frontiers within the European Community itself, I'm told that a more doubting mood is upon Europe today. I hear words like ``Europessimism" and ``Eu- roparalysis." I'm told that Europe seems to have lost that sense of confidence that dominated that postwar era. Well, if there is something of a lost quality these days, is it connected to the fact that some in the past few years have begun to question the ideals and philosophies that have guided the West for centuries, that some have even come to question the moral and intellectual worth of the West?

I wish to speak, in part, to that questioning today. And there is no better place to do it than Strasbourg -- where Goethe studied, where Pasteur taught, where Hugo knew inspiration. This has been a lucky city for questioning and finding valid answers. It is also a city for which some of us feel a very sweet affection. You know that our Statue of Liberty was a gift from France, and its sculptor, Auguste Bartholdi, was a son of France. I don't know if you've ever studied the face of the statue, but immigrants entering New York Harbor used to strain to see it, as if it would tell them something about their new world. It's a strong, kind face. It is the face of Bartholdi's mother, a woman of Alsace. And so, among the many things we Americans thank you for, we thank you for her.

The Statue of Liberty -- made in Europe, erected in America -- helps remind us not only of past ties but present realities. It is to those realities we must look in order to dispel whatever doubts may exist about the course of history and the place of free men and women within it. We live in a complex, dangerous, divided world; yet a world which can provide all of the good things we require -- spiritual and material -- if we but have the confidence and courage to face history's challenge.

We in the West have much to be thankful for -- peace, prosperity, and freedom. If we are to preserve these for our children and for theirs, today's leaders must demonstrate the same resolve and sense of vision which inspired Churchill, Adenauer, De Gasperi, and Schuman. The challenge was to rebuild a democratic Europe under the shadow of Soviet power. Our task, in some ways even more daunting, is to keep the peace with an ever more powerful Soviet Union, to introduce greater stability in our relationship with it, and to live together in a world in which our values can prosper.

The leaders and people of postwar Europe had learned the lessons of their history from the failures of their predecessors. They learned that aggression feeds on appeasement and that weakness itself can be provocative. We, for our part, can learn from the success of our predecessors. We know that both conflict and aggression can be deterred, that democratic nations are capable of the resolve, the sacrifices, and the consistency of policy needed to sustain such deterrence.

From the creation of NATO in 1949 through the early 1970's, Soviet aggression was effectively deterred. The strength of Western economies, the vitality of our societies, the wisdom of our diplomacy all contributed to Soviet restraint; but certainly the decisive factor must have been the countervailing power -- ultimately, military, and above all, nuclear power, which the West was capable of bringing to bear in the defense of its interests.

It was in the early 1970's that the United States lost that superiority over the Soviet Union in strategic nuclear weapons, which had characterized the postwar era. In Europe the effect of this loss was not quickly perceptible, but seen globally, Soviet conduct changed markedly and dangerously. First in Angola in 1975, then when the West failed to respond, in Ethiopia, in South Yemen, in Kampuchea, and ultimately in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union began courting more risks and expanding its influence through the indirect and direct application of military power. Today we see similar Soviet efforts to profit from and stimulate regional conflicts in Central America.

Audience members. Boo - o - o!

The President. They haven't been there. I have.

The ineffectual Western response to Soviet adventurism of the late 1970's had many roots, not least the crisis of self-confidence within the American body politic wrought by the Vietnam experience. But just as Soviet decisionmaking in the earlier postwar era had taken place against a background of overwhelming American strategic power, so the decisions of the late seventies were taken in Moscow, as in Washington and throughout Europe, against a background of growing Soviet and stagnating Western nuclear strength.

One might draw the conclusion from these events that the West should reassert that nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union upon which our security and our strategy rested through the postwar era. That is not my view. We cannot and should not seek to build our peace and freedom perpetually upon the basis of expanding nuclear arsenals.

