

**Remarks by Dr. Madeleine K. Albright
Zbigniew Brzezinski Memorial Lecture Series
Natolin College Europe
Warsaw, Poland
Thursday, March 7, 2019**

Thank you, Madam Vice-Rector, for that kind introduction. And my heartfelt thanks to you and to Natolin College of Europe for hosting me here this evening.

Cieszę się, że mogłam przyjechać do Warszawy.

I still fondly remember my visit to Natolin three years ago, during the NATO Summit. I was deeply impressed by the students I met, and by the college's mission to give a new generation of leaders both an outstanding education and a wider perspective on Europe.

That mission is one that very much appealed to Zbigniew Brzezinski, so this beautiful campus, located in the city of his birth, is a most fitting home for a lecture series named in his honor.

We would not be here this evening were it not for the efforts of Ambassador Jerzy Koźmiński. Ambassador Koźmiński is not only one of Poland's foremost diplomats, he was also one of the Zbigniew Brzezinski's closest friends.

I know the Brzezinski family is incredibly grateful to Ambassador Koźmiński for working to keep Dr. Brzezinski's legacy shining bright in Poland.

The timing for this lecture is most appropriate. Later this month, we celebrate what would have been Dr. Brzezinski's ninety-first birthday. And next week in Prague, I will join President Duda and other leaders to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of NATO expansion, which Brzezinski strongly supported.

So there is much for us to discuss.

But I would like to begin with a few observations on the life and legacy of a man who did more than anyone apart from my father to shape my view of the world and my understanding of international relations.

Zbigniew Brzezinski was my professor, my mentor, my boss, and my friend.

Our relationship spanned nearly six decades, and it is hard for me to believe that he is no longer around to tell me when I am doing something wrong.

I was far from the only one who benefited from his feedback. As demonstrated by the outpouring of testimonials and tributes in the wake of his passing, Brzezinski occupied a unique and towering position in America's foreign policy establishment.

Although he served in the administration of President Jimmy Carter, a Democrat, he was greatly respected by Republicans such as Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, who embraced his strong stance against the Soviet Union.

Later, his outspoken opposition to the Iraq War would win him admiration among a new generation of leaders, including a young U.S. senator and presidential candidate named Barack Obama. And although they hardly agreed on anything, President Trump sent his national security advisor to Brzezinski's funeral as a sign of respect and appreciation for his service to the United States of America.

Brzezinski was a proud naturalized American citizen, but he loved Poland and understood that he had a special role to play as a voice for Polish freedom and democracy abroad.

I will never forget working for him at the Carter White House in the fall of 1980, when new intelligence reports showed the Soviets were going to move troops into Poland to crush the Solidarity movement.

Brzezinski had gotten to know the Pope and appreciated the Holy Father's unique expertise on the Polish situation.

The President was meeting with his team in the Cabinet room. I was out in the hall. Brzezinski came out and said "Get me the Pope."

I called the White House operators, who always knew everyone's phone number, and asked for the Pope. They came back quickly and said that they didn't have a number – perhaps because of our belief in separation of church and state.

Brzezinski became a bit irritated and when the number was finally located he said, "this can never happen again. Put his number in my personal phone book, under P for Pope."

Throughout his career, Brzezinski faced critics – such as Governor Averell Harriman – who argued that his Polish background disqualified him from dealing objectively with the U.S.-Soviet relationship.

I often thought, why wouldn't you want someone who actually understood the complicated relationship between Poland and the Soviet Union to give his opinion?

Others claimed that all he thought about was the struggle with the Soviet Union.

They were so wrong.

He was prepared to push back against Soviet expansionism, but his horizon was much larger.

He saw the world changed by the rise of new regional powers, and insisted that attention had to be paid to them.

He led the negotiations with China which culminated in the historic breakthrough of normalization and set the stage for China's modern transformation.

He helped President Carter secure the Camp David peace agreement between Egypt and Israel, declare America's opposition to apartheid, and define U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf through the Carter Doctrine.

He embraced the idea that support for democracy and human rights served America's national interest best. And by putting human rights squarely on the global agenda, he handed dissidents behind the Iron Curtain a new and effective tool in their struggle.

There are many today who overlook this key aspect of his legacy. They lump Brzezinski together with other foreign policy realists who saw little connection between the pursuit of American interests and the fostering of democratic practices.

