


IN SOLIDARITY WITH POLAND

Americans Who Strengthened
Polish-American Ties

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Embassy
of the Republic of Poland
in Washington, D.C.



The years 2020-2021 mark the **40th anniversary** of the emergence of Solidarity, the first free and independent trade union behind the Iron Curtain. To commemorate the anniversary of that movement which changed the course of history, this book honors **40 Americans** who, through their actions and advocacy, championed Poland-U.S. solidarity.

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Americans Who Strengthened Polish-American Ties

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Edited and introduced by Piotr Wilczek

Washington, D.C.

2021

Publisher Embassy of Poland in Washington, D.C.
2640 16th Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20009

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Typefaces New Zelek Pro, Mandrel
The New Zelek Pro typeface was designed in 1974 by Bronisław Zelek, a Polish graphic artist, poster designer, and typographer.



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Washington, D.C.

Printed in the United States of America

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As we finalize this publication, the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, still impacting too many families all too deeply. It has wrought immense and irreplaceable loss on communities across the world. And while it may have changed lives and sidelined many of our plans, it could not totally stop us in our tracks.

When I decided to pursue this project in early 2020, inspired by a similar project by my good friend Ambassador Ron Dermer, I could not imagine what the coming months would be like. The global pandemic tested everyone, including us—in the diplomatic field, working far from home. And yet, through it all, we have managed to persevere and continue our duties, working in new configurations to complete our tasks. I would like to express my deep gratitude to the entire Embassy team for going above and beyond to keep operations running smoothly during this unprecedented time.

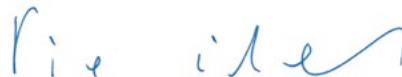
I would like to thank writer and researcher Matthew Stefanski for putting into words the spirit of our bilateral ties, both past and present. A former colleague at the Embassy, his passion for history and Polish-American relations comes across in each of the 40 profiles in this book. I am grateful for his collaboration on this project, and for helping to tell the story of *In Solidarity With Poland*.

This publication could not have been accomplished without the superb management of the project by three key members of the Embassy team: Urszula Horoszko, Head of the Public Diplomacy and Culture Section; Dagmara Jasińska, Culture and Public Diplomacy Counselor; and Piotr Erenfeicht, Head of the Political Section. Their oversight kept all the moving parts aligned, and ensured that the publication I envisioned would become a reality.

I would also like to thank copy editor Mary Oberst Kulongoski for her sharp eye and thoughtful feedback stemming from her experience in editing historical works.

The fresh look of the book is thanks to the work of graphic designer Jakub Rola, who represents the young generation of Poland's graphic talent and who continues the great traditions of Polish graphic masters.

Lastly, thank you to all who supported this project by providing their feedback and photographs to help illustrate our publication.



Piotr Wilczek
Ambassador of Poland to the United States

Washington, D.C., May 3rd, 2021



INTRODUCTION

BY PIOTR WILCZEK

**AMBASSADOR OF POLAND
TO THE UNITED STATES**



“There is no Freedom without Solidarity,” proclaimed the workers of Poland during the extraordinary strikes that gripped the country in the summer of 1980. In factories, shipyards, steel mills, and mines, the Polish people banded together to peacefully demand fundamental freedoms, and in doing so changed the world.

What began as isolated strikes quickly spread across Poland until over 500 workplaces were on strike – in solidarity. The communist government was forced to negotiate and eventually agreed to the demands of the strikers, pledging to release political prisoners and respect guaranteed freedoms, including free speech, the right to strike, and the right to establish independent trade unions. The Polish people’s sense of solidarity was so strong that it became their rallying cry, their guiding philosophy, and the name of their movement.

For fifteen months following the strikes, a newfound sense of freedom swept across Poland, as the people felt empowered and dared to demand a better, more free Poland. We commemorate these landmark events and the accompanying spirit of solidarity that filled the hearts of millions in Poland and around the world.

The years 2020-2021 mark the 40th anniversary of that hopeful period when Solidarity emerged.

It was a time when over ten million people, a third of Poland’s population, joined the Solidarity movement, making history and setting into motion a series of events that eventually resulted in a fully free and independent Poland. The breakthroughs of 1980-1981, and later in 1989, would not have been possible without the solidarity of the Polish people. Uniting over political, regional, generational, and social distinctions to work together for the greater good, they showed that together, anything is possible. Forty years ago, the people of Poland also witnessed an outpouring of solidarity from around the world, including especially from the United States. This solidarity – backed by substantive actions – lasted through martial law, the democratic transformation, and beyond.

On this occasion, I have decided to reflect on and recognize some of the many exceptional Americans who, in various ways, have contributed to strengthening ties between Poland and the United States, supported Poland in her most trying moments, and lived up to the true meaning of the word *solidarity*. Our two countries have been gifted with great statesmen, activists, and



civil society leaders who have dedicated their time and energy to helping others. I dare not even try to list every American who supported Poland and tied us closer together, for that would be an impossible task. So, given that it is the 40th anniversary, I have chosen to spotlight 40 Americans who, through their actions and advocacy, have been champions of Poland-U.S. solidarity. This list features outstanding individuals from the 1980s as well as from earlier and later periods in our ties, concluding with Poland's 1999 accession into NATO. Although our bilateral relations continue to be strengthened today, thanks to the ongoing close ties with successive American administrations, I have decided not to include anyone still serving in office because they could easily fill another book entirely.

In addition to the 38 distinguished individuals included in this book, I've added two organizations, The Polish American Congress and the Committee in Support of Solidarity, selected to represent the much greater number of Polish-American organizations of all stripes, from established foundations to local groups, that actively supported Solidarity and continue to serve a crucial role in Poland-U.S. ties. The Polish-American community and their multitude of proud organizations have always been key partners, especially during our most trying times. By recognizing these two organizations, I wish to recognize all those individuals who, through their involvement in *Polonia*, have played a role in helping Poland be free. I am grateful for each and every Polish-American who has helped strengthen the ties that bind us together.

I hope that by reading this book you will be inspired, as I was, to look at the human dimension of our transatlantic ties. For beneath the official protocols are the people. It is the people who form the most important component in our relations. It is the people who made history, and it is the people, today, in Warsaw, Washington, D.C., and throughout our two countries, who continue to facilitate our ties, build bridges, and bring us together.

It is my sincere hope, as has been my driving mission while Ambassador, that the list of friends of Poland in Washington, D.C., and across the United States continues to grow so that many future editions of this book can be published. May this book lead to reflection on the events of our past, inspire bold undertakings to meet the challenges of our time, and rejuvenate the spirit of solidarity around the world to prepare for what lies ahead.

← Police cars clearing the way for a pro-Solidarity march on New York City's Madison Avenue, January 30, 1982 (photo credit: Z. Malinowski)



Irena Lasota, Committee in Support of Solidarity
(photo credit: Z. Malinowski)

COMMITTEE IN SUPPORT OF SOLIDARITY

ESTABLISHED 1981

On a frigid Sunday morning, December 13, 1981, the people of Poland awoke to a horrible new reality. Martial law had been instituted, curtailing already limited freedoms and banning the Solidarity trade union, the mass movement that had galvanized Polish society since its establishment nearly a year and a half earlier. Solidarity activists were imprisoned and contact with the outside world was cut off. Disbelief, despair, and uncertainty gripped the Polish people, as some actively resisted the crackdown and others went underground to continue their opposition activities clandestinely. Abroad, supporters of Solidarity also sprang into action.