In the short run, we have no alternative but to compete with the Soviet Union in this field, not in the pursuit of superiority but merely of balance. It is thus essential that the United States maintain a modern and survivable nuclear capability in each leg of the strategic triad -- sea, land, and air-based. It is similarly important that France and Britain maintain and modernize their independent strategic capabilities.

Now, the Soviet Union, however, does not share our view of what constitutes a stable nuclear balance. It has chosen instead to build nuclear forces clearly designed to strike first and thus disarm their adversary. The Soviet Union is now moving toward deployment of new mobile MIRV'ed missiles which have these capabilities plus the potential to avoid detection, monitoring, or arms control verification. In doing this the Soviet Union is undermining stability and the basis for mutual deterrence.

One can imagine several possible responses to the continued Soviet buildup of nuclear forces. On the one hand, we can ask the Soviet Union to reduce its offensive systems through equitable, verifiable arms control measures. We are pressing that case in Geneva. Thus far, however, we've heard nothing new from the other side.

A second possibility would be for the West to step up our current modernization effort to keep up with constantly accelerating Soviet deployments, not to regain superiority but merely to keep up with Soviet deployments. But is this really an acceptable alternative? Even if this course could be sustained by the West, it would produce a less stable strategic balance than the one we have today. Must we accept an endless process of nuclear arms competition? I don't think so. We need a better guarantee of peace than that.

And fortunately, there is a third possibility. It is to offset the continued Soviet offensive buildup in destabilizing weapons by developing defenses against these weapons. In 1983 I launched a new research program -- the Strategic Defense Initiative.

The state of modern technology may soon make possible, for the first time, the ability to use nonnuclear systems to defeat ballistic missiles. The Soviets themselves have long recognized the value of defensive systems and have invested heavily in them. Indeed, they have spent as much on defensive systems as they have on offensive systems for more than 20 years.

Now, this research program will take time. As we proceed with it, we will remain within existing treaty constraints. We will also consult in the closest possible fashion with our allies. And when the time for decisions on the possible production and deployment of such systems comes, we must and will discuss and negotiate these issues with the Soviet Union.

Both for the short- and the long-term I'm confident that the West can maintain effective military deterrence. But surely we can aspire to more than maintaining a state of highly armed truce in international politics.

During the 1970's we went to great lengths to restrain unilaterally our strategic weapons programs out of the conviction that the Soviet Union would adhere to certain rules in its conduct -- rules such as neither side seeking to gain unilateral advantage at the expense of the other. Those efforts of the early 1970's resulted in some improvements in Europe, the Berlin Quadripartite Agreement being the best example. But the hopes for a broader and lasting moderation of the East-West competition foundered in Angola, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua.

The question before us today is whether we have learned from those mistakes, and can we undertake a stable and peaceful relationship with the Soviet Union based upon effective deterrence and the reduction of tensions. I believe we can. I believe we've learned that fruitful cooperation with the Soviet Union must be accompanied by successful competition in areas, particularly Third World areas where the Soviets are not yet prepared to act with restraint.

[At this point, some members of the audience walked out.]

You know, I've learned something useful. Maybe if I talk long enough in my own Congress, some of those will walk out.

But let me talk about the reflections which have molded our policy toward the Soviet Union. That policy embodies the following basic elements:

While we maintain deterrence to preserve the peace, the United States will make a steady, sustained effort to reduce tensions and solve problems in its relations with the Soviet Union.

The United States is prepared to conclude fair, equitable, verifiable agreements for arms reduction, above all with regard to offensive nuclear weapons.

The United States will insist upon compliance with past agreements, both for their own sake and to strengthen confidence in the possibility of future accords.

The United States seeks no unilateral advantages and, of course, can accept none on the Soviet side.

The United States will proceed in full consultation with its allies, recognizing that our fates are intertwined and we must act in unity.

The United States does not seek to undermine or change the Soviet system nor to impinge upon the security of the Soviet Union. At the same time it will resist attempts by the Soviet Union to use or threaten force against others or to impose its system on others by force.

