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U.S. and Europe: Advancing the Freedom Agenda Together

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Address to the Baltimore Council on Foreign Affairs
Baltimore, Maryland
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[As delivered]

It's a pleasure to be here tonight with you and a pleasure actually to get out of Washington this evening, maybe any evening, but it is especially good to be here with you at the Baltimore Council on Foreign Affairs. Thank you for turning out. There are too many of us to cram into one of H.L. Mencken's Mount Vernon hideouts, or it might be worth it to get his take on Washington. Or we can meet in Fells Point for a good local ale. Come to think of it, maybe Edgar Allan Poe could better describe Washington.

It is an honor to be in your company. It's an honor to be here, knowing John Lewis Gaddis will be here; he's a good man and a friend. It's good to have an opportunity to discuss with you America's strategy in the world and our alliance with Europe in pursuing it. We must look beyond the media cycle and beyond the political cycle. The hardest part of strategic foreign policy thinking is to understand the difference between the headlines and what counts, between the urgent task of the day and what it is you're really trying to do. As my boss Condoleezza Rice has said, strategy consists of understanding where history is going, and then getting behind it and giving it a push.

In my view, and the theme of my remarks this evening, is that history is moving in the direction of freedom, and that the role of the United States is to get behind freedom and, yes, give it a push. American support for freedom is the foundation of the Bush Administration's foreign policy. From fledgling democracies along Europe's Frontiers of Freedom to the reformers in China, from the liberated peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq to the people of Iran who deserve freedom, support for freedom is a task for America and the international community. I said that support for freedom was a centerpiece of the Bush Administration foreign policies, and so it is, but I also believe that support for freedom has been a persistent theme of American foreign policy since America's rise to power at the turn of the 20th century. Support for freedom is not just a tactic or tool in an America's national security strategy – it is THE core concept of our national grand strategy and,

I believe, has been so for over a century.

That is one point. My second point this evening is America cannot advance freedom alone. Nor are we alone. Europe and the United States are essentially united in this great task. Together, we are putting the political, economic and security assets of the transatlantic community to work outside Europe in support of freedom-seekers around the world.

The Concerted Effort of Free Nations

Many of you at this point maybe wonder at my assertion of Transatlantic comity, especially since so much has been and is being written about the so call crisis of the Transatlantic alliance.

But Secretary Rice and our boss, President Bush, believe in that alliance. In his Second Inaugural address, the President said it very clearly: "All the allies of the United States can know we honor your friendship, we rely on your counsel and we depend on your help. The concerted effort of free nations to promote democracy is a prelude to our enemies' defeat." Let me repeat that: "The concerted effort of free nations to promote democracy is a prelude to our enemies' defeat."

Since the President's Second Inaugural, which set out the freedom agenda, we have made significant progress in putting this "concerted effort of free nations" to work on an agenda of worldwide action.

Just last week you saw German Chancellor Merkel at the White House alongside President Bush stating her commitment to Transatlantic unity in confronting the challenge of Iran, and solidarity in advancing freedom throughout the world.

The day before Chancellor Merkel arrived in Washington, I was in Austria, meeting with my counterparts from the 25 nations of the European Union, discussing how we could advance freedom in Belarus, consolidate it in Ukraine, and support forces of freedom in other countries.

Last November, European foreign ministers met with Secretary Rice and counterparts from the Broader Middle East at the "Forum for the Future" in Bahrain to pledge support for democratic reform and reformers in that region. And in December, NATO Foreign Ministers met in Brussels to approve the way ahead for NATO’s expanding mission to increase security in Afghanistan.

That is the reality of transatlantic cooperation today; Chancellor Merkel’s language of common purpose is what we hear from European governments, so that a strong Europe can act in partnership with the United States. What we no longer hear are the voices calling for a strong Europe as a counterweight to the United States – a check on U.S. economic, political and military power. Despite the debate in 2003 and 2004 over Iraq, there exists, I contend, a developing transatlantic consensus that our shared interests cannot be separated from our shared values, that democratic governance has a greater legitimacy than other forms of government, and that this is true everywhere in the world. More, there exists a growing consensus that the purpose of U.S.-European cooperation is not to simply manage problems, or serve as a regulator of value-free competition, but to support common action in the pursuit of freedom.

