

Ambassador Stephen Mull  
Welcome Ceremony for the 173<sup>rd</sup> IBCT (Airborne)  
Drawsko Pomorskie, Poland  
April 23, 2014

Minister Siemoniak, General Majewski, General Konopka, General Pack, Major General Longo, distinguished guests and friends:

Just over 15 years ago, my friend, the late Bronisław Geremek, traveled as Poland's Foreign Minister to Independence, Missouri in the United States to present Poland's formal accession to NATO. On that historic day, he told the audience, in which I was proud to sit:

*"To wielki dzień dla Polski, jak i dla milionów Polaków rozproszonych po wszystkich kontynentach. Polska wraca na zawsze tam gdzie jest jej miejsce: do wolnego świata. Polska już nie jest osamotniona w obronie swojej wolności. Jesteśmy w NATO dla "naszej i waszej wolności"."*

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Since that fateful day, Poland has devotedly and reliably brought to life Professor Geremek's commitment "*dla naszej i waszej wolności*" far beyond the power of mere words. Whenever America has faced danger or insecurity, Poland has been there by our side, whether keeping the peace in the Balkans, ending the horrors of the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, or in sacrificing the lives of 43 brave soldiers in the struggle against terrorism in Afghanistan. As a member of NATO, Poland continues set the standard for responsible NATO membership, both in terms of defense spending and in terms of seeking necessary improvement in its military capability.

Just as Poland has been there for the United States, today, as the transatlantic community confronts Russia's unacceptable aggression against Poland's neighbor Ukraine, a sovereign and independent state, we have a solemn obligation in the framework of NATO to reassure Poland of our security guarantee. As Vice President Biden said in Warsaw just a few weeks ago:

"President Obama and I view Article 5 as a solemn commitment not only for our time, but for all time. We take it deadly serious, and our commitment is absolutely unwavering and unshakeable."

It was in that spirit in March that the United States responded within days to Poland's request by deploying 12 F-16s and more than 200 airmen to Łask air base, and why today we welcome troops of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team to Poland. As Secretary Hagel told Minister Siemoniak in Washington last Thursday, the United States will maintain this presence in Poland at least through the rest of the year to provide reassurance and to enhance the interoperability of U.S. and Polish forces through joint training and exercises.

Secretary Hagel and Minister Siemoniak agreed that these deployments represent the start of our commitment to take the U.S.-Polish security relationship to a new level, in a Program of Solidarity and Partnership. We look forward to working hard with our Polish allies to carry out the program in the months and years ahead through new cooperation in among others securing Poland's air and missile defense system, strengthening its F-16 program, enhancing the cooperation of our Special Forces, expanding joint exercises of our conventional forces, and recognizing Poland's leadership role in regional security.

To Colonel Foster and his outstanding paratroopers of the 173rd Brigade: Welcome to Poland! I know within a short time of your arrival, you will agree with me that the United States is incredibly lucky to have allies this brave, partners this committed, and friends this loyal.

And to my Polish friends, I know you will welcome these elite, accomplished and fearless soldiers who represent the very best of the American military tradition as your brothers in arms. Together, every day, you will be strengthening the alliance that will keep Poland and America safe and secure in defense of our common values.

Thank you!