



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

Keynote Address - Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski

Inaugural Forum of the Brzezinski Chair
Strategic Issues in the New Central and Eastern Europe
October 03, 2003

Ladies and gentlemen, I know it has been a long day and I don't know what's more tiring: whether it is to sit and listen, and then to think in order to decide whether one agrees with what one hears or whether it's better to stand and talk, and then to think and in all probability to agree with what one has just said. I rather suspect that the former is actually more tiring because it requires discrimination, and since most of you have been sitting all day, I want to assure you that I will not speak too long.

Second, again by way of preface, let me say that I do not wish to break new ground in my remarks because so much has been said that's wise and timely, but I would rather stress some basic fundamentals which are relevant to the issues with which we are concerned.

I would like to begin by stressing first of all that our meeting here is in many ways symbolic of the new interest of America in Central and Eastern Europe, and of the new special relationship that now prevails between the United States and Poland. It is in fact unprecedented that Americans and Poles should be cosponsoring a meeting and participating in a meeting that deals with the political future of Central and Eastern Europe. I think this new collaboration is a reflection of important new realities that are trans-Atlantic in nature and that are mutually beneficial. And since the effort involves the relationship between the distinguished American research institution, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and a Polish institution, the Center of Eastern Studies, I think it is useful to recall, and it is particularly important to recall

this to Americans, that Poland has an established tradition of Eastern studies that goes back many decades even before the present Center of Eastern Studies was created. In pre-World War II Poland, there were important research centers, genuine academic research centers, in Warsaw and in Wilno (President Landsbergis will forgive me for saying not Vilnius, but Wilno, because it was called Wilno at the time in Poland). These research centers on the Soviet Union did first rate academic work that was of the highest intellectual standards and there were very many Polish scholars, notably historians, that gained international recognition for their work on Russia and more specifically also on Soviet Russia. Such names as Kucharzewski, Halecki, Sukiennicki come to mind, and I'm sure the Polish participants here recall them, but Americans should know more about them. In addition to that, in the inter-war period, Poland was politically interested in what today we call the new Eastern Europe.

It was in Poland, for example, that the so-called 'Promethean League' was sponsored. The Promethean League was a league dedicated to the idea that some day the non-Russian people of the old Tsarist empire, and then of the Soviet Union, will have their own independence. That was the political concept which was actively propagated and which had, incidentally, a very specific military dimension. The pre-World War II Polish army had a number of senior officers who were Ukrainians, who were Georgians, who were Armenians, and so forth. In fact, that now has an American connection because one of our very recent chairmen of the Joint Chiefs, General Shalikashvili, a Georgian native, was born in Poland, where his father was a colonel in the Polish army and a deputy commander of the most elite cavalry regiment in the Polish army. And this wasn't--I hastily add--philanthropy. This was deliberate political action based on a certain political interest. So there is this connection, and it continued through World War II.

As we all know, in the course of World War II, hundreds of thousands of Poles had the unique opportunity to gain a very personal knowledge of Soviet conditions. Some of them managed to end up in the West, and particularly in serving in the Second Polish Army Corps, which fought in Italy and in Monte Cassino, which the Poles, in the end took. Those who had served as prisoners in the Soviet Union were organized by deliberate research centers to do the first studies in the West on the subject of the Gulag. I remember, in fact, seeing these publications as a very young child and even the detailed maps that were produced by these people, indicating for the first time to the people in the West that there is something called the Gulag and what the locations of the principal camps were. This is where I as a child first heard the words 'Vorkuta,' 'Magadan,' 'Altaysky Krai' and so forth, words which Poles know only too well, and which recent years Americans have also come to know. So all of that is part of the Polish tradition, which in many ways the Center of Eastern Studies revives. It provides the basis for high quality, insightful analysis from which we in America can benefit, and which is reinforced by the very direct personal ties which many people in this center, and in Poland more generally, have with Ukraine, and with Belarus, and with Russia, and with Georgia, and so forth.

So, we in America can benefit by this collaboration with the Polish center and it is something that I personally welcome, not only because of sentiment, but because of practicality. It is a useful relationship for us Americans, and at the same time, the global range of the interests of CSIS can help the Poles to widen the scope of their own geopolitical and strategic interests. They can perhaps benefit from some of the work that we do on current international and global problems, be it the revolution in military affairs, because of the injection of science and technology into strategy, or the political implications of global aging which are enormous, or the

dynamics of energy markets which have great political implications, or the security of the Far East, or U.S. strategy, or recently John Hamre's report on political conditions in Iraq.