Now, I am aware, painfully, of the skepticism with which European publics regard the United States, and, frankly, regard this Administration. Skeptics, by nature, make news. And the media has long given more-than-ample attention to

occasional lurid poll results that show divisions, divides, gaps, and mutual skepticism between Americans and Europeans. But most have overlooked other, more hopeful signs. According to the German Marshall Fund poll released last September, an enormous majority of European public opinion – 74 percent – supports joint European-American action to advance democracy in the world. While the same poll reflected a desire for Europe to take on "superpower status," the Europeans look for their "superpower" to join the United States in support of the number one U.S. foreign policy objective – the advancement of freedom.

Actions to Advance Freedom

Now, talk can be cheap. And theory can be cheap. Theory is useful to the degree that it produces useful actions, and the time has come to put theory to work in the service of freedom. That is our objective for 2006.

Let me report to you the actions the United States and Europe have been taking to advance freedom. And let me outline what we hope to achieve together this year.

In the Balkans, rather than wait to be overtaken by the next disaster, the so called Contact Group, which bring together the United States, Russia, and key European countries, has launched an effort to resolve the last major open question in that region, which is Kosovo's final status. As part of this effort, we are advancing prospects for a European future for Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, and Serbia and Montenegro as well, if they meet the conditions. Having set the stage over the past few months, in 2006, we – the United States and Europe – will have to show united strength to bring the Balkans from post-war to pre-Europe.

In Eastern Europe and Eurasia, the United States and Europe have acted to support and now to consolidate democracy in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan; to help the Belarusian people achieve democracy; and to encourage countries such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to move more decisively and consistently in the direction of democracy.

In 2006, we must be prepared to stand by our friends, like Presidents Saakashvili of Georgia and Yushchenko of Ukraine, when they are under pressure, as they sometimes are, and to push our friends to maintain their reforms, even in the face of difficulties.

Just over the past couple of weeks, we have seen how real these pressures are. On New Year’s Day, the Russians turned off the flow of natural gas to Ukraine in what appeared to be political pressure. This raised new questions about Russia’s intentions toward its neighbors, and Russia’s willingness to assume its responsibilities as a major, reliable energy supplier. The clear and swift reaction from Europe and the United States alleviated this crisis for the moment and pointed both Russia and Ukraine towards steps each needed to take. But the United States and Europe will have to work together in 2006, and with willing partners in the region, hopefully Russia and certainly the gas producers of Central Asia, to bring transparency, genuine market principles, and openness to the European and Eurasian energy market.

In Eurasia, we will have to demonstrate clarity about our goals – democracy, and, through democracy, stability and strengthened sovereignty – while being realistic about what we can achieve in any given year and in any given election.

We will have to be prepared in 2006 to stand up for freedom in the face of dictators.

In Uzbekistan, the United States faced a choice last summer. We could have kept our military base in Karshi-Khanabad had we turned a blind eye to President Karimov's attempt to grab 450 refugees who had fled after the crackdown at Andijon. We could have saved an important facility used to support our operations in Afghanistan had we soft-pedaled our reaction to the human rights abuses. We could have, but we didn't. We chose to save lives rather than wink at dictatorship. And the pressure on Tashkent came not just from Washington, but also from capitals across Europe. When it came time to get the Uzbek refugees out of harm's way, the government of Romania opened its doors. So Americans and Europeans, again, showed commitment to the same goals.

In Belarus, we stand together with the European Union in our call for free and fair elections this March. As the nations along the Frontiers of Freedom open their societies and reconnect with the world, the Belarusian government knows that it is doomed to isolation if it continues to stifle voices of freedom. There is no space between Europeans and Americans on Belarus.

Transatlantic cooperation has also focused on the Middle East. We have advanced Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking further than almost anyone in Europe thought possible. Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza and the opening of the Rafah crossing – with the European Union, by the way, taking on a major security responsibility – has given the Palestinian people a chance to start building their future state in reality, not just in rhetoric. Now we stand ready to help the Palestinians develop effective instruments of governance, as they must if they are to achieve the statehood they seek and deserve.

NATO at the Core of the Global Democratic Security Community

NATO stands at the center of our global democratic security community. And NATO is a place where transatlantic power – and I mean power in the broadest sense, including also political, economic and moral power – is translated into action. We have outlined the way ahead to strengthen NATO and to give it the tools it needs to secure and advance freedom. NATO continues to change radically from its Cold War identity. As the Wall came down, NATO was wonderfully prepared to fight one big war in Europe, but had never fired a shot in anger. There was constant commentary about NATO going out of business. And there was vigorous debate about whether NATO should ever act "out of area," meaning outside Europe.

