

The White House

Office of the Vice President

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Remarks By Vice President Biden in a Joint Statement with President Kaczynski

Presidential Palace, Warsaw, Poland

VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN: Mr. President, thank you for your hospitality. And I apologize to your colleagues, when two old friends get together, they tend to talk. You know how diplomats always walk out and say, we had a frank and thorough discussion? Well, we had a discussion friends have, we talked about everything. And had we the time, and were we not cognizant of people's schedules, we probably would have talked for another two hours.

But, Mr. President, I am proud to stand here with you, and I think our meeting was productive. I know of no problem of consequence we have with Poland. I know of no consequential problem. I know of no problem that is not able to be resolved as they emerge. Poland has a decided disadvantage in the relationship -- they own a part of our heart, and that is a disadvantage, Mr. President, we have.

My daughter-in-law comes from the second largest Polish city in the world, Chicago. But all kidding aside, it was a great discussion, and we discussed a broad range of mutual interests. I think if I could add on to what the President said, we both see the relationship as being rooted in security, but much beyond that, it's much beyond that. Poland, in 20 years, has moved from a country that in fact we looked at in terms of what we could do for, to a country as to what we can do jointly with, how we can jointly address the problems and opportunities that we face as genuine partners.

So there's a broad range of mutual interests, and our joint commitment to the NATO effort, to Afghanistan on. By the way, I expressed my deep appreciation -- I, like the President, have visited the troops on more than one occasion in Afghanistan. The Polish soldiers in Afghanistan are not just soldiers, they are warriors. They are warriors. They are doing an incredibly difficult job, and I wish every Pole could see just how brave and steadfast they are. You would be incredibly proud, incredibly proud, as I was, to have the opportunity to know and see where they were.

As a matter of fact -- it is just part of my DNA, as they say -- but I'm going to go from here to meet with men and women of the Polish armed forces later today, to let them know how much I truly appreciate -- and I mean this sincerely, this is not a diplomatic nicety. The President and I truly appreciate -- truly appreciate the sacrifices that the Polish military is making. And I'm going to meet with decorated Polish war veterans who have served in Afghanistan.

I understand, like all parents -- my son just got back from a year in Iraq. I understand the anxiety of every Polish mother and father, husband and wife, son and daughter. And I just want you to know it may not be a big deal, but it's a big deal to me. It's a big deal that you all know that we generally appreciate and recognize the sacrifice not only the soldiers in the field are making, but the families who are left at home.

There's a famous expression attributable to another man, not me. It says that, "they also serve who stand and wait. They also serve who stand and wait." So we owe a debt of obligation to the mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, and children of those brave Polish soldiers.

We also reaffirmed -- I reaffirmed -- President Obama's absolute determination to secure and ensure NATO's success in the 21st century is matched by the -- matches the success of the 20th century. I briefed the President on Secretary Clinton's -- we talked in depth about Russia. And we talked in depth about the -- our mutual desire to see better relations with Russia. We also talked about my recent trip to Ukraine and to Georgia, and our similar views and concerns that we have relative to both countries.

The President and I discussed the leading role that Poland can play if it chooses to play -- and I believe it will, but that's a decision made by Poland -- on national missile defense within NATO -- within NATO. And I welcome the President's support for the missile defense, and for Poland's offer to host a standard missile, this so-called SM-3s, in a third stage.

President Obama has a phased adaptive approach to missile defense that I believe -- I don't believe, I know -- strengthens missile defense for Europe unlike its ever existed, reinforces Article 5, and it will bolster the alliance's deterrent capability overall. Simply put, it's better for NATO, it's better for Poland, it's better for Europe, it's better for the United States. It's a more adaptable, rational, and workable system.

And I want to thank the President, and the Polish people, for the hospitality they've shown during my visit to Warsaw. I was reminiscing with some of my colleagues prior to arriving -- and I mentioned this at a previous meeting -- that how far Poland has come, the incredible sacrifices the Polish people have made over the past century and a half longer, but in modern history, and the distance they have traveled in the last 20 years. It's absolutely remarkable.

And I was discussing this with my national security advisor in the way over, in the car. As I rode through Warsaw in the last -- the first -- well, the most recent time I was here, was when we were deciding -- we, me and others -- pushing for the admission of Poland into NATO in the mid-'90s. And the discussion then was if Poland would be a partner in NATO -- Poland clearly wanted to be -- if it would be. We were pushing with all of our allies for the admission of Poland into NATO. And I look now, and here we are, not just talking about whether or not Poland is a part of NATO, but the vital role Poland is playing within NATO.

And I assured -- in conclusion, I assured the President that no one should misunderstand our commitment -- NATO's commitment and the United States' commit -- to the security of Poland is unalterable. It will not change. It has not changed. The only thing that's changed is the admission of Poland into NATO, making NATO stronger than it was.

So, Mr. President, I thank you very much for your hospitality. And I apologize to all of you, because we got to talking, and we ended up spending two hours together in a private meeting. But it was -- I benefited greatly from the discussion, Mr. President. Thank you for your hospitality, and I'll see you all. Thank you.

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