

**CENTER FOR
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ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Thank you very much. I'm delighted to be here and to have the chance to say a few words about Kazakhstan, a country which I've visited several times in the course of my life, and the first time, many years ago, when it was, in effect, a colony. And one had a feeling in Kazakhstan that it was somewhat like, perhaps, Algeria at the time. That is to say, a country with its own genuine authenticity but covered by a layer of subordination and identification with something external to it.

And it wasn't very clear how the two would interrelate and the extent of which and how quickly what was underneath would assert itself. Subsequently, I visited Kazakhstan shortly after its independence and then again quite recently. I must say that the appearance of Kazakhstan on the map of the world is, in itself, an important phenomenon because it marks the end, basically, of European-originated imperialism around the world. And Kazakhstan was not the only object of such imperialism, but it was one of the last objects of that imperialism. And that, of course, is true more generally of Central Asia. And that is what makes that region, also, so interesting and important.

Focusing more specifically on Kazakhstan, I'd like to make brief comments on three issues, namely the question of consolidation of the country's independence, secondly, the issue of diversification of the country's international access, and third, the institutionalization of the democratic process. With regards to the first, I think it is fair to say it was not an easy task for Kazakhstan to consolidate its independence.

Its freedom was gained as a consequence of a sudden development external to Kazakhstan, itself, in the sense that it happened elsewhere, in Moscow and in the Soviet bloc writ-large. It was not the consequence of a prolonged and head-on struggle for independence, such as, for example, in Algeria, though there certainly were aspirations for independence in Kazakhstan – witness the events in Alma-Ata not long before independence. But it was still somewhat of a sudden development.

Nonetheless, since then, I think Kazakh nationalism has acquired clear identification, and the existence of Kazakhstan has become an expression of the predominant desire of the people of Kazakhstan. It is, however, a fact that the people of Kazakhstan are multiethnic. According to the most recent statistics that I have been able to see, something like 54 percent of the population of Kazakhstan is Kazakh. The Russians account for about 30 percent, with some Ukrainians and others creating a Slavic minority of about 35 percent. That is a complicated reality, and it puts a lot of emphasis on the ability of the country to structure responsible and accommodating relationships among the component ethnic elements. It is also interesting to note that the religious distribution of the country is somewhat different than the ethnic one. According to

official statistics, Muslims account for 47 percent of the population and Russian Orthodox for 44 percent. So there seems to be a much higher percentage of Russian Orthodox than one would normally assume from purely ethnic statistics. That certainly makes it more complicated.

When I first visited Kazakhstan after it was independent, I was struck how diversified the top elite was around the president. Lately, it has become more nationally homogenous and one certainly sees a great many young, well-educated Kazakhs in positions of responsibility. In fostering a sense of consolidated national independence, I think President Nazarbayev took one very important and retroactively successful, symbolic decision, for which I had the opportunity, at the time, to congratulate him personally, since I've had a number of meetings with him here and over there, but which I know was, to some extent, an issue of some debate within Kazakhstan – namely, the decision to relocate the capital to Astana.

And I told him at the time that I thought this was a very wise and important decision, and one which will symbolize, in the long run, the fact that this is a country with its own identity and its own will to be itself. And I was struck by how pleased he was by that congratulation, and I think that must have reflected the degree of some division, even in his entourage, regarding that particular decision. Nonetheless, I think it is also fair to say that while the independence has been consolidated and is a fact, it is not entirely, yet, fully assured. It depends a great deal on the geopolitical dynamics in that part of the world; it depends, also, on the degree to which the Kazakhs themselves remain vigilant in the need to preserve that independence.

It is interesting to note in this connection that, for example, Russia has recently delayed its efforts to enter the World Trade Organization, because it now prefers to enter the WTO as part of a common space with Belarus and Kazakhstan. I think the political implications of that decision need to be examined carefully. One obviously has reason to understand the importance of the free trade arrangement - and it is not exclusive to Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan - it has happened in other parts of the world. Nonetheless, when it happens at an early stage of national consolidation of independence, it could have implications that are worthwhile noting.

