

CONFIRMATION TESTIMONY
Statement of Lee Feinstein
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Poland
September 15, 2009
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Madam Chair, Ranking Member DeMint, and Members of the Committee,
Thank you for inviting me to appear before you this morning. It is an honor to come before you as the President's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Poland. I am grateful for the confidence that President Obama and Secretary Clinton have shown in putting me forward for this important post.

I am proud to be joined here today by my family. I am more than grateful for the continuing love and devotion of my wife, Elaine Monaghan, a Scot who had no idea what she was getting into when she accepted an assignment in Washington ten years ago. Our inquisitive and flexible children, Jack and Cara, are also here today. Elaine and I feel incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to share this life experience with them.

I am especially honored to be nominated to represent the United States in Poland. My first trip to Warsaw was thirty years ago, when Europe was divided, and few could have imagined that Poland would become a member of NATO and the European Union. I am not only literally a member of a transatlantic family, I am an Atlanticist, who believes that the United States can best advance its interests and values when we work in partnership with our NATO allies -- democracies that are committed to building a more secure and prosperous world as we face the challenges of the new century. On a personal note, my father's mother was born in a village in what was part of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth, and is now part of today's Ukraine.

I have been privileged to work on national security strategy and foreign policy from both inside and outside the government and on a bipartisan basis. I have served in several capacities in the U.S. government, including in the Office of Strategy and Requirements in the Department of Defense and as principal deputy director of Policy Planning at the Department of State. I was national security director to Secretary Clinton during her presidential campaign. I served as an advisor to the congressionally mandated Task Force on UN Reform, co-chaired by Senator George Mitchell and Speaker Newt Gingrich. In my work at the Council on Foreign Relations and the Brookings Institution, I focused on many of the challenges facing our nation, from nuclear proliferation, to global security, to the changing role of international norms and institutions.

Poland has endured great hardship and tragedy in its history. It has been occupied and dismembered by foreign powers time and again. It experienced a brief period of independence after World War I, but then fell prey to Nazi invasion and occupation, during which six million Polish citizens lost their lives, including three million Jews, most of Poland's Jewish population. Then, following the war, the Soviet regime deprived Poles of their political liberty and imposed an economic system that kept the country in poverty and subjugation.

But in the face of these harsh realities, the Poles rallied themselves in a mass movement, and threw off communist rule, creating a chain reaction that led to the collapse of the communist system in Central and Eastern Europe.

The courage and moral force of this movement had ripple effects around the world. It is no exaggeration to say that Poland played a key role both in ending the Cold War and in creating the more democratic world in which we now live. Poland has built a dynamic economy which is weathering the global economic recession better than many of its neighbors and is one of the few economies in the world that is still growing, if at a reduced pace.

Poland has also built a vibrant democracy that serves as a positive example. Ten years after joining NATO, and five years after joining the European Union, Poland is taking on a larger strategic role in its immediate neighborhood, in Europe, and internationally.

We are bound by what President Obama has described as the “enduring promise of our alliance,” embodied in Article 5 of the NATO treaty, which provides that an armed attack against one NATO country “shall be considered an attack against them all.” The United States stands by that commitment.

As Secretary Clinton has said, Poland is “one of our closest allies.” Poland was one of just three countries that entered Iraq with U.S. forces in 2003. It contributes forces for NATO’s KFOR mission in Kosovo. Polish forces have served in Afghanistan since the onset of the NATO mission in 2004. Poland is contributing in Afghanistan both in terms of combat troops and development projects, leading the security effort in Ghazni province, where soldiers confront an active insurgency, while delivering development assistance and building local Afghan security and governance capacity in an area where there is a limited NGO presence.

In short, intrepid Polish forces stand with us in dangerous places with dangerous missions, and Poland has increased its contributions, which are prodigious. The United States and NATO have important decisions to make on transatlantic and European security, on dealing with proliferation threats, on defense modernization, and on relations with Russia, to name just a few. It is fundamental that Poland – one of Europe’s largest countries -- and the United States move forward in tandem, and I am committed to make that happen.

Poland is a leader in supporting democratic and economic reforms in the region. The United States can benefit from Polish experience in this area.

I look forward to listening intently to our Polish allies. Poland has partnered with Sweden, through the European Union, and in the Eastern Partnership Initiative to promote prosperity and rule of law in the region. Poland was the convener of the first ministerial meeting of the Community of Democracies in Warsaw in 2000. I was gratified to take part in that meeting with Secretary Albright, and I look forward, if confirmed, to participating in the 10th anniversary meeting scheduled to take place in Krakow next year.

U.S. economic vitality and a strong trade and investment relationship with Poland are vitally important. We have an opportunity together to enhance energy security, by exploiting new technologies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while creating jobs on both sides of the Atlantic. Increased U.S. investment in Poland and a better, faster and more transparent process for U.S. firms, big and small, seeking to do business will have my full attention.

I pledge, if confirmed, to advocate our interests and our values, and to build personal and institutional ties that will advance our common vision. I will work diligently on outstanding issues of importance to both our nations, including missile defense and defense cooperation. Achieving Polish membership in the Visa Waiver Program remains a shared goal. If confirmed, I will work actively to help Poland meet the criteria that Congress has set out. Even before its founding, our country immeasurably benefited from the contributions of the Polish people, and this has continued for more than two centuries. When Poles and Americans travel back and forth, they energize and enrich our societies and, if confirmed, I will be committed to ensuring that this long tradition continues.

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews, to be built in the heart of the Warsaw Ghetto, is testimony to the growing outreach between the government and people of Poland, and the Jewish community, whose presence in Poland dates back almost one thousand years and remains alive to this day, despite the Nazi Holocaust.

Poland's commemoration earlier this month of the liquidation of the Lodz ghetto was a poignant and powerful example of the Polish government's actions to honor the victims and those Poles who risked their lives to protect them. Poland has passed and is implementing legislation restoring Jewish community property, and committed to pass legislation to establish a claims resolution process for privately-owned property seized by the Nazis and held onto by the Communist Party. If confirmed, I will support U.S. efforts to encourage enactment of that legislation, which would benefit Polish citizens, who make up an estimated 80 percent of eligible claimants, as well as holocaust survivors and victims' heirs.

If confirmed as the 25th U.S. ambassador to Poland, I will enter the job standing on the shoulders of those who came before me, the gracious incumbent Ambassador Victor Ashe, as well as some of America's finest diplomats, including Ambassadors Dan Fried and Chris Hill.

I appear before this committee with pride and humility and with a commitment, if confirmed, to represent the United States with honor in a country with which we share unshakeable historic bonds and vital strategic interests.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.