Volume 10. One Germany in Europe, 1989 – 2009
No to the War in Iraq (September 5, 2002)

Shortly before the Bundestag elections in Germany, and several months before international forces invaded Iraq under the leadership of the United States, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder explained his reasons for opposing such an attack. It was often said that the chancellor was extremely self-assured, especially in his relations with the United States; that assuredness comes though in this *New York Times* interview.

PERSPECTIVES/Gerhard Schröder
'No One Has a Clear Idea about What the Effects Would Be'

HANOVER, Germany, Sept. 4 — Following are excerpts from an interview with Chancellor Gerhard Schröder of Germany, reflecting on events since Sept. 11. The interview was conducted in German and translated by The New York Times.

Q: *Did Sept. 11 really change the world, or is that just an American way of looking at it?*

A: First of all, it is understandable that the reaction in America, which for the first time was attacked on its own territory, was more intense than in the rest of the world. But it was also interesting for me to observe how much it affected the Germans, for example, and others as well. The large demonstration in Berlin by 200,000 or 300,000 people was in fact a spontaneous expression of sympathy and solidarity. And I also experienced it much closer to home — if I may be permitted to say so — since my wife had once lived not far away, on the Upper West Side. [. . .]

I believe it not only changed America, but also the world, in two ways: first, it was astounding how fast and how impressively this international coalition came into being. One said that the offer of support was a self-evident duty as a friend. And Germany agreed to break with tradition in deploying military forces outside Europe.

But that is only one side of it. I think the other side is that changes have taken place because the analysis of the threat had to be changed. That is to say, in the past, countries or alliances felt themselves threatened by other countries or alliances. That was, after all, the classic confrontation in the cold war. What happened in New York and Washington — this attack on the

two cities and on the people in them — has shown that there is a privatized form of war, waged by terrorist organizations, and that we have to defend ourselves against this using appropriate means, including military means.

So I believe two things have changed. First there is the question: who is threatening the civilized world? Not only countries, but also forms of privatized violence that never used to exist in this form. And the second remarkable thing is the unity at the United Nations, rallying an international coalition against terror. It is important to keep the awareness of both alive. [. . .]

I asked myself why the attack on New York affected so many people in the world in such a special way. I think the answer has to do with the special importance that this city has always had for all those who were forced to or wanted to leave their own country. New York is thus a symbol of asylum. This was very much the case during the Nazi period in Germany. [. . .]

Q: *Your new defense minister, Peter Struck, said there was no threat to Germany from Saddam Hussein, and Condi Rice, of course, said the whole world was threatened.*

A: I think the truth lies somewhere in the middle. There is no question that dictators represent a threat. And the crucial question is: what can they do and what would they like to do to realize their threats? The problem with Saddam is making up our minds what scope for political and military action he has. Politically, he has none, unless one forces the Arab world into solidarity with him. Militarily, I believe it is hard to judge.

In my view, the threat may be overestimated by people like Ms. Rice, and underestimated by others. That is why I was one of those who were disappointed that a change of objectives took place as regards the treatment of Saddam Hussein. I think that we— all of us, together— had isolated him politically and that there was a real opportunity of using diplomatic and economic pressure to get the inspectors admitted to the country again. The moment the debate in the United States put an end to the objective of exerting every possible kind of pressure to get the inspectors readmitted to the country so that we could discover what the real situation was, and not have to rely on surmises or intelligence reports — the moment this objective was changed, the real problem began.

How can you exert pressure on someone by saying to them: Even if you accede to our demands, we will destroy you? I think that was a change of strategy in the United States — whatever the explanation may be — a change that made things difficult for others, including ourselves.

That is one thing. The other thing is consultations. In the past it was always said: Before we do anything, we will consult with our principal allies — at least with those who take an active, very active part in the fight against international terrorism. But consultation cannot mean that I get a phone call two hours in advance only to be told, “We’re going in.” Consultation among grown-up

nations has to mean not just consultation about the how and the when, but also about the whether.

Q: *Do you believe that Cheney speaks for President Bush?*

A: I am not qualified to say. The problem is that he has or seems to have committed himself so strongly that it is hard to imagine how he can climb down. And that is the real problem, that not only I have, but that all of us in Europe have. I think that a mistake has been made. It may be understandable in terms of domestic politics, but it has, of course, made things much more difficult for all those who were in agreement with the original objective of exerting pressure to have the inspectors admitted to the country.