Today, NATO is an alliance in action, with operations across the globe – from Afghanistan, to Iraq, the Mediterranean and the Balkans – in support of transatlantic security. The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, mission in Afghanistan showcases the capabilities that the alliance has developed – supporting President Karzai's government's efforts to build freedom and security for a nation even as the U.S. and other Coalition partners root out the remnants of the Taliban and their terrorist allies.

This November at NATO's summit in Riga, we need to give NATO the tools it needs to do its job.

"Go Forward All Together" in Iraq

Let me now turn to three additional issues that will occupy much transatlantic attention in the coming year.

In Iraq, political debate and jockeying for power is taking place in the aftermath of that country's December elections.

We tend to get stuck looking at the news of the day, but if you take a step back and look at the past year, it's clear that Iraq has undergone a remarkable political transformation.

The American debate on Iraq has escalated in a way that I see as understandable – I'm glad that I live in a country where issues of war and peace are debated – but the debate often seems disconnected from progress on the ground. In the meantime, however the European debate has moved forward in an interesting and frankly welcome direction. I'm hearing more and more voices like that of Chancellor Merkel, who reminded Americans and Europeans alike that a democratic Iraq is in everyone's interest. Even French officials like French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin now say the international community must "go forward all together" to achieve success.

Given the history of the debate between the Americans and the Europeans on Iraq, with the Germans and French sounding like this, clearly, some corner has been turned.

Whatever our disagreements with Europe about the decision to remove Saddam Hussein from power, Europeans have come to realize that democracy's failure in Iraq would be a grave blow to our common security and to the prospects for reform and stability throughout the Middle East. In contrast, success in Iraq would set the stage for the advancement of the freedom agenda throughout that region.

But words are not enough. It is important that Europeans act on that realization. As the new Iraqi government takes shape, it will be the most democratic government in the region, a government elected by the people, for the people of that long-suffering nation. This new government deserves our support, and it deserves the support of democratic allies around the world. This will give Europeans the chance to support fully the Iraqi people and their elected government. That support can take many forms – military, capacity-building, political support – but it needs to be unstinting.

Agenda of Hope in Iran

In recent weeks, U.S., European, and indeed international patience with Iran has ended. Over the past year, we worked closely with the EU-3 – France, Germany, Britain – to curtail Iran's nuclear weapons program and find a way forward. We're on the same page with the Europeans, but the Iranian regime is off in its own world.

Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons is alarming. But the problem is broader. Not only is the regime in Tehran determined to develop nuclear weapons; it also supports terrorism. Not only does it support terrorism, but the regime is hostile to democracy in principle. Ahmadi-Nejad's bizarre remarks about destroying Israel remind one of another era. In some ways, this is just another dictatorship desperately trying to legitimize its rule by externalizing an imagined threat. In other ways, this is a dictatorship seeking to misuse Islam – a religion that the United States holds in the greatest respect – as an excuse for justifying threats and violence. But in any case, in its current anti-Semitic, Holocaust-denying form, this raving is as familiar as it is ugly.

This ugliness runs contrary to the honor and respect that we have for the Iranian people. As Secretary Rice said last week, "This about the Iranian regime and it is the Iranian regime that is isolating Iran." As she noted, "The Iranian people, frankly, deserve better."

We do, indeed, need to draw a distinction. Have the Iranian people chosen the path of increasing international isolation?

Do they support the regime and its hate-filled language? We should not assume so. Iran is home to a great civilization, a people with a glorious past and, one would hope, equally glorious future.

To draw a parallel, we did not wage the Cold War against the peoples of captive nations. We knew that the communist regimes and their peoples were distinct. We should not now accept that theocracy and isolation are the fate or desire of the Iranian people. International pressure on the regime may increase in 2006. It should, but the world's democracies should at the same time reach out to the Iranian people. In addition to our efforts to deal with the nuclear challenge, in 2006 the United States and Europe should offer an agenda of hope for Iran.

Not so far from Tehran, across the border to the west, Iraq's Shia and other communities are realizing their aspirations through democracy. The changes taking place there, the hope for a brighter tomorrow, are being noted by the Iranian people.

Reform in the Broader Middle East

This brings me to the third and final major item on the U.S.-European agenda: our combined efforts to advance reform in the broader Middle East. You may recall – I certainly recall – the skepticism and, frankly, the derision with which this initiative was greeted when the administration launched it two years ago. But as with the case of European attitudes toward Iraq, that skepticism has changed.

Just before Thanksgiving, I traveled with Secretary Rice to Bahrain for a meeting of senior officials and civil society pioneers from Europe and the region.