Secondly, there is the obligation to diversify one's international position if one wishes to consolidate one's independence. And I think it is fair to say that, by and large, progress has been made in that respect, but it is still limited. It is limited largely to Kazakhstan's immediate neighbors – namely, Russia and China. If one looks at the trade statistics, one finds that reflected very dramatically. The import partners for Kazakhstan are: Russia 35 percent, China 32 percent. Export partners: China 15 percent, Russia 11 percent. It is rather surprising that Russia is 11 percent, which is exactly the same as Germany.

This shows some diversification, but diversification obviously limited to the two most important and powerful neighbors, but a diversification which strikes a balance between them. There is the larger question, of course, of access to the world economy as a whole – and direct access, and not access through intermediaries. And that is still something to be fully worked out and consolidated. I think progress is being made in gaining access to the outside world, and particularly to the West, through the Caspian Sea, and thereby, westward through Turkey to Europe. And that, I think, is in the long-run interests of Kazakhstan.

I assume there is a longer-range possibility, but still remote at this moment, of a southward route through Afghanistan and down through Pakistan to the Indian Ocean. All of that would, in the long run, help to consolidate a much more direct and open-ended, diversified access by Kazakhstan to the world community – to the world economic system – something which is fundamentally important to the preservation of independence.

One also has the sense that Kazakhstan is striving to maintain a margin of choice in the area of its foreign policy, a consideration of some importance, given its forthcoming role in the OSCE. And here, I have to note as a positive sign the fact that Kazakhstan has, so far, abstained from recognizing the “independence,” so-called, in quotation marks, of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. And I think that, in itself, is a good signal of Kazakhstan’s ability to maintain its own position on this, perhaps, very sensitive issue.

The third question which needs addressing is, of course, the institutionalization of democracy. I think it is a fact that initially, highly personalized rule – centralized, personalized rule – was inevitable, given the circumstances prevailing at the time of the emergence of Kazakhstan, and hence the central role of President Nazarbayev as the father of the nation is understandable. And I’ve already noted it in connection with the decision to move the capital to Astana, a capital which is clearly identified with him personally and regarding which, there is even some speculation, that at some point in the future, its name may even be changed to reflect that symbolic connection.

But in any case, the fact is that when Kazakhstan became independent, the only source of authority was the first secretary of the party – the Communist party of the Soviet Union – with some of its practices and its traditions, and certainly, there was no other alternative at the time. But it does mean that the road to democracy is bound to be long and difficult. Saying that is not to, in any way, confuse the present situation in Kazakhstan with some sort of a brutal autocracy, because it is not and Kazakhstan’s evolution politically is a progressive historical success. But it has to be sustained by the consolidation of the rule of law and in particular by instilling in the society a sense of loyalty to the state as such, and to its constitution, that transcends the role of a single individual.

And here, of course, the ethnic element could be a further complication in that process and one has to recognize it. Nonetheless, I think it is important to institutionalize that loyalty, that commitment to the state and to the constitution which is above any single individual. In effect, the real model for Kazakhstan is not that which is transpiring in neighboring Russia, particularly in Putin’s role, but it is Ataturk and the Turkish experience. And one of the great accomplishments of Ataturk was to instill in the state bureaucracy and in the military a supreme commitment to the supremacy of the state and the constitution.

And thus, even though Turkey has experienced a number of times in which the military took power, it was the military itself that yielded power, once it felt that the constitution had been re-established and reasserted and reconfirmed as the framework within which the political process takes place. It seems to me that at this stage, and given the fact that Kazakhstan has now been independent for almost 20 years, it is important to set in motion a process for the future, which provides for stable succession, which is based on the constitutional order, which is not derivative

of personal rule, and which thereby creates the preconditions for further movement toward a more widespread institutionalization of democracy.