So this is a very important mutual undertaking--mutually beneficial. It has academic and political benefits and can also in that fashion be of help to the increasingly convoluted trans-Atlantic relationship that currently besets the American-European connection. Poland in a variety of ways, including this one, can help to be an important link--not a protagonist, for one side against the other, but as a constructive link between both sides of the Atlantic. And certainly that is necessary if we are to be effective and constructive, not only in discussing the future of Central and Eastern Europe, but actually in shaping it, and we can do it more effectively on an American-European basis.

We are now entering what I called at a CSIS-sponsored conference on the future of NATO and Ukraine, the third phase of Europe's geopolitical reconstruction following the end of the Cold War and the associated dissolution of the Soviet Union. The first phase, to which I like to refer as the 'Warsaw Round,' attempted to resolve the most obvious and pressing negative legacies of the Cold War by the introduction of Poland, of Hungary, and the Czech Republic into the Atlantic alliance. The second phase, which I would call the 'Vilnius Round' extended that process, and thereby matched also on the territorial level the expansion of NATO with the expansion of the European Union. This overlap between NATO and the European Union speaks for itself and provides a very major justification for the expansion of each, as well as for the expansion of both at the same time. The third phase, which we'll have to confront before long and which I'd like to call the 'Kyiv Round,' will require moving into more uncharted waters with greater historic political and social uncertainties. There is no doubt about that, it is going to be more complex, more difficult, there are more problematics. But I think there are strong historical

and geo-political considerations that justify our viewing the future in terms of the Euro-Atlantic community that extends territorially beyond the limits of the second ‘Vilnius Round’; that is to say, by the inclusion of those peoples beyond the forthcoming territorial definition of the Euro-Atlantic community. Certainly, the Ukrainian people deserve, if they wish, to be part of that larger entity. The key, of course, phrase is ‘if they wish’. And if they wish, they can demonstrate it, and if they demonstrate it they create an obligation on our part to be responsive, and the two attitudes are synergistic, interdependent. The same is true, even though it may look unlikely today, of Belarus. The same is true eventually, even though it may sound remote today of Georgia, which incidentally was Christian 600 years before Poland, and which identifies itself with Europe, or Armenia. The same is true, in some fashion, if it wishes and if it is serious, of Russia, but only if it is serious and truly proves that it is serious, because it is easy to say that we want to be part of Europe, do you want us to be part of Europe, and then to leave it at that.

Being part of NATO, being part of the EU, is an opportunity, it is a responsibility. It is also an obligation to fulfill certain objective, as well as subjective, criteria. They have to be met because building a truly democratic Euro-Atlantic community is a serious undertaking which is based not only on institutions and on laws, but on shared values that have to be genuinely subscribed to and practiced and not only proclaimed by sloganeering, and this is why we have to be very realistic. We don’t know very clearly what the future of Belarus will be in this context; and I am not quite sure of whether we should treat Lukashenko the way we treated Jaruzelski after 1981, namely by ostracizing him as well as the system, or whether we should treat him like Ceausescu in the ‘70s and ‘80s by seduction which we hoped would then become contagious in a pervasive manner. Maybe a combination of the two, in fact, is needed given the present complexities.

Those are the judgments that we also have to make responsibly, and in making them, we must be careful not engage in self-delusions. For example, today in Russia the trends are ambiguous. They are certainly not predominantly negative, but they are certainly not positive. We should not and cannot ignore the fact that we also see creeping authoritarianism in Russia, to put it mildly. We cannot ignore the suppression of the mass media. We cannot ignore the implications of the ruling elite increasingly being dominated by the last generation of KGB graduates. We cannot dismiss the political symbolism of a country that proclaims itself to be a democracy and is peppered with monuments to the founder of the Gulag. We cannot ignore the reality of a country that proclaims fidelity to human rights and is engaging in genocide of a very small nation. These are important issues, and added to them, of course, are immediate foreign policy issues. We talked today about the so-called 'economic space' and what it means politically. All of these issues have to be addressed directly and openly if one is serious about Russia being part of the West by the Russians themselves and by us. I think we do Russia no service by substituting slogans for serious discussion. For that, if nothing else, delays what I happen to believe is inevitable, the transformation of Russia. But the question that is open is whether it will take a long time or whether it will accelerate. I expect that after the KGB generation is gone, there will be a serious change because the new Russian generation, the young Russians that I meet in Moscow or in St. Petersburg are impressive and very different, but it may take one or two or three decades before they are at the political apex. We can hasten that process by what's called 'tough love'. That is to say by being very realistic in dealing with Russia and not relying on expedient flirtation and self-delusional courtship which delays the processes of change.