What I heard from civil society leaders such as Egypt’s Saad Ibrahim was remarkable. While many Europeans approach discussions of reform in the Broader Middle East cautiously, fearing high expectations for democracy, we heard the boldest words, the most ambitious hopes coming from the people of the region.

Now, do the governments of the region embrace these democratic dreams with the same enthusiasm? Perhaps not yet. But reformers are there, in and out of government. And the United States and Europe, the two great centers of democratic legitimacy in the world, are standing with them. And our faith in democracy – our faith in the natural right and longing of every man, woman and child to be able to guide their future – should not be less than those of the reformers in the region.

In 2006, let us reach out, assist and empower reforms and reformers in the Broader Middle East. We should work with them as Secretary Rice has said, to transform volatile status quos that have no future and perhaps and certainly no purpose. We must not be impatient, but we have started and we must keep faith with our values and with those in the region who share them.

We in government frequently overestimate what can be accomplished in the short run. But we often underestimate what we can accomplish in the long run. Those of us who lived through the dramatic changes that swept across Eastern Europe in a very short period of history know that the status quo does not last forever. In the broader Middle East, too, we have made a start and we must continue.

What does Europe Bring to the Table?

I'd like to make one final point before hearing from you.

Why Europe? What does Europe bring to the table? What can we do with Europe that we can't do alone?

Let me acknowledge, at the risk of igniting the debate from the recent past, that unilateral American action is always an option. But you know and I know, that it is not the best option. We and our friends and Allies throughout the world, starting with Europe, can and must do better.

Together, America and Europe constitute a single democratic civilization with common values. Together, America and Europe constitute a quorum of democratic legitimacy. That is not a legal observation so much as a political one, but I believe it to be accurate. When divided, we create a moral fog over events and their significance. When united, we are clear. The friends of freedom want the United States and Europe to be united. The enemies of freedom would rather we stayed in the fog.

Do we differ with Europe on tactics? At times. And they with us. During the Cold War, we differed nearly every day. But our united strategy, rooted in common values, led to victory. And in this present battle for freedom, in the face of this latest iteration of totalitarian ideology, our current strategy, rooted in those values, with America and Europe together, will also result in victory.

Thank you, and I look forward hearing from you.

Question: Would you please define freedom?

Ambassador Fried: Would I please define freedom?

We could obviously have a very long discussion of this, but I will define freedom for these purposes as rooted in a democratic political system which in turn is rooted in recognition of the inalienable rights of people.

Now there is behind this a large debate as to whether freedom is the exclusive property of European civilizations and the immediate heirs to European civilizations, and it is often said in a rather crude way that democracy is not for Arabs. You haven't said that. I've heard it said, including by some Europeans.

A fundamental belief of this Administration is that freedom is for everyone. President Bush has said that freedom is not America's gift. It is rooted, as he says, in the Almighty's gift of dignity to every person.

It also seems to me, and Secretary Rice says this more eloquently than I'm about to, that democracy and freedom is in fact a natural state of affairs – more natural than dictatorship. Dictatorship is in fact imposed, and we know this because dictators use secret police, crooked courts…

Question: [off mike]

[Laughter].

Ambassador Fried: No. No. We don't. I believe there is a fundamental difference between democracies with their flaws and their imperfections – and I do believe that since human beings are not perfectible, our institutions are also not perfect – and totalitarian countries. I've lived in totalitarian countries and there is a fundamental difference.

There is a difference between a country where the issues of war and peace, the issues of one government's approach to legal issues, to fighting the war on terrorism is debated, and a government where raising those questions gets you fired from your job and thrown into prison. Okay? So I'll take on that battle.

Voice: Can I help you?

Ambassador Fried: Please do.

Question: I'm Alla Ohliger. I'm with Lockheed Martin. I've been in the United States for 26 years.

Voices: We can't hear you.

Question: I'm Alla Ohliger. I'm with Lockheed Martin. I've been in the United States for 26 years. I was born in Russia, former Soviet Union. I was born, received my education and I didn't realize what freedom was until I left Russia and I arrived in the United States.

You take freedom for granted. Freedom is everything. You can speak about everything you want. You can do everything you want. I am so thankful to all your efforts that the United States is doing in Ukraine and Belarus to promote freedom and democracy, because I want the people that I left behind to have the same freedom that I have here. And I want to tell you that your speech really touched me. And I am just so excited because of all of these activities, and I'm hoping all the other people will be just as happy as I am.

I've been here for all these years and I am 100 percent U.S. citizen, and I would die for this country. Unless you really experience other boundaries of the freedom, it's very difficult to understand what freedom is.