These are the three key tasks that Kazakhstan confronts, and I think, at least in terms of my analysis, it is fair to say that it is a process which involves some successes, but still a number of tasks to be consummated. If I had to rank the three areas in which the challenge has to be confronted, I would say that consolidation of independence, in an academic sense, ranks somewhere close to A-minus. The diversification of international access, I would say, deserves a B-minus. The institutionalization of democracy, maybe, a C-minus – certainly not a failure, but too early, yet, to say that it is a full success.

But on the whole, I would say it is a pretty good record, and this is why the independence of Kazakhstan in Central Asia is a positive development, one which justifies a serious degree of historical optimism, and makes it, also, an important object of American foreign policy interest, obviously aiming at the consolidation of a stable relationship with Kazakhstan as an enduring reality in the new Central Asia. So perhaps that's enough by way of introduction, and during the questions to be raised, I'll be happy to comment.

BUGAJSKI: Thanks very much, Zbig, let me ask the first one at you: What would you advise the Obama Administration to do that it is not doing, with regard particularly to Kazakhstan, but also the wider Central Asian region?

BRZEZINSKI: I think by and large, the American policy here is one of continuity – that is to say, deepening commitment, deepening presence, a stable relationship without a loss of historical perspective regarding what is feasible at a given moment. One should not have excessive expectations in any one of the three areas I have enumerated, and one should be aware that one is a point of departure, two consolidates it, three builds on it, and that is a historical sequence, which one cannot ignore. When one has an excessive degree of expectations regarding number three, for example, one can damage number two or even number one, and I think that has happened elsewhere in Central Asia.

Q: Given your grading of Kazakhstan, is the message to Kazakhstan to concentrate on the C-minus? I mean, I would tell students, if you have a C-minus, you've got to bring that one up.

BRZEZINSKI: No, I've just said something which is very relevant to that; it has to be related to the other two, and one has to have an understanding that that historical sequence involves consolidation of the first to make the second possible and to make the third fruitful. So you have to keep balancing them, given the specifics of the geopolitical and historical circumstances.

Q: One of the biggest problems for OSCE and the United States is the inattention of the U.S. government to that organization.

BRZEZINSKI: Well, that may be one of the problems, but I think a bigger problem is the way the Russian government, under Mr. Putin, has addressed some of the problems which are of concern to OSCE. I don't think one can entirely ignore that. The fact of the matter is that there has been some regression in the Russian view of the world under the present leadership, and a

redefinition of where Russia is historically and ought to be -- historically, to a degree that it creates and compounds problems. These problems, in turn, have been maximized by the absence of a coherent European foreign policy in general and more specifically, within the OSCE. And the chairmanship of some of the European countries in OSCE has been, to put it mildly, somewhat lax or passive. Cumulatively, this has adversely affected the role of the OSCE. Whether the Kazakh chairmanship can infuse it with the needed sense of energy and responsibility is somewhat problematic, because obviously, Kazakhstan is not going to have an entirely free hand in defining its role. And one will have to take into account that fact, because Kazakhstan is still in a complex stage of its own national development and national consolidation.

AMB. IDRISOV: Mr. Brzezinski, thank you very much. I'm ambassador of Kazakhstan. I'm sorry for being late. But thank you for your very eloquent and very deep analysis. And we have a saying, "the age of respect is the age of wisdom." So I understand why we have this saying. First of all, two observations: With regard to the ethnic composition, Kazakhstan has been changing. The Kazakh ethnic population in Kazakhstan now is 55 percent; we had the census recently, and the Russian population is less than 30. There are slight changes, but Kazakhstan continues to be a melting pot. In terms of diversification of trade, when we became independent in 1992, our trade was 80 percent with Russia and the rest was with the majority of the former CIS states. Today, the biggest trade partner of Kazakhstan is the European Union -- 40 percent of our trade is with the EU. And then comes Russia and China. But as a whole, both exports and imports, in our trade, the biggest share is with the European Union.