“The West cannot remain silent!,” declared the newly established Committee in Support of Solidarity in one of its first public statements. This grassroots group, composed of a mix of Polish dissidents, student activists, social democrats, and Polish-Americans, banded together in New York City in the immediate aftermath of the martial law crackdown. “The Committee in Support of Solidarity believes it is of the utmost importance that the United States along with its allies respond resolutely and consistently to the state of war in Poland. This response must include full economic and political sanctions,” it proclaimed.

Through the dedicated efforts of such individuals as Eric Chenoweth, Jakub Karpiński, Irena Lasota, Jerzy Warman, and others, the Committee swiftly established itself as a key voice on the issue, advocating for human rights in Poland and promoting the cause of Solidarity in the United States. Fueled by an intense desire to stop the repressions being perpetuated in Poland, the organization quickly became one of the crucial links in the chain of Western support for the Solidarity movement and the Polish people.

The Committee documented human rights violations in Poland in order to inform the Western world about the repressive actions underway there. It became a key partner of American labor, keeping the AFL-CIO and its affiliates up-to-date on the latest developments in Eastern Europe. The Committee sought to do what it could to support Solidarity and the resistance to communism in Poland, including publishing reports, testifying before Congress, collaborating with human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and the Helsinki Watch Committee, and initiating campaigns and

public demonstrations to maintain the spotlight on Poland. In 1983, for example, the Committee spearheaded an effort with the American Federation of Teachers and other unions to financially adopt the families of Polish political prisoners. Such efforts brought much-needed comfort, attention, and solidarity with Poland’s battered dissidents.

With time, the Committee became a critical intermediary between the United States and the Polish underground, using its extensive contact network to help channel greatly needed supplies into communist Poland. These supplies, much of which were funded by American unions, Polish-Americans, private foundations, and the National Endowment for Democracy, helped keep the Solidarity movement afloat while it was forced underground. Just one tested method among many was to empty chocolate-syrup bottles and fill them with printer ink. These bottles were then smuggled through communist border checks with other supplies and used to keep Solidarity’s underground press operations running.

In 1985, Committee leaders Irena Lasota and Eric Chenoweth established the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE), an independent organization dedicated to the promotion of democracy, civil society, and human rights throughout Eastern Europe and other communist and post-communist countries. For their contributions to Poland’s struggle, Lasota was awarded the Commander Cross of the Order of *Polonia Restituta* and Chenoweth the Commander Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland.

The Committee in Support of Solidarity, as well as all those committed individuals in America who dedicated their time and energy to the cause of Poland and Solidarity, were instrumental in helping to keep the movement and its ideals alive during the dark days of martial law. Thanks to their support, Solidarity could not be defeated, and today the ideals of Solidarity live on in Poland and around the world.



Irena Lasota and Eric Chenoweth
at the New York City office of the
Committee in Support of Solidarity
(courtesy of IDEE)



Jerzy Warman
Committee in Support of Solidarity
(photo credit: Z. Malinowski)



Jakub Karpiński
Committee in Support of Solidarity
(photo credit: Z. Malinowski)



President Woodrow Wilson, 1919

WOODROW WILSON

1856-1924

From 1795-1918, Poland did not exist as a state. Throughout this long century of foreign domination, the Polish people never lost their will for freedom. Each generation, through armed struggle, diplomatic maneuvering, and public appeals, sought to undo the injustice of Poland's partition and re-establish her independence. Like previous failed efforts, World War I might have been no different, had it not been in part for the support that the Polish people and the Polish cause received from such influential leaders as President Woodrow Wilson.

Wilson was born in Virginia before the American Civil War but spent many years in New Jersey, where he served as a member of the faculty and later as president of Princeton University. A progressive Democrat described as highly idealistic and intensely ambitious, Wilson was elected Governor of New Jersey in 1910, and soon after President of the United States in 1912.

Prior to the United States' entry into the Great War, President Wilson declared in his *Peace Without Victory* speech before Congress on January 22, 1917, that "a united, independent, and autonomous Poland" was a fundamental condition of peace. In doing so, Wilson became the first world leader to publicly declare that Poland's independence was to be an outcome of the conflict being waged.

One year later, in January 1918, Wilson delivered his renowned *Fourteen Points* address, which outlined the United States' program for world peace. Influenced by Polish statesmen, including Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Wilson stated in his 13th Point that an independent Polish state should be re-established, thus bolstering Polish independence efforts and enshrining the Polish cause within the American post-war vision. This support forever secured President Wilson the admiration of the Polish people. As Stephen Mizwa, the founder of the Kościuszko Foundation, wrote, "What Lincoln's Gettysburg address is to the Americans, Woodrow Wilson's Thirteenth Point is to the Poles."

But Wilson's speeches and policy declarations regarding post-war Europe, as decisive and meaningful as they were to the course of Poland's re-establishment, were not all that the president did. Preceding these actions, Wilson was involved in relief efforts for Poland, declaring a Polish Relief Day in 1916 and facilitating U.S.

aid to war-torn Polish provinces. The President also approved the enlistment of Polish nationals in the United States into the Polish Blue Army under General Haller, which served with distinction in France during World War I and in Poland during the Polish-Bolshevik War. Later, Wilson appointed Herbert Hoover to head the American Relief Administration, which brought tangible assistance and much-needed food to the Polish people.

Two years to the day after his *Peace Without Victory* speech, President Woodrow Wilson and the United States officially recognized the Polish government, and soon thereafter established diplomatic relations. In the coming months, as Poland waged a battle for her survival against Bolshevik Russia, President Wilson requested that Congress grant Poland a war loan totaling \$176 million, which enabled the purchase of supplies and munitions, including approximately 200 tanks and 300 airplanes.

Contemporary accounts best capture the sympathies that Poles harbored for President Wilson, grateful for his support of the Polish cause. "For centuries to come, in a free, united, and independent Poland, the children yet unborn will celebrate the momentous event and link the names of Wilson and Paderewski in their jubilation," wrote the Polish-American *Free Poland* newspaper. Ignacy Paderewski wrote to Wilson in 1917, "You are the foster-father of a chiefless land. You are Poland's inspired protector. For many a month the spelling of your name has been the only comfort and joy of a starving nation. For many a month among the ruins of a devastated country millions of people have been feeding on you."

In recognition of his role in Poland's rebirth, President Wilson was presented Poland's highest distinction, the Order of the White Eagle. Today, a city square and a metro station in Warsaw bear his name, and President Woodrow Wilson continues to be celebrated in Poland as a man of goodwill who helped realize the Polish dream of independence.



Edward Mandell House, 1920

EDWARD MANDELL HOUSE

1858-1938

Officially, Colonel Edward Mandell House was an advisor to President Woodrow Wilson, but in truth he was the President's close friend and right-hand man. According to Wilson himself, "Mr. House is my second personality, he's my independent self. His thoughts and mine are one." The close proximity and strong connection to the President made Colonel House a powerful force in the Wilson White House.

Like Wilson, House was a Southern gentleman. House earned his political stripes in Texas, where he helped elect and advise four Governors. It was in Texas where he also gained his honorific title of Colonel, albeit not due to any military service but as a nod to his role as an advisor.

House's domain was foreign affairs, and biographer Godfrey Hodgson called him Wilson's "assistant president for foreign policy." As Wilson's unofficial envoy during and after the Great War, House navigated the choppy waters of European diplomacy as empires crumbled and the map of Europe was redrawn. In this role of foreign policy advisor, House came to know Ignacy Jan Paderewski, the internationally renowned virtuoso and Polish statesman.