Connected with that is another fundamental which is important to stress, namely, that Ukraine's early accession to NATO and then to the EU will accelerate, rather than delay Russia's eventual association. The longer it is delayed, the less likely Russia is to be associated. If it is forestalled or made dependent on Russia's own association, it may not even happen, because then it will translate imperial nostalgia into imperial self-isolation. But Ukraine's accession opens the doors for Russia to accelerate itself and hence, I do hope that both the Ukrainians and we, Americans, Poles, and our allies, will do what we can to make Ukraine's movement towards NATO a reality. This cannot be done artificially by acceleration, it requires meeting certain objectives, but if we are aware of what is involved, both we and the Ukrainians can do it. Next year the Istanbul-NATO summit will convene to discuss NATO issues and it is a realistic target, though an ambitious target to think of the Istanbul-NATO summit as the place at which a membership action plan for Ukraine can be formally promulgated. There are preparations for it, but these preparations have to be translated into ambitious achievement, first by the Ukrainians, but also we--Poles, Americans, and others--have to mobilize support for that in NATO.

All of that, what I would call our strategic vision, will only be possible if America and Europe work together. That is also fundamental, and we must not lose sight of that. We can talk all day long today, all day long tomorrow about the Polish-American perspectives on Central and Eastern Europe, but it will come to naught if America and Europe don't work together as partners. We know we need each other, we know that each is vulnerable without the other. The Europeans know that because they know of their military impotence. Until recently, we tended a bit to veer into the direction of historical hubris, namely to assume that our military power is so overwhelming that we no longer need Europe. I think we have learned something in the last few weeks. I think Poland can help in this process, particularly by helping to develop a more active

trans-Atlantic strategic dialog about meeting the dangers of the first decade of the 21st century. The last decade was in some respects a decade of illusions, the decade dominated by the slogan 'The New World Order'. This decade runs the risk of being excessively devoid of vision and preoccupied with petty conflicts. If we succumb to these conflicts we in America could become victims to a paranoid nationalism that will be at the same time panicky and unilateralist; and the Europeans can wallow in self-indulgence which they can call multilateralism, but which will in effect will be an elegant name for global pacificity, and that would be destructive to all of us. We need a continuing and expanding Euro-Atlantic architecture that can only be done by both Europe and America, and Poland can help.

There is a paradox, a practical paradox at work at this very moment, and I will end on this. If what I am talking about is to be done, the road will have to lead through the Middle East. The road to a larger Europe is through the Middle East, because only American and European cooperation on Iraq will resolve that problem and each has to help the other. The Europeans at some stage have to participate not verbally, but with money and men. And Americans have to reconsider their position on such issues as sovereignty for Iraq. It's ridiculous for us to be arguing that we cannot give sovereignty to Iraq because Iraq is not yet ready. When will it be ready? And what is sovereignty in this day and age? Sovereignty is a concept, but it's a relative concept. If there was declared a provisional government of Iraq, we could give it symbolic sovereignty and it would help it to gain legitimacy, thereby reducing the need for an assertive occupation. We need American-European cooperation on Israel and Palestine, because America has become too partial and too one-sided and thus is losing credibility as a mediator. The Europeans can help us, and the Europeans know there is the need for an assertive solution to that problem which paralyzes the Middle East and incidentally isolates the United States.

Fifty-Three years ago, when the communists attacked South Korea and the Soviets blocked any vote on the subject in the Security Council, we had a resolution pass in the General Assembly in which the Soviet Union was completely isolated. Just two weeks ago, there was a vote in the General Assembly on Israel and Palestine, 133 states voted for it, every one of our European allies voted for it, Poland and Great Britain included, 133. Four countries voted against it, the United States, Israel, the Marshall Islands, and Micronesia. If that isn't political isolation, I don't know what political isolation is.

An American-European drift will destroy the basis for dealing effectively with the larger challenge of European architecture. It will produce paralysis, it will sustain trans-Atlantic hostility, and it will encourage extremist elements in the U.S. administration for a fundamental revision of American global strategy, away from traditional institutionalized alliances towards so-called 'ad hoc' coalitions, or to put it at a personal basis, to create an anti-Islamic fundamentalist alliance in which we rely primarily on Prime Minister Sharon, President Putin, and Vice-Premier Advani instead of, let us say, Schroeder, and Chirac, or dare I even say Kwasniewski. So there is a lot at stake in what happens in the Middle East. If we can address those issues effectively, we can revitalize the alliance, and on that basis deal with the challenges which we have been discussing here today and will continue discussing tomorrow. Thank you.