[Applause].

Ambassador Fried: I won't try to improve on that.

[Applause].

Question: What, if anything, is your government doing to advance freedom in Russia and in Saudi Arabia?

Ambassador Fried: The question was: What is the U.S. government doing to advance freedom in Russia and Saudi Arabia?

Two different questions, two different answers.

In Russia we are concerned by what is unquestionably backsliding from the more hopeful period of the mid '90s. The pressure on the free media; the government takeover of all, I believe all national television networks; pressures on NGOs; the climate of, some have called it a climate of fear, others have called it a climate of repression, others call it managed democracy, is something of consistent concern to us.

It is certainly true that our relations with Russia in the end are affected by our assessment of where that country is going, whether it is moving in a democratic direction or whether it is moving backwards and it does affect our relations, it does affect our ability to look at Russia as a partner.

We do have a lot of interests with Russia. We have to work with them. We're going to work with them on the Balkans, on Iran, in the Middle East. But our concern about Russia also requires us to reach out to Russian civil society, to express our concerns when we have them, and to support the civil society activists as best we can.

Now in Saudi Arabia, when we announced, when the Administration started talking about freedom in the broader Middle East, the question, the equivalent question to yours that I heard was: It's all very well to say so in Washington. Are you going to say so in Saudi Arabia or Egypt? Are you going to go there? So Rice went to Cairo University and gave a speech on freedom in the broader Middle East.

What we have done, what this Administration has done, is removed, quite frankly, a red line around the broader Middle East that had existed for decades. A red line that said, well, human rights is very well, but not for this part of the world, okay? Not for this part of the world.

President Bush has been accused of a lot of things. One of the things he's been accused of is never admitting any mistake. But when we began to launch this initiative, in his speech which he did in London in 2003, he got up and said American Administrations have been wrong for the past 60 years, because we simply tried to buy security by sacrificing freedom – and we got neither.

We have succeeded, and the "we" in this case is not just the Bush Administration, because there are a lot of – this is broader. It's Europeans and others who support us. We have managed to change the conversation about freedom in the Middle East. Now, whether it's us or whether we're simply following people in the region that are doing it, I can't say. I suspect it's the latter, but I'm proud to be part of this process.

Freedom, democracy, reform is now front and center in the region, including in Saudi Arabia. To make change happen, you first have to change the intellectual climate. You have to have people thinking about it and talking about it. Then you have rulers who will either institute reforms or pretend to, but you have begun changing things, and that's what we've decided to do. That's where we are putting our efforts.

Question: Can you explain why Iran is not a democracy since this clown was elected by 56 percent of the vote?

Ambassador Fried: The question was, if I got it right: Why do we not consider Iran a democracy since President Ahmadi-Nejad – I believe you called him "this clown" – [Laughter] – your words, not mine, was elected with 56 percent of

the vote?

Of course I call that a so-called election because all the candidates were vetted by the Guardian Council. It is not an election when an unelected group of rulers decides who can and cannot run. So I don't count that as a free election.

I don't know what the Iranian people really think. I don't know how they would behave if there were a democracy in which people could run because they wanted to run as opposed to people running who had been vetted by an unelected group of rulers.

So, no, I don't consider Iran to be a democracy, and that kind of election doesn't cut it in my book.

Question: I fully agree with you on democracy, and democracy generally means the people rule, or something like that. But there is another side. There are people who say that people shouldn't rule; God should rule. And so it becomes a theocracy, as you have in Iran.

Is there a discrepancy there between democracy, as we see it, and a theocracy, or God ruling, as you see in some strains of Islam?

Ambassador Fried: The question was about theocratic strains in Islam, and can a democracy be applied to the Islamic world when there is such a strong tradition of God ruling instead of people ruling?

This is a good question. I had this conversation with the senior Turkish official who heads the equivalent of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Turkey, and I put that question to him. I've not forgotten his response. It was fascinating. He said in the Ottoman Empire, during the time of the caliphate – so this is the 19th century – we worked out the concept of the separation of mosque and state. The concept we worked out is that political sovereignty rests with the people. It is not a challenge to God. It is simply separate from God. Political sovereignty rests with the people. Those were his words.

And he said, now remember, it's not just Istanbul where we worked it out. If we figured this out in Istanbul it was also known in Cairo and in Damascus. Don't forget that. He said, don't go on about moderate Islam, because that suggests that Islam itself is not moderate, that you have to modify it, you have to throw an adjective in front of it. Islam, he said, recognizes the separation of mosque and state. It recognizes the principle of democracy. These people who claim otherwise are not acting in the Islamic tradition.