During the war years, Paderewski used his musical fame and clout to champion the cause of Polish independence around the world, especially among political and cultural elites in the United States. Widely known in the U.S. due to his blockbuster piano-concert tours, which sold out such venues as Madison Square Garden, Paderewski leveraged his access to the power centers of America to advocate for his native Poland, which had been wiped off the map of Europe one hundred years earlier. During the course of his lobbying campaign, Paderewski befriended Colonel House, a friendship that had outsized ramifications on the fate of Poland and the course of world events.

As House later wrote in his diary, "My contact with Paderewski was close and affectionate. We were friends at our first meeting. I knew at once that I was in the presence of a great man, and one with whom it would be a delight to work. He enlisted my sympathies for Poland." The feelings were mutual, as Paderewski called House "the noblest man I have ever had the honor to know."

In January 1917, still months before the United States entered the war, House turned to his friend Paderewski and asked for a memorandum on the cause of Polish independence for President Wilson's review. Two weeks later, the President delivered a speech to Congress in which he declared, "there should be a united, independent, and autonomous Poland." The President's declaration would later develop into the 13th Point of Wilson's famed *Fourteen Points* address and, eventually, into reality.

In his capacity as Wilson's confidant and unofficial chief diplomat, House became a crucial friend of and advocate for the Polish cause. At Versailles he was considered by some to be a very influential delegate, second only to Wilson. Although somewhat forgotten today, House's contributions to enshrining a free Poland in the post-war world order were not forgotten by his friend Paderewski, nor the Polish people. In 1932, Paderewski funded the construction of a statue of Colonel Edward M. House in Warsaw's Skaryszewski Park, which stands to this day in recognition of the work that House conducted to secure U.S. support for Poland's rightful return to the international community.



President Herbert Hoover, c. 1928

HERBERT HOOVER

1874-1964

In 1918, on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, shouts of joy emanated from the trenches as World War I finally came to an end. Throughout Europe, however, the joy was mixed with concern as a humanitarian catastrophe was developing. Wartime devastation had created a severe shortage of food, clothing, fuel, and medicine across the continent. While some would have thought the situation hopeless, one American, himself an orphan, was determined to restore faith and help feed millions in their time of greatest need.

Herbert Hoover was raised in the conservative Quaker tradition that placed great emphasis on a strong work ethic. By the time World War I broke out, he was a wealthy and well-traveled mining engineer working in Great Britain. Hoover immediately involved himself in humanitarian work, assisting stranded Americans in war-torn Europe. Next, he established the Commission for Relief in Belgium, and when the United States entered the global conflict, President Wilson made Hoover head of the U.S. Food Administration in order to oversee adequate food supply to both the front line and the home front.

The Great War left a decimated continent in its wake, and Polish lands were acutely affected. As Hoover described in a speech to Polish-Americans in Buffalo, “During the war Poland had been ravaged by four separate invasions—parts of it even by seven invasions. The destruction of property and civilian life was greater than all the destruction of property and life on the Western front.” American surveyors sent to assess the food situation wrote of their visit to Eastern Poland, “We passed from village to village, and everywhere found famine and disease... The people were subsisting on a sort of bread, an awful black substance made from bark from oak trees...”

To begin to ameliorate the desperate conditions in Europe, Hoover was tasked with leading the American Relief Administration (ARA), which established offices in 32 countries, including Poland. The ARA set up soup kitchens and began the massive relief effort of delivering food, medicine, and clothing to millions in need. By the summer of 1919, half a million children in Poland were receiving daily meals through the ARA. Hoover and the ARA also facilitated the distribu-

tion of American private-sector donations to Poland, including from Polish-American organizations, the YMCA, the YWCA, Quakers, the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and others.

Hoover was described as efficient, hardworking, and a man of few words. His Quaker ethos made him persistent in every endeavor he undertook. Thanks to Hoover and the thousands involved in the ARA, millions were fed in Poland when the need was greatest. “An entire generation in eastern Poland owed its survival to their singular acts of humanitarian assistance,” write historians Jan-Roman Potocki and Vivian Reed. In recognition of his great efforts, in 1922 the Polish Parliament carried out the rare act of granting Hoover honorary Polish citizenship.

After serving as Secretary of Commerce for over seven years, in 1928 Hoover was elected the 31st President of the United States and oversaw the elevation of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Warsaw to the rank of Embassy. When the Second World War broke out, Hoover returned to his humanitarian work and initiated the Commission for Polish Relief, which supplied aid to civilians in Nazi-German occupied Poland as well as to Polish refugees displaced by the war.

Back when Hoover was a student at Stanford University, he organized a concert for Ignacy Jan Paderewski, the famed Polish pianist and later statesman. However, due to a last-minute cancellation of classes by the university, Hoover was unable to sell enough tickets to pay the maestro. Paderewski, gracious as always, refused to take any money from the young man, asking him instead to repay him in the future. Undoubtedly, Hoover did that and much more, earning the gratitude of millions of Poles in the process.



Hugh S. Gibson, 1920

HUGH S. GIBSON

1883-1954

As the old adage goes, there is only one chance to make a first impression. Following the end of World War I and the reconstitution of an independent Poland, it finally became possible for the United States and Poland to formally establish diplomatic ties and exchange envoys. Thirty-six-year-old Hugh S. Gibson was the man selected to serve as the first U.S. envoy and make the crucial first impression in official Poland-U.S. ties.

Born to a middle-class family in Los Angeles, California, Gibson became a well-regarded professional diplomat following his studies at the prestigious Sciences Po Institute in Paris. The State Department dispatched him to several postings, including London, Havana, and later Brussels, where he witnessed firsthand the German invasion of neutral Belgium and wrote a book describing his experiences and the atrocities that took place there during the war.

Gibson was later sent to Paris, where he served as the U.S. liaison to the national committees of Poland and Czechoslovakia, which were then operating in the French capital. Once Congress approved the new U.S. mission to Warsaw, Gibson presented his credentials on May 2, 1919, becoming the first U.S. Minister to Poland. Skilled in diplomacy and fluent in French, he became the youngest minister in the U.S. Foreign Service.

The historic nature of Gibson's appointment was feted by the Polish-American press, with the semi-monthly *Free Poland* writing, "The new envoy will undoubtedly help in binding more closely together the ties which unite the oldest republic of the new world with the newest republic of the old."

However, the challenges that Gibson faced when he arrived in Poland were staggering. He wrote, "When I went to Poland... [i]t was a country without a government, practically a howling wilderness from end to end, a country without any organized railway system, or distribution of food, or any of the normal facilities of modern life." The country was ravaged by four years of warfare, and swaths of its territory were contested, famished, and desolate. As an American aid worker touring Eastern Poland wrote, "It was as if a blight had passed over these places." In this challenging environment, Gibson went about the difficult task of organizing an embassy.

For the next five years, Gibson served in Poland as the country established itself. "[H]e was a witness to Poland's birthing pains and saw the new nation through some very tough years including the Polish-Soviet War," writes historian Vivian Reed. During this important time, Minister Gibson worked to facilitate business and commercial ties between Poland and the United States, and supported the robust American relief efforts in the country. He sent detailed reports to Washington, D.C., seeking to keep State Department officials apprised of the situation on the ground in Poland and contextualize some of the rumors circulating in the American press.