Ultimately, I hope the leaders of the Soviet Union will come to understand that they have nothing to gain from attempts to achieve military superiority or to spread their dominance by force but have much to gain from joining the West in mutual arms reduction and expanding cooperation.

I have directed the Secretary of State to engage with the Soviet Union on an extended agenda of problem solving. Yet even as we embark upon new efforts to sustain a productive dialog with the Soviet Union, we're reminded of the obstacles posed by our so fundamentally different concepts of humanity, of human rights, of the value of human life. The murder of Major Nicholson by a Soviet soldier in East Germany and the Soviet Union's refusal to accept responsibility for this act is only the latest reminder.

If we're to succeed in reducing East-West tensions, we must find means to ensure against the arbitrary use of lethal force in the future, whether against individuals like Major Nicholson or against groups such as the passengers on a jumbo jet.

It is for that reason that I would like to outline for you today what I believe would be a useful way to proceed. I propose that the United States and the Soviet Union take four practical steps.

First, that our two countries make a regular practice of exchanging military observers at military exercises and locations. We now follow this practice with many other nations, to the equal benefit of all parties.

Second, as I believe it is desirable for the leaders of the United States and Soviet Union to meet and tackle problems, I am also convinced that the military leaders of our nations could benefit from more contact. I therefore propose that we institute regular, high-level contacts between Soviet and American military leaders to develop better understanding and to prevent potential tragedies from occurring.

Third, I urge that the Conference on Disarmament in Europe act promptly and agree on the concrete confidence-building measures proposed by the NATO countries. The United States is prepared to discuss the Soviet proposal on nonuse of force in the context of Soviet agreement to concrete confidence-building measures.

Fourth, I believe a permanent military-to-military communications link could serve a useful purpose in this important area of our relationship. It could be the channel for exchanging notifications and other information regarding routine military activities, thereby reducing the chances of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. And over time, it might evolve into a risk-reduction mechanism for rapid communication and exchange of data in times of crisis.

These proposals are not cure-alls for our current problems. They will not compensate for the deaths which have occurred. But as terrible as past events have been, it would be more tragic if we were to make no attempt to prevent even larger tragedies from occurring through lack of contact and communication.

We in the West have much to do, and we must do it together. We must remain unified in the face of attempts to divide us and strong in spite of attempts to weaken us. And we must remember that our unity and strength are not a mere impulse of like-minded allies, but the natural result of our shared love for liberty.

Surely we have no illusions that convergence of the Communist system and the free societies of the West is likely. We're in for an extended period of competition of ideas. It is up to us in the West to answer whether or not we will make available the resources, ideas, and assistance necessary to compete with the Soviet Union in the Third World. We have much in our favor, not least the experience of those states which have tried Marxism and are looking for an alternative.

We do not aspire to impose our system on anyone, nor do we have pat answers for all the world's ills. But our ideals of freedom and democracy -- --

Audience members. Nicaragua! Nicaragua!

The President. Is there an echo in here? [Laughter]

Our ideals of freedom and democracy and our economic systems have proven their ability to meet the needs of our people. Our adversaries can offer their people only economic stagnation and the corrupt hand of a state and party bureaucracy which ultimately satisfy neither material nor spiritual needs.

I want to reaffirm to the people of Europe the constancy of the American purpose. We were at your side through two great wars; we have been at your side through 40 years of a sometimes painful peace. We're at your side today, because, like you, we have not veered from the ideals of the West -- the ideals of freedom, liberty, and peace. Let no one -- no one -- doubt our purpose.

The United States is committed not only to the security of Europe, we're committed to the re-creation of a larger and more genuinely European Europe. The United States is committed not only to a partnership with Europe, the United States is committed to an end to the artificial division of Europe.

We do not deny any nation's legitimate interest in security. We share the basic aspirations of all of the peoples of Europe -- freedom, prosperity, and peace. But when families are divided and people are not allowed to maintain normal human and cultural contacts, this creates international tension. Only in a system in which all feel secure and sovereign can there be a lasting and secure peace.