Now look, I'm not an Islamic scholar, but that was very impressive.

All religions have dealt with issues of God's realm, man's realm, where you draw the line. We debate that in this country, obviously. But I can't accept that Islam is such a special world that democracy does not apply. After all, Turkey is a democracy, and the ruling party there started out as an Islamist party and now if you ask them what they are, they say, yeah, we're about as Islamic as a Christian Democratic party in Germany is Christian. That is from that tradition we are a modern center-right party. Others would disagree and they say, you know, strip away the mask and it's bad. But so far the Turkish AK party [Justice and Development Party], has been a democratic, responsible party, very popular, and determined to take Turkey into Europe.

That's a good question and we've thought about it. That's the best I can do as an answer.

Question: I would like to ask you a question as a person who disagrees with this Administration. I understand your loyalty to Condoleezza and to the President. I feel loyal to this country, too, but I want to understand from you and from your mentors why you would go into Iraq and try to bring democracy there and not know what the circumstances would be once you got there. And I resent paying $6 to $7 billion a month on things that you're talking about doing now with Europe wherever there is not [inaudible]. Think of the money you would have had to have done things for the civilian populations of the world instead of this arrogant militarism.

[Applause].

Ambassador Fried: The question was, if I do you justice, ma'am, why did the Administration go into Iraq so heedlessly with such bad results? And could this money and these resources not have been better spent helping other people in the world, if I've got the spirit right?

Question: Cooperatively.

Ambassador Fried: Yes.

In the end, this Administration will be judged by the outcome in Iraq to a very great degree, and that outcome, in my view, is, A) as yet unknown; and, B) more likely in my view to be successful than I suspect in your view, though I don't want to speak for you.

We could spend the rest of the evening debating Iraq, pro and con. As the Administration saw it, after September 11th our tolerance for dictators with a history of using weapons of mass destruction – and there is no debate about Saddam Hussein's history of using chemical weapons – was limited. We regarded it as a strategic problem.

There will be books written about what we did right and what we did wrong. However it ends up in Iraq, I suspect everything written in 20 years will show that the result, whatever it is, was inevitable. That is the trouble with making judgments now when you're in the middle of a situation like this, of a conflict like this, is that we don't yet know how it will turn out. But I suspect it will turn out better than many believe.

At the moment, the challenge we have in Iraq is to support the Iraqi people, who have made their choice known by going to the polls repeatedly and in increasing numbers each time to vote for democratic governance.

The nature of the enemy we face in Iraq is also pretty clear. These are people who are killing other Iraqi civilians and would kill more if they could.

The Iraqi people in overwhelming numbers have voted for their own democratic future. The Iraqi people also want to build their institutions so that the Coalition forces leave.

It's our responsibility at this point, regardless of the debate about the wisdom of the decision in 2004 – I think it was the

right decision. You and others disagree. Regardless of that decision or the stewardship in Iraq that has been ours, we have a responsibility to make that place the best possible country we can, working with the Iraqi people.

That's all I can say at this point. I appreciate the American debate, and I'm glad we have this kind of a debate, but that's the view I have.

Question: What is the Administration's opinion of Turkey's eventual admittance into the EU?

Ambassador Fried: Of Turkey's?

Question: Turkey.

Ambassador Fried: The question was: What is the Administration's position about Turkey's entry into the European Union?

We have always supported it, assuming that Turkey fulfills the criteria. The European Union invited Turkey to come in. Turkey's got to make the grade. If it does, it should be in.

I also think it would be a good thing for Europe, a good thing for the Middle East, a good thing for a forum, generally, if Turkey were to succeed in joining the European Union. So the European Union would not be a Christian club; it would be a club of European countries linked by values and aspirations. So, a very clear position.

Question: You mentioned Azerbaijan earlier in your speech, a country with oil near Iraq and Iran. We're training some of their military officers with our military [inaudible] the basic school. And they had an unusual election this fall. Can you comment on our policy towards that country?

Ambassador Fried: The question was about Azerbaijan – they have oil, they have gas. We are helping train their military. The questioner said they had an unusual election. My comment is that's a polite way of saying a very flawed election, an imperfect election, which is what I suspect you meant, and what's our policy toward the country?

I said earlier that we need to be very clear about what we want, which is democracy, and very realistic about what we can achieve in any country, in any given year, in any given election.