Following his posting in Warsaw, Gibson was sent to Switzerland, Belgium, and Brazil. In 1939, he joined Herbert Hoover's Commission for Polish Relief as executive director, and, in 1946, he accompanied Hoover on a world food survey tour, where he had the opportunity to revisit Warsaw. Having lived in the Polish capital for several years, Gibson knew the city well, but following its systematic destruction during World War II, he could not believe his eyes, writing, "I have seen pictures of Warsaw, heard [from] eye witnesses... but nothing gave me the slightest conception of the completeness of destruction."

Gibson died in Geneva in 1954, spending the last years of his life overseeing relief programs for displaced persons. A great humanitarian, diplomat, and true friend of Poland, Hugh S. Gibson was awarded the Order of *Polonia Restituta*, and helped ensure that Polish-American bilateral ties were the best they could be from day one.



Merian C. Cooper in Polish dress uniform during his service with the Kościuszko Squadron

MERIAN C. COOPER

1893-1973

Merian C. Cooper was a man of boundless determination: a pioneer in aviation and cinema who went where he felt most needed. Born in Jacksonville, Florida, to a family with a long tradition of military service dating back to the Revolutionary War, he attended the U.S. Naval Academy for three years before joining the National Guard and taking part in the pursuit of Pancho Villa along the U.S.-Mexico Border. In 1917, his request to be transferred to the U.S. Air Service was approved and, following training, he was sent to France to join the American Expeditionary Forces.

While serving as a bomber pilot during the Meuse-Argonne offensive in September 1918, he was severely burned when his aircraft caught fire, forcing him to crash-land in enemy territory. It would not be the last time that Cooper would find himself behind enemy lines.

By the end of the war, large swaths of Europe were destroyed or destitute. Hunger was rampant, poverty was pervasive, and the need for relief was great. Several thousand U.S. Army officers were recruited by Herbert Hoover to manage the American Relief Administration's colossal task of distributing critical American aid to those in need. Cooper was one of these so-called "Hoover Boys." In 1919, he was assigned to head the U.S. food administration for the city of Lwów, today Lviv in Ukraine, where he earned praise for overcoming significant logistical challenges and successfully delivering provisions to the populace.

While overseeing this important work, thanks to which so many could survive the winter, fighting raged nearby and Cooper was eager to do more. At this time, the newly re-born Polish state was engaged in an existential struggle against the forces of Bolshevik Russia. In April 1919, Cooper wrote a letter to Józef Piłsudski, the Polish Commander in Chief, requesting to fight with Polish forces at the front. "The Count Casimir Pulaski was killed by the side of my great, great, grandfather, Col. John Cooper, at the siege of Savannah," wrote Cooper, adding, "General Pulaski gave his life for my country while fighting with my own people. My family therefore considers it my duty, as is also my sincere wish, to offer my services to Poland during the period of its fight for its new freedom." Cooper's request was approved, and soon after he recruited other American volunteer aviators. Together they formed the Kościuszko Squadron.

Although numbering fewer than two dozen, the American volunteers provided much-needed aviation support to the newly reconstituted Polish Armed Forces, helping to blunt the Bolshevik attacks through reconnaissance missions, bombing runs, and ground attacks. Several Americans gave their lives, and Cooper himself was shot down and captured by the Russians. Fortunately, he was not identified, given that there was a bounty on his head, and he managed to eventually escape Bolshevik captivity and walk over 400 miles to freedom.

Cooper and the selfless American volunteers who aided Poland in not only saving herself, but also all of Europe, from the Bolshevik invasion were awarded Poland's highest military honor, the *Virtuti Militari* War Order. They were paid for their service with land parcels in Poland, which they then donated back to the Polish authorities for the building of a rehabilitation center for injured Polish service personnel.

After returning to America, Cooper became a successful filmmaker, writing, producing, and directing the legendary *King Kong*, among other remarkable movies, and earning an honorary lifetime achievement Oscar in 1952. As he won acclaim, Cooper remained a dear friend of Poland. When World War II broke out, he helped fundraise for Polish war victims and met with Polish airmen serving with the Kościuszko Squadron in Great Britain, always doing what he could to help a people far from his home, but close to his heart.



Arthur Bliss Lane, 1947



Ambassador Bliss Lane touring the ruins of Warsaw, 1945

ARTHUR BLISS LANE

1894-1956

“It is all very, very sad and depressing, but the spirit of the people is grand.... It is this quality which gives me great hope for the reconstruction of the country,” wrote Arthur Bliss Lane, the newly arrived U.S. Ambassador to Warsaw in 1945. Poland had been devastated by nearly six years of warfare and occupation: her cities and economic centers plundered and destroyed, and her people starved and brutalized. Yet, Lane still found hope in the midst of despair.

Arthur Bliss Lane was born in 1894 in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, New York, to a family descended from William Bradford, the governor of Plymouth Colony. He attended Yale University, and upon graduating was appointed private secretary to the American Ambassador in Rome, thus beginning a lifelong career with the U.S. Foreign Service. Over the next three decades, he served across Europe and the Americas, including as U.S. Envoy or Ambassador to Nicaragua, the Baltic States, Yugoslavia, Costa Rica, Colombia, and finally Poland.

Lane's Ambassadorship to Poland came during a time of seismic changes in Europe following the defeat of Nazi Germany. He arrived in Warsaw in July 1945, mere days after the United States recognized the newly constituted Polish Provisional Government of National Unity. This body, filled overwhelmingly with Soviet-backed communists, was supposed to serve as a transitional government until free and fair elections could be held in Poland, as mandated by the Yalta Conference. Over the course of the next 19 months, however, Lane found himself in an increasingly desperate position as the Soviet-imposed communist apparatus tightened its hold on the Polish people. Throughout Ambassador Lane's tenure in Warsaw, he faced uncooperative and hostile communist officials, who prevented him and his staff from conducting even basic diplomatic functions.

When the long-awaited 1947 elections were held in Poland, Ambassador Lane organized neutral election observers to ensure that the vote was fair, but his efforts were futile. The communists never intended to allow for an honest, democratic vote, and falsified the results. As a man of honor, Lane immediately decided to resign his post, stating, “My mission—to ensure that ‘free and unfettered elections’ should be held—had been a failure. To remain in Warsaw would be interpreted as tacit acquiescence in the fraudulent methods employed in the elections.”

Although his return to the United States marked the end of his official diplomatic mission, it did not end his personal campaign to bring the Polish tragedy, and the true nature of communism, to the attention of the American public. One of his first undertakings was to publish his memoir, *I Saw Poland Betrayed*, which described how the communists systematically usurped all power in Poland. The book became a bestseller and helped convey the dangers that communist totalitarianism posed to freedom-loving people.

Lane also became involved in numerous civic undertakings, such as helping establish the American Committee for the Investigation of the Katyń Massacre. “The Katyń crime is so terrible... that I feel a thorough airing of it in the press will serve to bring home to the American people the heartless, criminal methods of the Soviet government,” wrote Lane. Thanks to the committee's advocacy, in 1952 the U.S. Congress created a bipartisan committee to investigate the Katyń crime, which publicly pronounced Soviet guilt for the massacre of over 20,000 Polish prisoners of war in the spring of 1940.

Lane passed away in 1956, never living to see Poland free, but thanks to his unwavering commitment, the Polish cause of freedom lived on. Ambassador Lane was posthumously decorated with Poland's Commander Cross with Star of the Order of Merit in 2019, as part of commemorations of the centennial of Poland-U.S. bilateral relations. While his ambassadorship may have come at a nadir in those ties, his principled stand helped to ensure that one day a free and democratic Poland would once again be in control of her own destiny.



