

Bush seeks to fix turbulent relationship with Europe

BY TERENCE HUNT
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BRUSSELS, Belgium — President Bush sought to repair rocky relations with Europe on Sunday, saying "no power on earth will ever divide us." He urged allies to move beyond differences over Iraq in the interest of peace in the Mideast.

Hoping to set a more conciliatory tone for his second term, Bush will meet over five days with some of his toughest critics: French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, both of whom fiercely opposed the U.S.-led invasion. Bush also will see Russian President Vladimir Putin

Today's speech, the main reason for his trip, is a conciliatory message aimed at citizens across Europe, where Bush is widely disliked.

"Today, America and Europe face a moment of consequence and opportunity," the president will say. "Together we can once again set history on a hopeful course — away from poverty and despair and toward development and the dignity of self-rule ... away from resentment and violence and toward justice and the peaceful settlement of differences."

Bush's visit was intended to

soothe allies frustrated that the White House often ignored their views on issues from Iraq to global warming. Bush said that the European-American alliance is essential for security and global trade and offers a model of freedom for the rest of the world.

"In all these ways, our strong friendship is essential to peace and prosperity across the globe — and no temporary debate, no passing disagreement of governments, no power on earth will ever divide us," Bush will say.

"Our greatest opportunity and our immediate goal is peace in the Middle East." An alliance of 88 environmental, human rights, peace and other groups planned two days of protests in Brussels, beginning today, to demand "no European complicity" in a U.S.-designed world order.

Brussels police readied 2,500 officers — 1,000 more than the usual number for the three or four summit meetings that bring European Union leaders to the Belgian capital every year.

While seeking to move past old divisions, Bush and European leaders still face major differences.

Washington opposes Europe's plans to lift a 15-year-old arms em-

bargo against China. Bush has been cool toward Europe's negotiations to persuade Iran to abandon its suspected nuclear weapons program. The White House prefers asking the U.N. Nations Security Council to punish Tehran.

Hard feelings linger from Bush's opposition to the Kyoto climate change treaty and the International Criminal Court.

Bush expresses support for Europe's democratic unity in his speech and says Washington supports a strong Europe. He also says Washington shares Europe's concern about global poverty.

An issue where the allies may find common ground is a demand that Syria withdraw its forces from Lebanon — a declaration prompted by the assassination of a former prime minister, Rafik Hariri, in a massive bombing in Beirut.

The president has a private dinner with Chirac, who was a friend of Hariri.

On Tuesday, Bush will attend NATO and EU meetings. Wednesday finds the president in Mainz, Germany, for a meeting with Schroeder. The trip ends Thursday with talks with Putin in Slovakia.

IN BRIEF

Former presidents Bush, Clinton promise tsunami survivors more aid is coming

LAMPUUK, Indonesia — Former presidents Bush and Clinton traveled Sunday to ground zero of tsunami devastation where they described the destruction as unimaginable and promised survivors who begged for shelter that more help would come.

On the second day of their relief mission to the region, the two former leaders flew in U.S. military helicopters from the provincial capital Banda Aceh over a barren landscape that was once a patchwork of rice paddies, to the village of Lampuuk, where the sole structure left standing is a large white mosque.

The village had 6,500 inhabitants before the Dec. 26 disaster. Only 700 remain.

"I've never seen anything like this in my entire life. Ever," Bush said.

As he looked out of the helicopter, Bush said he was counting his blessings. "In my own heart, I was saying we're very lucky; we're very lucky people not to have to

go through something like this."

Clinton shook hands with Rahmayadi, one of thousands of survivors left homeless by the disaster. He said his house in Lampuuk had stood in the neighborhood where the Americans visited but was flattened by the tsunami.

"My children and wife died and I didn't get their bodies, so now it's only me and two sons," said the 53-year-old Rahmayadi, who goes by one name. "All we ask for now is shelter because we can't live in tents forever. I will keep being patient until someone helps me."

Bush reassured villagers who greeted them, "You're going to be OK. A lot of people around the world want to help."

Clinton asked one villager, Akhi Sukri, what the survivors needed most.

"They need everything," Sukri replied. Standing amid the debris of Lampuuk, Clinton said seeing the destruction firsthand helped him understand how so many people died.

The official tsunami death toll ranges from 169,070 to 178,118. The number of missing is believed to be as high as 128,426, with most presumed dead.

— The Associated Press

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