



U.S.-Polish Cooperation

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Opening Statement

Dzien dobry, i przepraszam z gory i e b de z koniecznoscí mówi po angielsku. Mnie brakuje codziennego kontaktu z polakami. Nie jestem w polsce tak d ugo aby prwróci do norm mojego polszczyzny. [translation: Hello, and I apologize that I will be speaking in English. I don't have daily contact with Poles. I'm not in Poland long enough to get back to my normal level of Polish.]

So, please forgive me. I've had a very good day and a half of meetings here, meeting with the President, Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Marshal of the Sejm, Bronis aw Komorowski, Deputy Defense Minister Stanis aw Komorowski, and breakfast this morning with some of the opposition... some of the leaders of LiD, Lewica i Demokracja.

We spoke about U.S.-Polish cooperation in general. I expressed the great appreciation of my government for Poland's latest offer of troops for NATO's mission in Afghanistan. This is not the first significant offer but it is an important one and we very much appreciate it.

I also expressed the understanding of the United States and the respect of the United States for the decision of the Polish government to end its military involvement in Iraq; and the Polish deadline has been set, that we respect, is the 31st of October.

Our militaries will work out the details of the Polish re-deployment but I want to emphasize that we respect the Polish decision, and the people of Iraq have benefited from the efforts of Polish soldiers. And the situation in Iraq, especially over the past six months, has improved sharply, so the Polish soldiers can leave knowing they have done a good job in the service of the freedom of the people of Iraq.

Of course my discussions also touched on the "s yna tarcza antyrakietowa" [translation: the famous anti-missile defense shield]. We believe, the United States believes, that this program will benefit Europe, including Poland, as well as the United States. The United States can defend itself without these installations. But we believe that the security of NATO should be indivisible. And therefore we want to defend all of Europe from potential threats that may arise in the course of the next 10 and 20 years.

In the course of our discussions over the past many months, Poland has made some suggestions that we take seriously. Poles have urged us to seek to work with Russia cooperatively on missile defense and we have done so. Of course Poland has never urged us to give Russia a veto over this program, but it was reasonable for Poland, as well as other European countries, to encourage us to seek to work with Russia, and Secretaries Rice and Gates made very forthcoming offers of cooperation with Russia in the area of missile defense.

The second Polish suggestion, particularly from people of the then-opposition Platforma Obywatelska [translation: Civic Platform] party, encouraged us to work with NATO and increase NATO's role in missile defense. We have done so. We believe that Polish arguments were actually correct substantively, and wise politically, and we took them into account, and as you know we've been working very closely in NATO to increase its role in missile defense.

A third Polish suggestion is that the United States should work with Poland to deepen our military cooperation generally, and in particular to address problems and security challenges that might arise if we do conclude our agreement on missile defense. We did not interpret these Polish suggestions as suggestions that Poland be paid off for missile defense, but rather as serious suggestions from a serious ally to deepen military cooperation.

And during the conversations earlier this week in Washington, Secretary of Defense Gates made clear to [Polish Defense] Minister Klich that we stand ready to discuss these issues with Poland. I anticipate that our bilateral discussions on missile defense and on military cooperation will intensify in the next few weeks. And I certainly agree with Foreign Minister Sikorski who said yesterday that the media should avoid over-interpreting every public statement. We're going to work well with the Poles, and we will do what we can to make progress. And with that, I'm happy to take your questions. "I zapraszam do dobrej dyskusji" [translation: And I invite you to a good discussion].

Question and Answer Session

Question: I have two questions. One, are you hearing concerns from Polish leaders that the change of government in the United States could basically scuttle the project, and if so what message did you bring to them? And, the second would be if you could confirm on the record that Redzikowo is actually the place that you're hoping to locate this base. Thank you.

Assistant Secretary Fried: Oh, the second one is easy. I'm not in a position to confirm any of that.

The Polish government is perfectly right in an election year to reach out to Democrats, particularly in Congress, and discuss missile defense. In fact, I believe that Defense Minister Klich met with Representative Tauscher of California, who is one of the leading experts, a Democrat, a major figure in the Armed Services Committee in the House and very knowledgeable about missile defense. I can't speak to their meeting, but I think this was a good idea, and I will reveal a secret that there is more bi-partisanship on this issue than is commonly admitted publicly in Washington.

In other words I do not think it likely that the next administration would undo what is done here.

Question: Mr. Ambassador, I am very sorry that it's you I'm putting this question to, as you are known as a friend of Poland, you have done a lot for Poland, but you have mentioned this "over-interpretation" of some public statements. How then, should we understand what the press person for the Pentagon said, when he said that we [Poland] had received military assistance valued 750 million USD and we should keep quiet, as President Chirac used to tell us? How should I understand that, those words coming from an official in the President Bush administration?

Assistant Secretary Fried: Well, it is certainly true that the United States has provided a great deal of support for Polish operations in Iraq. This was in the form of logistics support and I believe some equipment and transport and I think he used the figure \$750 million. I think that's right.

And this is important support and it should be recognized. It does not mean that that support ... for Polish operations... That was not the kind of long-term cooperation for Polish military modernization that might be possible. Those are different issues. There's a difference between operational support and longer term support and we will see about the development of longer term support. Certainly Poland is not the poor country it was even 15 years ago. It's been a successful country and its capabilities are greater. But there is a place for long-term cooperation, and I certainly support my colleagues in the Defense Department who are thinking about this very seriously now.

Question: Mr. Ambassador, in that regard, can the Polish government count on the fact that it will have an issue to discuss concerning air defense, Polish missile defense...what I have in mind are THAAD and Patriot missiles?