Anthony J. Drexel Biddle, Jr.,
while serving as an advisor
to General Eisenhower, 1944

ANTHONY JOSEPH DREXEL BIDDLE, JR.

1897-1961

As the roar of the bomber's engine intensified with each passing second, Ambassador Biddle crouched with his family against the wall of the stairwell, expecting, "that the next bomb would crash in on us." Fortunately, the bomb that landed in the American Ambassador's yard on the morning of September 3, 1939, failed to detonate, but war had arrived in Poland, and in an instant Biddle had become a diplomat in a war zone.

Anthony "Tony" Biddle, Jr., was born to a prominent family of Philadelphia bankers with ties to that Pennsylvania city dating back all the way to colonial times. His great-grandfather founded Drexel University, and his great-great-grandfather was president of the Second Bank of the United States. Raised in a well-connected social milieu, Biddle's upbringing prepared him for a job he never expected: diplomacy.

Following service in the U.S. Army in World War I, Biddle embarked on a series of business ventures. In the 1930s, following the stock market crash, he was an early and committed supporter of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's presidential campaign. When Roosevelt won the presidency, he appointed Biddle as U.S. Ambassador to Norway in 1935. Two years later, Biddle was posted to Warsaw, arriving as war clouds began to build over the European continent.

In Warsaw, Ambassador Biddle developed close ties with Polish government officials, and was known to invite his Polish interlocutors for a match of tennis or game of golf. Through his frequent meetings around town, Biddle was able to keep Washington well informed of the situation in Europe, and Poland specifically.

When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, Biddle did what he could to help American nationals evacuate the country and then, together with the rest of the diplomatic corps, left Warsaw with the Polish Government. Over the next several days, Biddle witnessed and experienced the relentless German air attacks on defenseless towns and civilian targets, including their own diplomatic convoy. "I find it difficult to ascribe the wanton barbaric aerial bombardment by German planes to anything short of deliberate intention to terrorize the civilian population," he cabled Washington. His unvarnished description of the horrors unfolding in Poland led President Roosevelt to issue a call to cease the ruthless bombing of civilians.

After Poland was overrun by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, Ambassador Biddle evacuated to France via Romania, and continued serving as ambassador to the reconstituted Polish Government in Exile. He authored the Biddle Report, detailing his experience during the invasion of Poland and his assessment of the events leading to war. In the coming months, Biddle became U.S. Ambassador to more countries at one time than anyone prior, as his portfolio was expanded to include several additional governments in exile, such as Czechoslovakia, Belgium, the Netherlands, and others.

After the fall of France, Ambassador Biddle continued to work closely with the Polish government in London. In December 1943, however, he resigned his posting following the Tehran Conference, where Poland's borders were redrawn. Biddle returned to the U.S. Army and was appointed to General Eisenhower's staff ahead of the D-Day invasion. For the next decade, Biddle served in various military sections in Europe and the United States, rising to the rank of Brigadier General. At the end of his career, he returned to diplomacy when President Kennedy appointed him as U.S. Ambassador to Spain. Biddle passed away soon after at the age of 64, having suffered a heart attack while undergoing treatment for lung cancer.

Throughout his life, Anthony Biddle was recognized by magazines on a number of occasions for his keen sense of fashion. However, more than his wardrobe, it was his friendship, sense of duty, and unwavering determination that is remembered today in Poland. His diplomatic service during one of the most difficult chapters in modern Polish history helped draw our two nations closer and laid the groundwork for the strong friendship and alliance that they share today.



President Ronald Reagan in Minnesota, 1982

RONALD REAGAN

1911-2004

As news began to trickle out on December 13, 1981, about the military crackdown underway in Poland, the President of the United States was outraged. As a staunch anti-communist, Reagan was fervently opposed to the evils of that system, which at that moment was crushing the human spirit in Poland. But thanks to his iron resolve and tangible support, President Reagan and the United States helped the Polish people endure and eventually topple communism in their land.

In a live television address from the Oval Office, President Reagan disparaged the forces of tyranny at work in Poland and aligned the American people with the cause of Solidarity. He immediately announced sanctions against the communist authorities and threatened further U.S. actions if the situation in Poland did not improve. “We cannot and will not conduct ‘business as usual’ with the perpetrators and those who aid and abet them,” said the President, castigating communist authorities in Poland and the Soviet Union for their role in subverting the will of the Polish people.

Reagan’s resolve to confront the injustice in Poland was grounded in his firm conservative ideals and strong religious faith. Following a successful career as an actor in Hollywood and later two-term Governor of California, Reagan handily won the 1980 Presidential election, pledging to restore America’s military strength and win the Cold War. As a firm believer in peace through strength, Reagan viewed individual freedom as an innate human right. So when millions of Poles were being oppressed and denied their fundamental rights following the imposition of martial law, Reagan called on Americans to stand with the Polish people and show them that they are not alone, saying “let the light of millions of candles in American homes give notice that the light of freedom is not going to be extinguished.”

In the weeks and months following the December 1981 crackdown in Poland, the Reagan administration developed a campaign of economic, symbolic, and subversive means to support the Solidarity movement. President Reagan designated January 30, 1982, as Solidarity Day, and the U.S. Information Agency produced the “Let Poland Be Poland” video appeal, which reached an audience of over 300 million globally. In 1982, President Reagan met with Pope John

Paul II and they developed close ties on Polish matters. As Reagan said to the Pope, “Hope remains in Poland. We, working together, can keep it alive.” Meanwhile, the CIA, acting under Reagan’s instructions, devoted millions of dollars’ worth of material aid to support the peaceful anti-communist efforts in Poland.

In 1982, President Reagan proposed an initiative that would become the National Endowment for Democracy, in order to “encourage the democratic forces and the development of free institutions throughout the world.” Through the endowment, as well as with the support of the labor movement, the Polish diaspora, and the Catholic Church, the United States delivered much-needed food and aid that went directly to the Polish people.

Although Reagan was no longer in the White House when the Polish people toppled communism through the ballot box, his contribution to these historic events is well known in Poland. “We owe him our liberty,” said Lech Wałęsa of President Reagan. Today a statue of President Reagan stands on one of Warsaw’s grand boulevards, opposite the U.S. Embassy, which throughout the dark days of communism was always a beacon of hope and freedom for the Polish people.

Following the democratic elections in Poland, President Wałęsa awarded President Reagan the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit for his support of the Polish people in their time of need. In 2007, President Reagan was posthumously decorated with the Order of the White Eagle, Poland’s highest state distinction and one traditionally reserved for Polish citizens. Justifying his decision to supersede tradition, President Lech Kaczyński explained that Poland’s transformation “was certainly a great achievement of my nation, but this achievement would not have been possible without the resoluteness and determination, without the sense of mission of President Ronald Reagan.”



Bayard Rustin at a pro-Solidarity rally
(photo credit: Z. Malinowski)

BUYARD RUSTIN

1912-1987

“The people of Poland are using nonviolence against the most ruthless force on earth—totalitarianism and communism. If they can win that fight, they are saving all of us,” declared Bayard Rustin during a pro-Solidarity march in New York City following the imposition of martial law in Poland in December 1981. An African American civil rights leader and avowed advocate for democracy around the world, Rustin committed himself to supporting the Polish cause as part of his belief in advancing the cause of human rights, both in the United States and abroad. In doing so, he helped amplify the Polish struggle and underscore the intersectionality of the various struggles for democracy and human rights around the world.