Azerbaijan's last parliamentary elections did not meet the standard of free and fair, but they weren't a complete joke either. There was an opposition. The opposition campaigned.

When we looked at the election, there were some districts where there was fraud committed and where an honest observer couldn't certify the results in that district as being fair. In other places, the results were pretty straight. The exit polls and the official results matched up pretty well.

What's our policy? We want to see Azerbaijan secure, sovereign, prospering, and democratic. All of those things. And we push them on democracy. We also support them in their economic reforms. We work with them on security issues. They are a little worried about Iran. They're in a rough neighborhood.

We also want to see peace in the region. They've been in a dispute with Armenia, which has resulted in war and conflict over the past 15 years or so, and we want to see that end.

So Azerbaijan is an example of a country where our rhetoric, our objectives, meet hard reality, and you have, in the Administration one has to push as best you can to get the best results you can; clear about your objectives; and move on from there.

We deal with countries which are in a kind of halfway stage – not vicious dictatorships, not fully democratic – all the time. We face these questions every day.

I don't know that there's a right answer, but we do the best we can.

Question: You talked about the words of the second inaugural, where the President said we welcome the counsel of our allies and we depend on their aid. Going into Iraq we obviously didn't listen to the counsel of our allies and they withheld their aid.

Does that indicate in the future that in fact you do have to pay attention, you can't go alone as Sir Galahad into the world, but you have to pay attention in fact to what other people are telling you, listen to it more carefully if in fact you do depend in some way on their aid, either immediately or down the road?

Ambassador Fried: I think that's basically right.

Sorry, the question was: The President spoke of depending on the counsel of allies, but we went into Iraq without allies, so doesn't that mean we have to listen more and better in the future? Is that about right? Okay.

Look, in Iraq we actually – Europeans were divided about Iraq. We did not go in alone. The British, the Spanish, the Poles, the Australians, the Portuguese, a lot of others were with us. The French and the Germans were solidly against it, so were the Belgians. So European governments were divided. That's just a fact.

Most NATO countries at one time had some forces in Iraq. That's also a fact.

But what you're saying is not completely wrong. Obviously, a lot of European publics were pretty much against the decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein, and there was a lot of talk in the first term about coalitions of the willing and unilateralism and a huge debate about this.

We want to strengthen the institutions that bring together Europe and the United States. We want to strengthen NATO as an institution. Now, notice what I didn't say. I didn't say we want to strengthen NATO so it can support coalitions of the willing. I said we want to strengthen NATO as an institution. We want to work with Europe – Europe as such. That means spending a lot of time consulting with Europe, achieving a consensus, listening to Europeans about tactics, and we've been doing a lot of that lately. I'm going to Belarus in two weeks, and I'm going with the European Union, a joint trip.

On Ukraine, when the Russians cut off the gas, the first call I made was to the European Union to coordinate a response on the morning of January 1st. I won't forget it.

What you say is essentially correct – that we need to be working with Europe. Europe needs to work with us as well. We need to spend less time debating the nature of the U.S.-European relationship and more time putting that relationship to work doing things together that need to be done. The thrust of the argument in my speech is that we are busy doing that.

Question: In the last few years there's been a lot of emphasis on the faith-based strategy. When the United States is discussing a faith-based strategy in other countries, has this strategy ever been perceived as a strategy which takes our agenda beyond the boundaries of the secular realm?

Ambassador Fried: The question was: Does the emphasis on faith-based strategies, when taken abroad, raise questions about our objectives and whether this is getting beyond a secular agenda? Is that right?

Question: Right.

Ambassador Fried: It hasn't in my opinion, in my experience. No government has come to me, even when they complain loudly about some of the things we do where they disagree with us, no government has come to me yet and said, well, we have a problem with a particular assistance program you have because it's faith-based.

When we design our work with civil society overseas, particularly when we start thinking about the Moslem world – about which the American government as an institution doesn't know a lot – we don't have a lot of institutional depth yet.

We need to be able to work with faith-based organizations – that's our term. That may not be the appropriate term for the Moslem world. And we have to become sophisticated and more knowledgeable about these issues. We have to be able to work with Moslem communities so that the Moslem identity is not defined by radicals whose ideology is extremist, if not worse.

Now that requires us to be knowledgeable and sophisticated and embrace, ecumenical in our view of what cooperation with faith-based institutions requires. That's easier said than done, but that's the way I approach the issue.

Question: So the Moslem religion is not outside of the faith-based…?

Ambassador Fried: Oh, not at all.