But Brzezinski thought deeply about the role that values must play in international relations and rejected the false dichotomy between so-called realists and idealists.

He would acknowledge that those engaged in statecraft must address the realities of power. Yet he also proclaimed, and I quote, that "human rights has become the genuine historical inevitability of our times."

I have been thinking about that phrase, and Brzezinski's defense of democratic ideals, in preparing for this visit to Warsaw.

I have also been thinking about a speech I delivered in this city in the year 2000, when I was Secretary of State and attended the first-ever meeting of the Community of Democracies.

The purpose of my visit then was to talk about how best to sustain democratic progress in the twenty-first century, and tonight I would like to revisit that theme in the context of Brzezinski's legacy and the challenges that we and our democratic allies face in this new and tumultuous era.

To explain my perspective, let me look back to the early 1980s.

After the end of the Carter administration, I helped Brzezinski research his memoir, *Power and Principle*.

But having written my dissertation on the role of the Czechoslovak press in Prague Spring, I was also very interested in looking at the role of the Polish press in supporting the Solidarity movement, which was gaining attention.

With Brzezinski's help, I obtained a fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson Center which enabled me to travel to Warsaw, Krakow and Gdansk in November 1981, one month before martial law was imposed.

For two weeks, I interviewed journalists, editors, and other pro-democracy trouble-makers – including Lech Wałęsa and Bronisław Geremek.

In the process, I became not only encouraged but envious.

My plan had been to write about Solidarity; but in my heart I wanted to join Solidarity.

And even though I was born Czech, I wanted to become a Pole because it was here that history had begun to march.

Within ten years, the Solidarity movement had triumphed, and that was when history began to gallop.

In Hungary, freedom emerged after ten months; in East Germany, ten weeks; in Czechoslovakia, ten days; and in Romania, ten hours.

After decades of darkness, the entire continent was flooded with light.

When I returned to government in the 1990s, I had a chance to make the most of that opportunity.

Our goal was to bring nations together based on core principles of democracy and free enterprise, human rights and the rule of law.

To that end, we took bold strides toward the creation of a Europe whole and free.

We worked to strengthen NATO by accepting new and broader responsibilities, and by adding new members.

Among those who offered essential support for this idea was Zbigniew Brzezinski, who worked closely with Poland's then-ambassador to the United States, Jerzy Koźmiński, to make the case for NATO enlargement.

The role that they played in making Poland's admission to NATO possible cannot be overstated.

At a time when many eminent American strategists, including George Kennan, Paul Nitze and Robert McNamara, were publicly arguing against expansion, Brzezinski launched his own intellectual campaign – writing articles and opinion pieces, testifying before the Senate, and giving dozens of media interviews.

His efforts had a decisive impact, convincing bipartisan majorities that America and Europe would be stronger with a NATO that included Central Europe's new democracies.

One of my proudest moments came on March 12, 1999, when I was able to call Brzezinski from the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri to tell him that Poland had just been formally admitted to the alliance.

It was tempting, during that miraculous time, to believe that democracy was in command and that the world would continue to move toward a more cooperative international system.

In the span of just a few decades, we had seen nation after nation gain its freedom: in Central and Eastern Europe, from Communism; in Asia and Africa, from colonialism; in Latin America, from military dictators; and in South Africa, from apartheid.

We witnessed and celebrated all this, but also saw warning signs that the democratic tide could recede.

Because while democracy in the long run is the most stable form of government; in the short run, it is among the most fragile.

In the 1990s, many new democracies began their existence with vast inherited problems, including inefficient centrally-planned economies, large debts and small bank accounts, ethnic strife and a lack of democratic institutions.

This complicated many countries' ability to combat corruption and crime and to build a strong civil society.

In addition, some countries were burdened with leaders who were more interested in self-promotion and self-enrichment than self-government.

So, although economic growth was often impressive, democracy's promise did not necessarily translate into the coin of higher living standards for the average person. And the onset of democracy did not always increase public satisfaction with the institutions of government.

All this was on my mind when I traveled to Poland in 2000 for the Community of Democracies meeting.

The idea behind that event was that free countries should help one another by sharing knowledge, providing assistance, and treating a threat to one as a danger to all.