Rustin was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, as one of 12 siblings who were raised by their grandmother. From his earliest adolescent days through old age, Rustin was unabashed in his willingness to confront injustice, oppose oppression, and stand up for what he believed in.

As a student at the historically black Wilberforce University, he was expelled for organizing a student strike protesting the quality of cafeteria food. During World War II, he was jailed as a conscientious objector, refusing to compromise his pacifist beliefs. In all, Rustin was arrested more than 20 times in his life, protesting for the civil and human rights that he championed.

Influenced by Mohandas Gandhi and his philosophy of nonviolent resistance, Rustin pursued nonviolent means to protest inequality and injustice in the United States, becoming involved in the Civil Rights Movement. After World War II, Rustin participated in the nation’s first nonviolent sit-in, and helped organize the first freedom rides for racial integration. He became a close advisor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and played a major role in organizing the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Through his efforts, he gained the label of “the apostle of nonviolence in the civil rights movement.”

In 1963, Rustin organized the event he is perhaps best known for: The March on Washington. Rarely in the public spotlight, Rustin was one of the key architects of that historic event. He went on to co-found and serve as the director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, which coordinated the AFL-CIO’s work on civil rights and

economic justice. He was committed to strengthening the labor movement, which he saw as means of empowerment for the African American community.

As a social democratic leader and an anti-communist, Rustin was instrumental in organizing early support for Solidarity, particularly in New York, and he spoke at numerous pro-Solidarity events. He traveled to Poland several times, including as a member of the U.S. Holocaust Commission, and most notably in April 1981 as part of the A. Philip Randolph Educational Fund. During the visit, which was intended to help the AFL-CIO ascertain the situation in Poland, he met with leaders of a number of regional branches of Solidarity, as well as with union leadership, including Lech Wałęsa. The group reported on the determination, fearlessness, and quiet confidence of the Polish unionists.

Through his activism and solidarity, Bayard Rustin was a champion of the oppressed. In 2013, President Obama posthumously awarded Rustin with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, describing him as an, “unyielding activist for civil rights, dignity, and equality for all [who] fought tirelessly for marginalized communities at home and abroad.”



Edward L. Rowny, 1984



Edward L. Rowny being presented with the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland by Ambassador Piotr Wilczek, 2017

EDWARD L. ROWNY

1917-2017

Edward L. Rowny was an American patriot who rose through the ranks of the U.S. Army to become a three-star general and earn the moniker “scholar general” for his sage counsel to numerous U.S. Presidents. His storied life, however, had a humble beginning. He was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland, the city where his father settled upon emigrating from Poland. When he was a student at Johns Hopkins University, Rowny was selected for a Kościuszko Foundation scholarship and went to study at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków in 1935-1936. This visit not only deepened his ties with the land of his ancestors, but also gave him the opportunity to travel across Europe, including to Berlin where he attended the infamous 1936 Olympics organized by Nazi Germany. It was there that Rowny saw first-hand the Nazi régime, an experience that would set the course of his life.

Upon his return to the United States, he enrolled at West Point, recognizing the danger brewing in Europe. Over the next three decades, Rowny dedicated himself to service in the United States Army, during which time he commanded an infantry battalion on the Italian Front, served under General MacArthur in Korea where he assisted in the planning of the Inchon landings, and pioneered the use of helicopters in the Vietnam War, among numerous other assignments.

As a fluent Russian speaker and keen strategist, General Rowny was appointed U.S. military representative to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) with the Soviet Union, a post he held under Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter. A man of great principle, he resigned over policy disagreements with the Carter administration, but not long after he was appointed by President Reagan to the rank of Ambassador and chief negotiator on the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and served as special advisor for arms control through the start of the George H.W. Bush administration.

In his negotiations with the Soviets, General Rowny became the chief architect of America’s “peace through strength” policy, earning him the label of uncompromising Cold Warrior, which he happily embraced. Rowny recalled that he taught President Reagan how to say in Russian, “Doveria no proveria,” meaning, “Trust but verify,” a policy that the administration vigorously pursued.

When General Rowny retired from government in 1990, he rededicated his efforts to another lifelong passion: his Polish heritage. From a young age, Rowny’s grandmother instilled in him a fondness for his family’s roots, and she nurtured in him a love of Poland, especially her hero, Ignacy Jan Paderewski, the Polish virtuoso and statesman.

Paderewski passed away in the United States in 1941, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt had his remains interred at Arlington National Cemetery until they could be returned to a free Poland. Rowny attended Paderewski’s funeral and promised his grandmother that he would see this pledged kept. Following Poland’s democratic transformation, Rowny served as chairman of the committee to return the statesman’s remains, which took place in 1992 during a state funeral held in Warsaw and attended by Presidents Lech Wałęsa and George H.W. Bush.

In his retirement, General Rowny became a prominent leader in the Polish-American community. He actively supported NATO’s expansions and dedicated himself to the American Polish Advisory Council, where he served as president. He also established the Paderewski Scholarship Fund, which supports Polish students who come to Washington, D.C., to complete summer courses and internships.

Although his health deteriorated in his later years, General Rowny’s spirits were always high, and he remained active around Washington, D.C., until his 100th birthday, which was celebrated with great flair. Among General Rowny’s decorations are the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland, as well as two Distinguished Service Medals, three Silver Star Medals, and the Presidential Citizens Medal. Never without his trusty harmonica, which he would gladly play whenever the occasion presented itself, the General was known to frequently serenade audiences at the Polish Embassy, much to the joy of all. He was a great friend of Poland, and to all who knew him.



Lane Kirkland at a pro-Solidarity rally
(photo credit: Z. Malinowski)

LANE KIRKLAND

1922-1999

Situated on a wall outside the Gdańsk Shipyard is a memorial plaque that quotes the American worker's anthem, "Solidarity Forever." This plaque, placed by the AFL-CIO, honors the struggle of Polish workers for freedom, democracy, and free trade unions. It was a struggle that the AFL-CIO, under the presidency of Lane Kirkland, did everything in its power to support.

Hailing from Camden, South Carolina, Lane Kirkland entered the U.S. Merchant Marine during World War II and sailed routes across the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, carrying vital supplies for the war effort. After earning a degree from Georgetown University, Kirkland was hired by the American Federation of Labor, beginning a lifetime of service to American labor culminating in 1979, when he was unanimously selected to be President of the AFL-CIO.

Kirkland was at the helm of America's largest labor federation, with over 20 million members, from 1979-1995, and oversaw a tumultuous time for unionism in America. According to the AFL-CIO's biography of Kirkland, "His greatest legacy was global. Kirkland's early and passionate support for the Polish labor movement, Solidarity, proved pivotal in ensuring the ultimate collapse of Soviet-dominated regimes throughout Eastern Europe."

When the Solidarity strikes began in the summer of 1980, the AFL-CIO did not wait for the slow-moving gears of American policy to go into motion. Within days of the outbreak of the strikes, the AFL-CIO came out publicly and unequivocally on the side of the Polish workers and, shortly thereafter, American unionists were raising funds and mustering political pressure to support the democratic phenomenon that was Solidarity. Administration officials in Washington, D.C., initially urged Kirkland and the AFL-CIO to temper their boisterous support. Kirkland, however, with the approval of Solidarity, did not budge an inch.