But my question to you would be on the Chinese aspect, what do you see for the future role of China in our part of the world? You know that we have a long history, very multi-colored history in our relations with China. And the reason for the Great Chinese Wall to appear was the nomadic society in the great Eurasian steppes. So how you would picture the future of the Chinese role in the area, and also the role of India?

BRZEZINSKI: Well, the Chinese role in the area was absolutely nonexistent until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Since then it has dramatically expanded, partly because of the changes in China since 1978 and the dramatic growth of the Chinese economy, changes in lifestyle, and the dynamism of its export capabilities has obviously impacted on Central Asia. When I first went to Kazakhstan in the 1950s, China was like somewhere on the moon; it was closed. China is now a political presence and an economic presence. The economic presence is overwhelming. You go to the bazaars, you look at the goods and so forth and the traders, it's stunning how present it is. But it is also a political presence, because it is dynamic and populated with an extremely energetic population. And it is both an opportunity and a threat, in a sense. It's an opportunity because it creates a degree of balance with your neighbor to the west that otherwise would leave Kazakhstan in a totally one-sided position.

On the other hand, one cannot be entirely certain as to what are the long-term aspirations of the Chinese in that part of the world. Historically, the Chinese are very conscious of the fact that they were pushed out of the area by the expansion of the Russian empire. And they view the treaties that were signed between China and imperial Russia as unfair treaties. They have formally now adopted the proposition that they do not question them and I suspect that territorially, that's probably true. But territorial aspects are not the only aspects of a relationship; there can be a geopolitical presence and influence, which can change.

And I think that one of the paradoxes of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is more of a Russian initiative than a Chinese, has actually been that it's more conducive to the growth of Chinese influence than, perhaps, the Russians initially thought, when in fact, encouraging the Chinese into that arrangement. And symbolically, the maneuvers held recently in western Kazakhstan, which had Chinese troops there, was the first presence of Chinese armed forces in that part of the world in several hundred years. And that's not devoid of political symbolism.

I think in the present situation and in the foreseeable future, the presence of China creates a kind of balance which enables Kazakhstan to maintain cooperative relationships with both sides, clearly leaning more towards Russia culturally, linguistically, educationally and so forth, although even that is beginning to change in terms of the number of students and contacts and exchanges. That reality is not going to alter, it is one that will probably endure. And if the Russian-Chinese relationship remains reasonably positive, I don't think Kazakhstan will suffer from that reality, and probably will benefit from it.

Moreover, that reality then gives Kazakhstan more of an opportunity to expand its access through other routes, as I have mentioned, through the Caucasus and the Caspian and south, through Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean, which will then further maximize the diversification – the geopolitical diversification in addition to the commercial – that is clearly in the long-run interests of Kazakhstan's viability as a nation-state.

The worst that could happen would be, of course, some serious economic crisis in the region as a whole, some instability in China, some worsening of relations within Kazakhstan between the Kazakh and the Russian communities as a byproduct of economic tensions and rivalries. And that, of course, could begin to cause some serious disarray. But the probabilities of that, in my judgment, are relatively low.

Q: I would like to ask you about the interesting role Kazakhstan is playing both with the OSCE chairmanship and then the chairmanship of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. What can it bring in terms of the checkered Islamic world that we see out there, in terms of its role and its stance in terms of its experience with Islam and its promotion of ethnic and cultural diversity?

BRZEZINSKI: Well, I think in a way, you've answered it by making reference to the last points. Kazakhstan can stand as an example – constructive example, so far, with many issues to be yet resolved, but a constructive example – of a state in which the majority of the people – not a huge majority, but the majority of the people – are Muslims, and a state which is modern, which is able to manage inter-religious and interethnic relationships constructively, and which, hopefully, consolidates a process in which its institutions and system of governance are increasingly characterized by respect for transparency and a democratic processes.