Officials from more than one hundred countries participated; the host city was Warsaw because Bronisław Geremek, who was by then Poland's Foreign Minister, wanted this city to be associated with democracy instead of the Warsaw Pact.

In my remarks, I acknowledged the anxieties facing many democracies and warned that if they were not addressed, public confidence would erode and support would grow for failed remedies from the past, including extreme nationalism and authoritarianism.

Regrettably, it now appears this warning was prescient.

Because, in the short history of this century, we have witnessed a multiplication of international divisions, a backlash against globalization, a resurgence of extreme nationalism, and a worldwide retreat from democratic values.

In the wake of the global financial crisis, China's contention that economic gains need not be unaccompanied by democratic norms has gained appeal.

Russia's active measures campaign has succeeded in deepening social divisions, sowing further doubts about democracy, and undermining confidence in Western institutions.

We also see more and more countries employing squads of opinion-shapers to flood online sites and social media networks, where one can spread lies just as easily as truth.

I have spent a lot of time in recent years thinking and writing about why freedom has seemingly gone into retreat, and the person whose perspective I especially valued was Zbigniew Brzezinski.

At a time when many were proclaiming that the fall of the Berlin Wall had brought about an “end of history,” Brzezinski understood that the triumph of liberal democracy was not assured.

He wrote a book in 1993 called *Out of Control*, which made a series of dark predictions about the future. It feels especially relevant today, because he warned that xenophobia, ethnic hatreds, religion and grievance over the loss of status could give rise to a new form of Fascism in Russia.

“Fascism,” he wrote, “is particularly effective in exploiting the irrational side of human nature, appealing quite effectively to emotions that can be galvanized through nationalistic symbols, exploiting the attraction of national power and glory, and responding to the craving for discipline and uniformity.”

Brzezinski warned that if such a desire for order took root, it would not be confined to Russia but would almost certainly spread across Europe.

He took no pleasure in being proven right.

Towards the end of his life he saw that the entire continent was wrestling with questions of identity, ethnic and religious pluralism, migration, and the consequences of modern technology.

He also saw that Central Europe had once again become a place of testing for democratic values and institutions.

During the Cold War, communist leaders sought to hijack the term by calling their system “people’s democracy,” or “guided democracy.”

So Brzezinski and I watched with some sense of irony as a former Hungarian dissident, Viktor Orban, emerged as a champion of “illiberal democracy,” which is an oxymoron.

Far from embracing democracy, Orban has looked to Russia and Turkey as models for how to stifle a free press, eliminate an independent judiciary, and distort the electoral system so that his party is all but ensured to win elections.

History teaches us that fascism and the tendencies that lead to it are subject to imitation.

So it worries me when I hear leaders speak of bringing Orban’s model of illiberal democracy to Poland, of building coalitions that seek to undermine the unity of European institutions, and warning of refugees spreading disease and parasites.

And it concerns me that in nearly every country on the continent, there are political parties echoing the same basic themes –less tolerance towards minorities, less migration, less identification with Europe, and more interest in going their own way.

But what troubles me the most, and I know it troubled Zbigniew Brzezinski, is to see the United States playing a different role now than it has in the past.

Instead of seeking to unify the democratic community, as we did in Warsaw in 2000, we have an American president who routinely dismisses the idea of working cooperatively with allies, and whose own actions and rhetoric are often at odds with democratic ideals.

We have a tradition in America that, when traveling abroad, citizens should not engage in blunt criticism of our president nor interfere in the politics of their host countries.

As a former secretary of state, I will abide by that tradition.

But tonight, I will emphasize what I am *for* – and what I believe Zbigniew Brzezinski stood *for* – and you can draw your own conclusions.

To begin, I believe the world needs leaders who will bring people together instead of driving them apart.

I believe in a free press dedicated to the pursuit of truth in all its aspects and a government that protects the rights of journalists – because the truth can never be an enemy to an honest leader.

I also believe that democratic leaders should help and support one another, instead of reserving their warmest words for dictators and the world's leading abusers of personal dignity and human rights.

I believe in multilateral cooperation to address global problems, including climate change, nuclear nonproliferation, terrorism, Middle East peace, and a free, fair, and open system of trade.

I believe the logic underpinning the European Union remains utterly compelling, even as I recognize that for those working on a farm in Poland or at a factory in Bratislava, allegiance to Brussels does not come naturally, if at all.