"We are not concerned about governmental policy or government discretion," said Kirkland, adding, "That is a matter for governments. Our independent policies, positions, and practices are the essence of free trade unionism... In my view, the establishment of a free trade union movement in the state of Poland—far from representing a threat to peace or a threat to the stability of the world or of Europe—ought to serve the cause of peace."

When in late 1981 Solidarity was sent underground with the imposition of martial law, Kirkland and the AFL-CIO launched a political crusade in the West calling for harsh sanctions on the Polish communists and the immediate release of all political prisoners. They supported their calls with a campaign of material support for Solidarity, which allowed the Polish movement and many of its important undertakings, such as the free underground press, to continue during the dark days of martial law and beyond. The AFL-CIO was Solidarity's largest supplier of material aid, a tangible expression of its support for Polish workers, and a reminder to the Polish people that they were not alone.

In 1982, the AFL-CIO took a leading role in supporting the proposed National Endowment for Democracy (NED), where Kirkland served as a founding board member. The NED played an important role in funding pro-democracy initiatives in communist Poland. Throughout the decade, both through its own fundraising as well as through the NED, the AFL-CIO channeled several million dollars in aid to Solidarity through its trade-union network.

Solidarity leaders, including Lech Wałęsa, have stated bluntly that without the AFL-CIO and Lane Kirkland, Solidarity would not have survived martial law. In 1989, President George H.W. Bush saluted the members and leaders of the American labor movement, "for hanging tough with Solidarity through its darkest days. Labor deserves great credit for that."

For his significant contributions to supporting democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, Lane Kirkland was awarded the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom, and was posthumously decorated with Poland's highest state distinction, the Order of the White Eagle. When asked what motivated his unwavering commitment to Solidarity, Lane Kirkland often said, "They are our brothers and we must help them."



Portrait of Benjamin Gilman
as Chairman of the House
Foreign Affairs Committee

BENJAMIN GILMAN

1922-2016

“The forces of reform and democracy in that region [Central and Eastern Europe] are calling out for our support, and we have an obligation to respond to that call,” declared Congressman Gilman. It is with this profound degree of clarity and conviction that Gilman spent nearly a decade advocating for NATO expansion and, by extension, a safer Poland.

Benjamin Gilman was raised in Orange County, New York, the same region he would go on to represent in Congress. His parents were Jewish immigrants from Central Europe, and later in life Gilman recalled that as a boy he traveled with his family to Germany in the 1930s. While there, he saw Nazis marching in the streets and met relatives who would later be killed in the Holocaust, experiences that forged in him a lifelong commitment to the promotion of human rights.

After the United States entered World War II, Gilman served in the Army Air Forces, taking part in 35 bombing missions over Japan, for which he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Like so many other members of the Greatest Generation, he knew the price of freedom. He saw first-hand the destruction that evil wrought, and he committed himself to upholding the cherished values and freedoms that have made America a beacon of liberty.

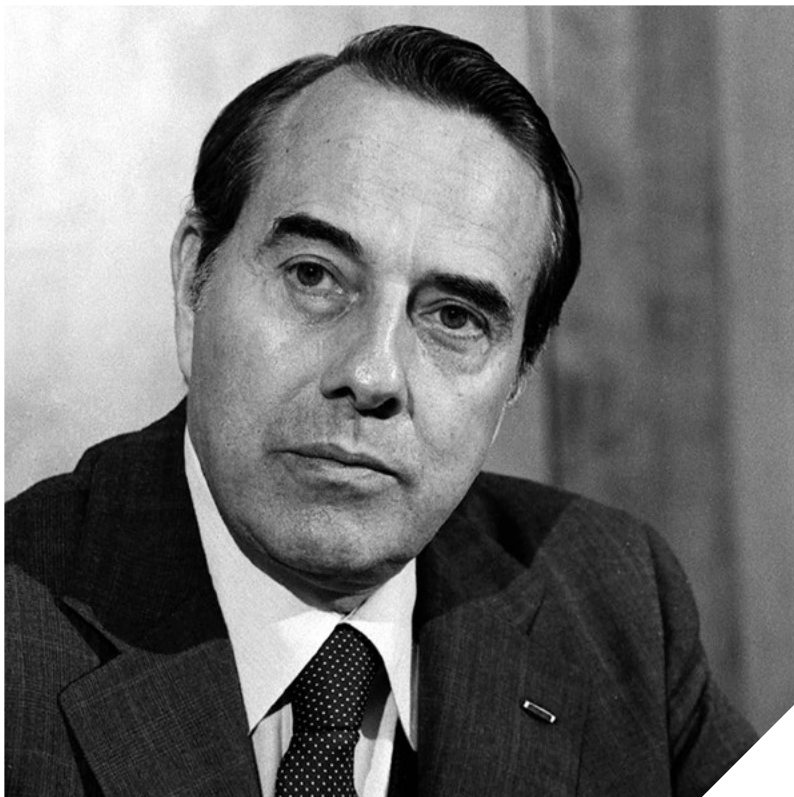
Following stints as an assistant attorney general in New York State and several years as a member of the New York State Assembly, Gilman was elected to Congress as a Republican in 1972 and served 15 terms, until his retirement in 2003.

During the Cold War, Gilman was a tireless advocate for human rights, helping to co-found the House Human Rights Caucus and championing the cause of Captive Nations. By the time communism began to crumble in Europe, Gilman was an astute observer and firm supporter of the freedom-seeking people behind the Iron Curtain who were yearning for democracy. Events unfolded quickly and oftentimes unpredictably in the late 1980s and through the 1990s, but as Ranking Member of the House International Relations Committee and later Chairman from 1995-2001, Gilman was one of the most vocal proponents in Congress on behalf of the newly democratic nations of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland.

Congressman Gilman quickly became convinced that one of the best ways to support the fledgling democracies, finally free from the Soviet yoke, was to bolster their security through membership in the North Atlantic Alliance. Pro-NATO expansion legislative proposals authored by Gilman were passed with bipartisan support and signed into law in 1994, 1995, and 1996.

These laws authorized President Clinton to facilitate the enlargement of NATO, called for a clear timetable of expansion, and listed leading candidates, including Poland, for membership. Through these successive measures, Gilman galvanized support among the American electorate, ensuring that NATO expansion became a broadly popular bipartisan issue. After the passage of the 1996 legislation, the Congressman declared, “After today’s vote, it is hoped that we will never again hear that the Congress does not support NATO enlargement.” Thanks to his leadership, the House of Representatives expressed its overwhelming support of NATO enlargement, which helped ensure that the cause did not lose political steam. Equally important, the passage of this legislation gave vital encouragement to the states of Central and Eastern Europe, showing before the world that the United States Congress supported them on their difficult path of reform.

Congressman Gilman believed that expanding NATO would expand the zone of stability and freedom in Europe, and how right he was. Thanks to his visionary leadership, Central Europe today is the safest it has ever been, with NATO forces, including U.S. military personnel, training side-by-side in the region, so that they will not again have to fight together in Europe. In recognition of his support of Poland-U.S. cooperation, Congressman Gilman was awarded the Commander Cross with Star of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland.



Bob Dole, 1982



Ambassador Piotr Wilczek presenting Bob Dole with the Commander Cross with Star of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland, 2019

BOB DOLE

1923-

During the course of Bob Dole's prominent career as a legislative leader, he earned a reputation for toughness and shrewdness. He developed these qualities as a young Army officer in Europe, where he helped liberate the Italian Peninsula until being severely wounded. So grave were his injuries that, as Dole later described, he was given a shot of morphine, marked with the letter "M" on his forehead with his own blood, and given little hope of survival. But, possessing that toughness that the American public would come to know in him by, Dole made a full recovery, not letting adversity stand in his way.

