

Ambassador Feinstein's Remarks
German Marshall Fund/Marshall Center Alumni Conference
Sheraton Hotel, November 30, 2011

Thank you, Andrew.

It is a pleasure to be here with you this morning joining my colleagues from the United States, who lead two great American organizations dedicated to strong transatlantic relations, the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. I am pleased to join Craig Kennedy and Lt Gen Dayton in welcoming you to this conference. I commend you all for your participation today and for your interest in shaping the future of our transatlantic partnership – a partnership that, as much as ever, is rooted in a shared dedication to prosperity and security.

A main, if sometimes unstated, pillar of our foreign policy is and has always been that security begins at home. To be strong as an Alliance, we need to be strong at home.

Throughout the post-War period, prosperity and security have gone hand in hand. Beginning with the Marshall Plan and with the entrance of newly democratic states into the European Union, our common pursuit of an open and liberal economic system has underpinned our ability to engage successfully in a common defense. Secretary Clinton recently said of the relationship between economic and military strength: “A strong economy has been a quiet pillar of American power in the world. It gives us the leverage we need to exert influence and advance our interests. It gives other countries confidence in our leadership and a greater stake in partnering with us.”

At the Chicago NATO Summit next May, the Allies will focus on how to meet the security challenges of the 21st century and sustain the Alliance's capabilities at a time of budget pressure. The subject of today's conference therefore could not be timelier or more important.

Addressing this topic recently in Belgium, U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said: "The fiscal environment means that the United States, and all nations in NATO, must depend on their fellow members even more to share the burden of protecting common interests . . . and that will require members to commit to addressing growing gaps in our military capabilities even as we confront the challenges of fiscal austerity."

Our operations in Afghanistan and Libya showed the alliance is uniquely able to provide a timely, comprehensive, and sustained military response to a crisis. At the same time, the operations exposed many of the gaps that Secretary Panetta mentioned, including those in intelligence collection, reconnaissance, targeting, air refueling, and armament shortfalls.

The United States remains committed to doing its share throughout the world, but cannot go it alone. As Secretary Panetta concluded recently in Brussels, “Security in the 21st century will not be achieved by each nation marching to its own drummer. It can only be achieved by a willingness to fight together to defend our common security interests.”

A great example of this cooperation is the successful NATO mission in Afghanistan, where the improving security environment is enabling the transition of security responsibility from NATO to Afghan National Security Forces. This past weekend, President Karzai announced the second tranche of areas to be transitioned. Included in the list is Ghazni City within the Ghazni province, where Polish forces have been serving since 2008.

When this second tranche of transition is complete, more than 50 percent of Afghan population will live in areas secured by the Afghan army and police. This is a mark of tremendous progress and opportunity for Afghanistan. As General John R. Allen, the commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, said, “Transition is a reality, and it is a path for the future success of this country and the Afghan people.”

Transition of another kind is needed to ensure that NATO remains relevant and ready to meet the security challenges of the future. NATO's leadership, drawing from both the successes and the lessons learned from Libya and Afghanistan, understands the need for greater integration and cooperation to address capability gaps.

The United States strongly supports the idea of "Smart Defense" proposed by NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen, which calls for greater integration between the militaries of member states to eliminate wasteful redundancies in military spending. Rasmussen explained: "Smart Defense is not about more money, it is about money spent more effectively. It is shared defense. It is efficient defense."

Efficient defense is really the name of the game as we look at defense spending in this time of economic austerity. We must have greater coordination between nations on military spending to get greater impact at a lower cost. Secretary Panetta said, “We cannot afford for countries to make decisions about force structure and force reductions in a vacuum, leaving neighbors in the dark. There must be a transparent and cooperative process.”

The relationship between the U.S. and Polish militaries, which has never been deeper, reveals the benefits of such a transparent and cooperative process. Despite the challenging economic environment, the United States’ presence in Poland will grow and diversify, and that will deepen our day-to-day security cooperation. We look forward to the stationing of a permanent U.S. air detachment in Poland beginning in the fall of next year.

We remain committed to the deployment of missile defense in Poland as part of the NATO-wide missile defense system that will provide protection to the countries of NATO. Our operations together will increase the security of our nations, and of the NATO alliance. The open communication and daily cooperation between our militaries is a model for cooperation within NATO, the European Union, and across the region.

We encourage Poland and our European allies to employ the principles of Smart Defense and the EU's "pooling and sharing" concept to seek increased cooperation and integration in other areas, such as pilot training, aircraft maintenance, intelligence and surveillance, and communications.

Secretary Clinton recently said, “One of America’s great successes of the past century was to build a strong network of relationships and institutions across the Atlantic – an investment that continues to pay off today.” America is committed to Europe and to maintaining our obligations to European security.

We look to our European allies -- and to Poland in particular -- to do the same: to maintain security commitments, improve military capabilities through increased integration and cooperation, and to resist making deep cuts in military spending as a quick fix to budgetary crises. In that context, we welcomed Prime Minister’s Tusk’s November 18 declaration that Poland will continue to adhere to the NATO standard of effectively 2% of GDP when it comes to defense spending.

Because of the growing Polish economy, this commitment to maintaining spending levels means that Poland's military budget will be one of the few within NATO that is actually growing during these difficult economic times. This is an excellent signal that Poland is determined to maintain a strong military that is prepared for the Alliance's challenges ahead.

As I said before, the United States is strongly committed to European security. But, that commitment cannot be an excuse for some European nations to avoid investing in their own security, even in the face of economic troubles.

The best security is shared security. It is my hope that our nations will work together to modernize our military structures and to eliminate redundancies, thereby strengthening our shared security even as we make the spending reductions needed to protect our long-term economic security.

I thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today and wish you continued success. Thank you.