After Sept. 11, the situation was quite different. We were among those whose military participation was likely to be requested, and we were all agreed there would be military action. And in that situation, where there is a need for secrecy, for the element of surprise, it is enough to be notified of the start of the operation just ahead of CNN or The New York Times.

The essential point is that everyone agrees on the question of whether something is going to happen. If we agree about that, we can then form different opinions, so to speak, about questions of when and how. That is the vital difference from Sept. 11. It was because I was inwardly convinced and had also been consulted that I said at the time: This thing has to be done, and I am going to force it through even if I have to call a vote of confidence, for the situation was not easy in Germany, especially with that coalition.

And that is why it is just not good enough if I learn from the American press about a speech which clearly states: We are going to do it, no matter what the world or our allies think. That is no way to treat others.

But there is another question that must be answered. According to my information, no one has a really clear idea of the political order that would follow in the Middle East. And such an idea is needed. No one has a clear idea about what the effects would be in the moderate Arab countries or what new political order might emerge after a military intervention in Iraq.

What I find particularly worrying, incidentally, is that there is so little discussion of the economic consequences for the world economy. [. . .]

There is another point I consider important. Germany is at present, after the United States, the second-largest provider of troops for international missions. We have almost 10,000 soldiers in the Balkans, involved in Enduring Freedom, and in Afghanistan. In 1998 we spent 170 million euros on international missions. This year it will be around 2 billion euros. I only mention this to make clear that no one can criticize us for lacking international solidarity. That is the one thing.

The other thing is that I was in Kabul and took a very close look at the situation. Germany is contributing a great deal to the international security force, perhaps more than any other country. I don't want to be unjust to the others, but I think this estimate is not far out. My concern is that we have not even begun to achieve in Afghanistan anything that could be called nation-building. Yet if that is not succeeding before the eyes of the whole world, what advantage are the masses in the third world going to see in the restoration of a country to the civilized world?

What I mean to say is, we have to prove that a return to the civilized community of nations brings a prosperity dividend. And many people are watching what is happening in Afghanistan. We are deeply committed there, and that is why I say: Before we have made any progress there, before we have proved to the disenfranchised masses in the third world that it is worth their while to return to the Western fold, to the civilized world, I would say that military interventions — in whatever terms they may be justified — tend to be counterproductive for the international coalition against terror.

Q: *I first understood you to say, no unilateral action in Iraq. Then later you seemed to say Germany will not participate in an attack or help pay for one no matter what the U.N. says. Which is it?*

A: Let me begin by saying that without a U.N. Security Council mandate, our Constitution would not permit any form of participation. That is quite clear.

But the other arguments that I have cited against an intervention are so important that I would also be against such an intervention if — for whatever reasons and in whatever form — the Security Council of the United Nations were to say "Yes," which I cannot imagine happening in the present situation.

I have attempted to make clear that it is not just formal considerations that induce me to say that this is the wrong way. I have told you about what harm we would do to the international coalition against terror. I have attempted to make clear that we must prove before the eyes of the world, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, that participation in the struggle against terror will also bring a peace dividend, and I know of no one who has a real concept for a new order in the Middle East which could shape the region afterward. These are for me weighty arguments that lead me to say: Of course it is important for Germany what resolutions the United Nations adopt, but these arguments — these three — they remain my own, the ones that make me say: Hands off. Especially because, as I said before, the evidence appears to be highly dubious. [. . .]

Q: *This administration is making lots of difficulties for its friends. Do you think that Sept. 11 has changed America in a way that isn't a good way?*

A: [. . .] I would like to answer that question with another: what is the duty of a friend in such a situation? It is the duty of friends to show solidarity, but also to use this tried and true solidarity

to bring rational arguments into the political debate. The duty of friends is not just to agree with everything, but to say: We disagree on this point. [. . .]

Q: *The nasty view is, you're in a tough campaign and you want to run against Bush, against America, for "peace," and change the subject from unemployment.*

A: [. . .] I would never treat this issue as a matter of tactics, because the consequences would catch up with me later. We will win in Germany, and then I will have to stick by this decision, and I know what that means. In this sense it was not a tactical variant in the election campaign. [. . .]