In terms of exercising a major influence on foreign policy decisions, either of OSCE or of the Islamic Conference, I think one has to be realistic. The room for that is not very large, and there are other players involved who are in a position to exercise greater influence. So I think realism on the one hand, but at the same time justifiable satisfaction at progress already made gives Kazakhstan considerable leverage in both institutions.

Q: The purpose of this CSIS-IND project is to provide some advice, or at least, have a discussion about the OSCE chairman-in-office for 2010. And given that that is going to be shaped by Kazakhstan's realities, OSCE realities, and the geopolitical realities around it, I wonder if you have any thoughts about what Kazakhstan could reasonably accomplish in the OSCE and what kinds of goals would benefit the OSCE and Kazakhstan?

BRZEZINSKI: Quite frankly, the answer is no, beyond not rocking the boat. I think that its ability to give OSCE some sort of decisive new role to play is not going to be derived from Kazakhstan's leadership; it is going to be derived from the degree to which there is some degree of consensus between the United States and Russia and the key European players. Kazakhstan will need to play a careful diplomatic role and not be perceived as an object of manipulation by a particular party, but as a relatively detached and neutral chairman in an organization in which it does not have the capacity to play a decisive role, but an organization which is subject to external influences emanating largely from the countries that I've mentioned.

Targat Kaliyev, Kazakh foreign ministry: Dr. Brzezinski, I will not surprise you saying that you are the most popular U.S. politician in Kazakhstan. You know, rephrasing the well-known words by Stalin, I will say that U.S. presidents come and go, but Brzezinski remains. Every single Kazakh expert publication on international relations analyzing the situation in the world should contain at least one reference to Brzezinski, especially your famous book on the "great game." Keeping in mind that a Democrat's is now in the White House, I'd like to ask you to raise your voice, recommending to President Obama to pay a visit to Kazakhstan in the nearest future.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: I have. But if he goes to Central Asia, he probably ought to visit more than one country.

Q: I am wondering if I can ask a perspective question: if you can think back to 30 years ago, when you were trying to shift American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union, that you would be thinking that, today, you'd be giving Kazakhstan a C-minus on institutionalization of democracy and an A-minus on its independence?

BRZEZINSKI: Thirty years ago – that would be 1979 – no, probably not, although I can say that I was always convinced that the Soviet Union would break up. Of that, I had no doubt ever since my graduate student days, because I felt that the 19th and 20th centuries were truly the centuries of nationalism, and that it was essentially a supranational entity with strong imperial characteristics, and therefore, would disintegrate. And what I tried to advance was the notion that by peaceful engagement, we could contribute to the acceleration of that process while giving it essentially a nonviolent character.

And I was extremely gratified that, 10 years later from the deadline that you set, it actually happened. And now, the task is to make certain that it is not reversed in any degree. I personally do not think it will be reversed, but I also recognize the fact that there are some important individuals in positions of power who want to see it reversed, and one in particular who I think has clearly identified himself with that cause, and who views his central mission as a reversal of that process, though not entirely in restoring the status quo ante, but in defining a new framework for which the essence would be essentially the same.

And I think it important, therefore, insofar as our policy towards Central Asia and Russia is concerned, that we keep that reality in mind. I think Russia will accommodate, eventually, to the reality that its post-imperial status is here to stay. It would be self-destructive to entertain, indefinitely, the contrary point of view. But in the shorter run, that contrary point of view still has some life to it, and some key institutions of power support it, and therefore, we are still at a stage at which that game isn't entirely over. And it requires us to play it intelligently, and this is why I welcome Kazakhstan's greater involvement in world affairs, but at the same time, we should not have excessively high expectations, specifically with regard to the OSCE, because the room for a country like Kazakhstan, given its geopolitical position, to play a really decisive role is very narrow, and we have to be aware of that.

Note: formal remarks delivered without a written text.