For this reason we will support and will encourage movement toward the social, humanitarian, and democratic ideals shared in Europe. The issue is not one of state boundaries but of ensuring the right of all nations to conduct their affairs as their peoples desire. The problem of a divided Europe, like others, must be solved by peaceful means. Let us rededicate ourselves to the full implementation of the Helsinki final act in all its aspects.

As we seek to encourage democracy, we must remember that each country must struggle for democracy within its own culture. Emerging democracies have special problems and require special help. Those nations whose democratic institutions are newly emerged and whose confidence in the process is not yet deeply rooted need our help. They should have an established community of their peers, other democratic countries to whom they can turn for support or just advice.

In my address to the British Parliament in 1982, I spoke of the need for democratic governments to spread the message of democracy throughout the world. I expressed my support for the Council of Europe's effort to bring together delegates from many nations for this purpose. I am encouraged by the product of that conference -- the Strasbourg initiative.

We in our country have launched a major effort to strengthen and promote democratic ideals and institutions. Following a pattern first started in the Federal Republic of Germany, the United States Congress approved the National Endowment for Democracy. This organization subsequently established institutes of labor, business, and political parties dedicated to programs of cooperation with

democratic forces around the world. I hope other democracies will join in this effort and contribute their wisdom and talents to this cause.

Here in Western Europe you have created a multinational democratic community in which there is a free flow of people, of information, of goods, and of culture. West Europeans move frequently and freely in all directions, sharing and partaking of each other's ideas and culture. It is my hope that in the 21st century, which is only 15 years away, all Europeans, from Moscow to Lisbon, will be able to travel without a passport; and the free flow of people and ideas will include the other half of Europe. It is my fervent wish that in the next century there will be one free Europe.

I do not believe those who say the people of Europe today are paralyzed and pessimistic. And I would say to those who think this, Europe, beloved Europe, you are greater than you know. You are the treasury of centuries of Western thought and Western culture; you are the father of Western ideals and the mother of Western faith. Europe, you have been the power and the glory of the West, and you are a moral success. In the horrors after World War II, you rejected totalitarianism; you rejected the lure of the new superman and a new Communist man; you proved that you were and are a moral triumph.

You in the West are a Europe without illusions, a Europe firmly grounded in the ideals and traditions that made her greatness, a Europe unbound and unfettered by a bankrupt ideology. You are today a new Europe on the brink of a new century, a democratic community with much to be proud of.

We have so much to do. The work ahead is not unlike the building of a great cathedral. The work is slow, complicated, and painstaking. It's passed on with pride from generation to generation. It's the work not only of leaders but of ordinary people. The cathedral evolves as it is created, with each generation adding its own vision. But the initial ideal remains constant, and the faith that drives the vision persists. The results may be slow to see, but our children and their children will trace in the air the emerging arches and spires and know the faith and dedication and love that produced them. My friends, Europe is the cathedral, and it is illuminated still.

And if you doubt your will and your spirit and your strength to stand for something, think of those people 40 years ago who wept in the rubble, who laughed in the streets, who paraded across Europe, who cheered Churchill with love and devotion, who sang the "Marseillaise" down the boulevards. Spirit like that does not disappear; it cannot perish; it will not go. There is too much left unsung within it.

I would like to just conclude with one line, if I could, and say we've seen evidence here of your faith in democracy, in the ability of some to speak up freely as they preferred to speak. And yet I can't help but remind all of us that some who take advantage of that right of democracy seem unaware that if the government that they would advocate became reality, no one would have that freedom to speak up again.

Thank you all for your graciousness on this great day. Thank you, and God bless you all. Thank you.

Note: The President spoke at 2:35 p.m. in the assembly chamber at the Palais de l'Europe. He was introduced by Pierre Pflimlin, President of the European Parliament. Following his address, the President met briefly with Marcelino Oreja, Secretary General of the Council of Europe. He then traveled to Lisbon, Portugal.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/50885a.htm>