Finally, I believe in the ongoing value of the Trans-Atlantic partnership.

As children, Zbigniew Brzezinski and I saw what happens when good and decent people fail to unite in the face of demagogues. In that era, Poland was among the countries that paid a terrible price.

So we cannot afford to be complacent.

We must draw a line between legitimate debate and efforts to augment power by chipping away at the foundations of democracy.

We must recognize that the alliance between Poland and the United States is one based not only on shared interests but on shared values. If our countries move away from those values, then it undermines the strength of our bond.

In the United States, we have a slogan that has been drilled into us in relation to the fight against terror. If we see something, such as an unattended suitcase or backpack, we should say something.

Well, when I look around the world today, I am disturbed by much of what I see.

So I have added a third element to the slogan “see something, say something” – and what I have added is “do something.”

That is why I wrote my most recent book, as a warning.

And that is why I am calling on people on both sides of the Atlantic to stand together and vow that we will not allow would-be dictators and despots to shape our future.

Last month, I was proud to travel to the Munich Security Conference to launch a new initiative aimed at rallying the democratic world on behalf of our common values.

Spearheaded by the Atlantic Council and America’s former Ambassador to Poland, Dan Fried, the centerpiece of this effort is a new Declaration of Principles for Freedom, Security and Prosperity, which was co-signed by leaders from every region of the world and across the political spectrum.

More than seventy years have elapsed since the Atlantic Charter was issued and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted.

It has been almost 30 years since the rebirth of freedom in Central and Eastern Europe. And it has been almost 20 years since the Community of Democracies gathered to sign the Warsaw Declaration.

Perhaps we all started taking some of those principles for granted.

So the time is right to renew our vows and to engage a new generation in freedom’s cause.

In the months ahead, we will be working with universities, parliaments and civil society to gain support for these principles and to revitalize the institutions that underpin them.

I am keenly aware that for the leaders of today and tomorrow, the experiences that shaped my worldview, and that of Zbigniew Brzezinski, may seem like ancient history.

A generation whose worldview was shaped by World War II and the Cold War is passing from the stage.

We cannot prepare for the future by clinging to the past, but I pray that we do not have to endure another trauma on the scale of World War II to recognize the urgency of civic responsibility, international cooperation, and the rule of law.

To avoid that fate, we need to learn from experience and recognize the threat posed when governments become hostile or indifferent to the ideals that defeated fascism and brought down the Berlin Wall.

It has been almost two years since we said goodbye to Zbig. I miss talking to him – and arguing with him.

But today's event, and so many others like it that have taken place, help reassure me that his legacy will endure.

Zbig always understood that he had an obligation to pass on his wisdom to new generations.

I was lucky enough to have benefited from his willingness to be a mentor, and I know that many in this audience did as well.

It is incumbent on all of us to carry forward that tradition.

That is why I am proud to Chair the National Democratic Institute, which for more than 35 years has helped train governments and citizens alike in the nuts and bolts of democracy.

That is why I make my students read his last book, *Strategic Vision*, and why I recently dusted off my copy of *The Soviet Bloc* – which is more relevant than ever.

It is why I enjoy spending time at universities such as Natolin College.

It is also why I always share the lessons that we can draw from his life.

Aggressors must be resisted.

Hate can never again be allowed to hide behind the mask of nationalist pride.

And America and Poland have a special responsibility to uphold and defend democracy.

Zbigniew Brzezinski learned too much in life to expect perfection, but he cared too much to settle for the world as it is.

He was a realistic optimist, who never stopped being an idealist.

He understood well that democratic elections do not always produce good leaders or efficient governments.

But he recognized that the advantage of living in democracy is that you do not have to prevail in every debate or win every election in order to have your voice heard and your rights protected. The rule of law ensures that with majority rule comes minority rights.

Moreover, democracy carries within it the remedies of its own shortcomings. Through its processes, policies may be changed, divisions bridged, and leaders held accountable.

Democracy is fragile, but it is also resilient. It is not the answer to every human problem. But it is the best system of government humans have devised. And the only system that values and respects the rights of all.

That is why so many brave men and women have sacrificed their lives and pledged their honor in freedom's name. And that is why the best way to honor the life and legacy of Zbigniew Brzezinski is to continue the struggle to defend and strengthen democracy in Europe, America, and around the world.

###