Assistant Secretary Fried: It is perfectly reasonable for Polish authorities to point out that we should discuss the security implications of any missile defense facility that was placed in Poland. Obviously we want this facility to be secure and obviously we want Poland to be secure. The Polish government has quite rightly pointed out that its security should be increased as a result of our cooperation on missile defense. That's a perfectly reasonable point the Polish government has made. Perfectly reasonable.

I'm not a military person, and so the question of what precisely we need to do, what kinds of programs... anti-aircraft, anti-missile short-range... those are very legitimate questions. I was not present in the meeting between Minister Klich and Secretary Gates, but I am told it did come up, and of course we recognize Poland's interest in military cooperation in general and anti-aircraft... that sort of cooperation in particular. I'm not a military person, but I certainly think that we ought to be having rather concrete discussions about this. What is the danger? What is the added threat? What do we do about it? When do we do it? How do we do it? Those are reasonable questions, and they are important ones, and it's good to get the discussion away from "pi kne zasady albo niepi kne zasady, a do konkretów." I to ma by w dziedzinie nie polityków i nie... przepraszam w r kach szanownych dziennikarzy ale w r kach ekspertów... w r kach tych którzy znaj si na tych sprawach. [translation: ... nice principles or bad principles, to the concrete. And it should be in the realm not of... excuse me, in the hands of esteemed journalists, but in the hands of experts...in the hands of those who know these issues.]

Question: This is a follow up, basically, to what has been said. Polish officials, Polish government ministers, have been on the record saying they would like to have a strengthening of certain bilateral aspects of security, I think of a bilateral agreement as the United States has with Turkey or Italy. Also the idea of having missiles... additional missiles deployed in Poland has a bilateral aspect, creating a sort of special security zone for Poland. Now my question is: What do you think about this idea to have, in addition to NATO, to the collected security system, a bi-polar... bilateral aspect of Polish security through a special relation to the United States?

Assistant Secretary Fried: We certainly ought to be working with Poland to develop our military cooperation quite apart from missile defense. We also ought to be dealing with any, as they say, contingent security liabilities that the Poles would take on if we had a missile defense agreement. I don't want to get into the details of what this might take. I'm aware of the Polish government's statements also.

Poland is a member, after all, of NATO, and NATO's Article 5 commits the United States to the defense of Poland. The Poles say they would like to know what this means in particular... and in particular in the context of missile defense. And so we should be discussing these things. Minister Sikorski pointed out yesterday that we shouldn't be doing so through the media. He was quite right. I quite agree with him.

So over the next weeks I think you'll see an intensification of the discussions. It was natural that the new government came in and chose to study missile defense. That was a perfectly normal, reasonable response of the new government. I think now -- given Minister Klich's visit to Washington -- the Poles have let us know that they're ready to pick up discussions. And they want their concerns addressed. And we look forward to having some serious talks.

Question: First question is: should we understand that the phase of negotiations which has been in effect since November -- i.e., the break in negotiations -- is over and that formal talks about MD have started? Second question is about the meeting of Mr. Ambassador and President Kaczynski. Was the meeting held in a different atmosphere? Is the President more enthusiastic about this project? Can you see a difference between the attitudes between the President and the [Tusk] government? Third issue: Am I able to use the formula that now the US does not exclude, or at least is considering, handing over to Poland anti-air defense systems such as THAAD or Patriot missiles?

Assistant Secretary Fried: First, I do expect that our discussions will intensify now. So that's a quick answer to a quick question.

Secondly, I did meet with the President. I'm not going to discuss the political or constitutional relations between the President and the Government. This is a Polish matter. We had a good discussion of missile defense and as well as other issues.

And third, it's not my place to discuss any particular technical details. Obviously this has come up... what you mention has come up before in the media. I was not here... it's not my place to discuss particular systems. What we need to do is outline what the challenges are to Poland and how best we can meet them.

Question: I have two quick questions. The first is really more or less technical. The Czechs have said that they will probably be ready to sign some kind of an agreement with the U.S. on missile defense in around April. And I wanted to ask if there's actually any sense in the U.S. administration signing an agreement with the Czechs if no agreement is in sight with the Poles? If the radar can be of any use without the missile interceptors in Poland? And the second question is, you said yesterday that talks with the Polish government have been constructive, which is very nice to know, but it's fairly clear to everybody that the stakes are higher than they were with the new government, and I wondered if you could say something about how high they've got and whether there's any chance this year do you think of an agreement with Poland or when it might be good.

Assistant Secretary Fried: For the first question, we have made progress with the Czechs. We've had good negotiations. Let's see where we are in April. There's no reason to speculate about things that haven't happened yet. I'm a big believer in making decisions when you have to make them, but not agonizing about them beforehand.

Secondly, the Polish government has made clear it wants to see -- it has some hard questions -- it wants to see Polish security increased by this arrangement. We had good discussions about this. We want to move ahead, and address these questions. Minister Klich had good discussions with Secretary Gates about these issues. So let's see what we can do. The stakes are high, but let's remember the context of a very deep Polish-American friendship and alliance. There's a lot of cooperation and a lot of success behind this. It is perfectly true that Poland is part of Europe now. And part of institutional Europe. It was also part of Europe, but it was kept out of institutional Europe. And now it is part of the institutions of Europe. So we have a very good context. Missile defense is one issue against a backdrop of considerable achievements in Polish-American relations, of which both countries should be proud, and that's how we look at it.

Dzi kuje bardzo. Thank you very much.