The question was: So Islam is not outside of the realm of faith-based initiatives? And my answer was, not at all. And it can't be.

We need to develop a sophisticated knowledge base, both in the government, but I suspect in American society also, about Islam – one of the three great Abrahamic religions, rapidly growing, rapidly growing in Europe. This is going to be a task for the next generation – in my world – the next generation of foreign policy specialists to learn about that world and be comfortable in it.

Question: What do you see going on in Yugoslavia, or actually Bosnia? Do you perceive the three communities continuing to harden to the ethnic identities and eventually forming what? There's some kind of weird artificial state right now with the Croats and the Croats, the Serbs and the Serbs, the Bosnians and the Bosniaks. Do you perceive that state actually growing in strength? Or do you see it kind of fragmenting? And what is going on in Kosovo, since you mentioned it?

Ambassador Fried: The question is: How do we see the future of Bosnia, with its three constituent peoples – Serbs, Croats, Bosnian Muslims? Is the state going to strengthen or will it fall apart? And what's happening in Kosovo?

That's interesting because today, today I had a long conversation with our Ambassador to Bosnia, discussing the latest efforts of the three communities and their political leaders to reform the Bosnian constitution to make a more functional state.

You remember Bosnia emerged, as a state, emerged in 1995, after three or four years of vicious civil war. It was put together in Dayton. Dick Holbrooke had a lot to do with putting that together, and it was an uneasy compromise between three peoples who had been at war with each other. And a nasty war.

The state has held together. There's been no fighting. The economy is a lot better than it was. Most refugees have returned. Now the question is, to answer your question, can we help that country, Bosnia, get on its feet, to get off life support and out of the intensive care ward and make its way from a post-war situation to a kind of pre-EU accession phase so that its future is Europe?

The answer is, I think so. I think it's possible. I've spent a lot of time with the Bosnians, especially this fall because it was the tenth anniversary of Dayton.

Nobody wants a war. These are politicians who guard their prerogatives, but they don't want a war, and they do understand that their state has a future, especially if that state leads them into the European Union because that is a big, big incentive for them.

Kosovo has basically been a UN protectorate since 1999. NATO – and, by the way, just for the record – NATO went to war against Milosevic without a UN sanction because the Russians would have vetoed it so it went to war anyway; forced out Milosevic's armies. Kosovo has been a UN protectorate, more or less, ever since, and the question is what are we going to do with Kosovo because the status quo won't keep?

The UN has achieved a lot there, but everyone agrees that that's no future for a country.

What is the future of Kosovo? Is it going to be an independent country? Will it go back to Serbia? There is general agreement that we have to solve this question this year. The Europeans and Americans with the Russians have something called the Contact Group which is working through these issues. The UN has appointed a senior Finnish politician, a former President, Martti Ahtisaari, to help settle this question this year, and there's going to be a very intensive period of negotiations ahead.

It's risky trying to solve a problem, but the alternative is to sit back and wait for things to collapse, which we're just unwilling

to do.

Question: When Saddam Hussein was in power in Iraq he announced to his people that he was building an atom bomb at Osiraq where the reactor was. He said it is the Tel Aviv bomb. It will wipe Israel from the face of the earth. The next morning, the Israeli Air Force took off and destroyed the Osiraq reactor.

Do you have an idea about what Mr. Ahmadi-Nejad, with the threat that he wants to wipe Israel from the map of the world, and he said he is building a bomb in Iran to do that. How is our policy going to do that, or are we going to simply hope and pray that Tel Aviv will give us another answer? [Laughter].

Ambassador Fried: The question was: What are we going to do about Iran's nuclear weapons program, given that President Ahmadi-Nejad has declared his intention and hope that Israel be wiped off the map? Will we do something ourselves, or will we wait, if I can paraphrase, for the Israelis to do the job as they did in Iraq in 1981?

We very much hope that a diplomatic solution can be found. That is where our efforts are focused at present. We're committed to pursuing that course.

We believe that the next step is to take Iran to the Security Council. We believe that Iran is, in fact, susceptible to diplomatic pressure of that sort. The Iranians claim they aren't, and when someone shouts, "I don't care what you say, I don't care what you say," you think maybe they do care what we say. And we need – Iran needs to be faced with a united diplomatic front.

The Iranians say it won't make any difference. We think it will, and we are working very closely with the so-called EU-3 – Britain, France, Germany – and reaching out to the Russians, hopefully the Chinese, other countries on the UN Security Council, and we want to pressure the Iranians so that they come back to the talks in good faith and negotiate seriously. That's where we are.

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