Back in his native Kansas, Dole became involved in local politics, being elected to the Kansas House of Representatives, serving as County Attorney, and ultimately making it to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1960. But these positions were all stepping-stones to the great legislative body where Dole would become the astute political leader he is known as today: The United States Senate. Bob Dole served in the Senate from 1969 through 1996, including as Majority Leader, and set a record as the longest-serving Republican leader in the Senate. It was from the Senate that Dole launched his successive political campaigns, running as the Republican nominee for Vice President in 1976, campaigning for the Republican nomination for President in 1980 and 1988, and eventually becoming the Republican Presidential nominee in 1996.

During his years of public service, Senator Dole expressed a strong fondness for the people of Poland and their struggle for freedom. When the communist authorities cracked down on Solidarity in Poland and introduced martial law, Senator Dole leveraged his moral authority as a wounded combat veteran to declare, "we must voice, loudly and clearly, our firmest support for the aspirations of the Polish people to live in freedom and dignity, without discounting as mere rhetoric the significance of this open defense of the values for which Americans also have suffered and died."

Several years later, in 1989, President George H.W. Bush dispatched Senator Dole to Poland to witness the first elections in Central Europe in half a century that were open to opposition candidates. Following Solidarity's smashing electoral success, Dole urged strong U.S. support for the cause of freedom in Poland. While speaking to

the Solidarity members of the Polish Parliament, he said that the United States would help to ensure that Poland was successful on its path to democracy and freedom. It was a vital message delivered at a crucial time in history.

Dole's outspoken support for Solidarity and Poland transitioned into a strong position of support for NATO expansion to the newly democratic states of Central Europe. As the debate intensified on the topic of expansion, and the key question became increasingly not whether expansion would happen, but when and who would be included, Senator Dole maintained political pressure to ensure that these important decisions would not languish. "It's an outrage, that the patriots who threw off the chains of Soviet bondage are told that they must wait," declared Dole, not mincing words.

In one of his last acts in the U.S. Senate prior to resigning his seat to focus on his 1996 presidential campaign, Dole introduced the NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act of 1996, highlighting the importance he tied to NATO expansion. As the standard-bearer of the Republican Party, Dole ran on a party platform that called for NATO expansion no later than 1998 to include Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary.

For his longstanding support of Poland-U.S. bilateral relations, Senator Bob Dole was decorated with the Commander Cross with Star of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland. As a champion of freedom in Central Europe, Senator Dole's refusal to budge ensured that today Poland and the United States are steadfast NATO allies.



President George H.W. Bush's
official portrait, 1989

GEORGE H.W. BUSH

1924-2018

When George H. W. Bush was sworn in as the 41st President of the United States in 1989, he assumed the highest office with a wealth of governmental and international expertise. From serving as Ronald Reagan's Vice President and the Director of the CIA, to United Nations Ambassador and a member of Congress, Bush's career prepared him to respond accordingly as historic events unfolded on his watch and communism collapsed in Central and Eastern Europe.

President Bush was inaugurated just two weeks before the transformative Round Table negotiations began in Poland. Fortunately, Bush was already intimately familiar with the situation in Poland and the players on the ground. He had previously traveled to Warsaw in 1987 as Vice President, which afforded him the opportunity to build rapport with Solidarity leaders and maintain channels of communication with the communist authorities still governing the country. These established contacts proved vital for the success of events underway in Poland, as President Bush sought to support the people of Poland in their peaceful transition to democracy.

When Solidarity was officially re-legalized on April 17, 1989—as a condition of the Round Table agreement—President Bush spoke before a roaring crowd of Polish-Americans in Hamtramck, Michigan, declaring, “We Americans are not mildly sympathetic spectators of events in Poland, we are bound to Poland by a very special bond, a bond of blood, culture and shared values.” During the speech the President outlined an eight-point economic package for Poland, including tariff elimination, loan guarantees, and measures to ease Poland's debt burden.

In the summer of 1989, President Bush became the first American president to speak in the Polish parliament, where he delivered remarks to the newly elected body. “There can be no substitute for Poland's own efforts,” declared Bush, “but I want to stress to you today that Poland is not alone. Given the enormity of this moment, the United States stands ready to help as you help yourselves.” The president pledged that further economic and political reforms would bring new American trade and credits.

During this time, still months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, President Bush worked to support the Polish democratic forces while

maintaining contacts with communist leadership to ensure that they stayed committed to the peaceful transition as was agreed to. No one knew for sure how these historic events would unfold, and jubilation at the transformation could be tempered by the thought of the colossal socio-economic challenges facing Poland, along with the still-present danger of foreign interference and another crackdown. But throughout it all, President Bush never veered in his steady, determined championing of Polish liberty, declaring, “Poland's struggle has always been America's struggle. Maybe that's why it seems that Polish hearts and American hearts beat as one.”

Over the coming months, President Bush marshaled the forces of the U.S. government, civil society, international financial institutions, and private business to support Poland's transition. From U.S. leadership in reducing Poland's international debt obligations to launching initiatives to encourage business investment in Poland such as the American Business Initiative and the Trade Enhancement Initiative, President Bush was committed to Poland's success.

President Bush bestowed America's highest distinction, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, on the leader of Solidarity, Lech Wałęsa. A few years later, President Wałęsa awarded Bush Poland's Grand Cross of the Order of Merit, saying, “You, Mr. President, were a world leader who since the very beginning understood and valued the sense of our fight.”

When President Bush returned to Warsaw in 1992 for the reburial of famed statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski, he arrived in a fully free and democratic Poland. At the funeral, Bush spoke movingly of the strength of the Polish people, so many of whom had helped build the American dream. “Now at long last,” President Bush said, “Poles can build that dream right here at home.”



Congressman John Dingell being sworn in by Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, 1955

JOHN DINGELL, JR.

1926-2019

If anyone can honestly say that they have dedicated their life to public service, it's Democratic Congressman John Dingell of Michigan. First elected to Congress in 1955 at the age of 29, Congressman Dingell was re-elected 29 consecutive times, which amounted to 59 years and 21 days in office, the longest-serving member of Congress in history.

But Congressman Dingell was never impressed by long records. "Any damn fool can sit in a chair and take up space," he said, "it's what you do with your time that matters." Over the course of his lifetime, Congressman Dingell worked to better his community, his constituents, and his country in ways both big and small. From passing legislation bolstering environmental preservation to his meaningful work on Civil Rights legislation to his lifelong work to expand healthcare access to Americans, many of the boldest legislative measures from the past half-century have Congressman Dingell's fingerprints on them.

Throughout his many years on Capitol Hill, Dingell gained a reputation for his sharp eye for government oversight, and he eventually became Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. No matter how important he became in Washington, D.C., the old Polish lawyer, as Dingell referred to himself, always took pride in his Polish immigrant heritage.

John Dingell's grandfather, Joseph Dzięglewicz, emigrated from the small village of Bączal Górny in Galician Poland to the United States in 1872 and adopted the name Dingell. His father, John Sr., although only attaining a grade-school education at St. Casimir's in Detroit, nevertheless ran and was elected to the Congress in 1933, representing the heavily Polish constituency of Michigan's 15th District. John Sr. served in Congress for 22 years until his untimely passing in 1955, which led his son, Congressman John Dingell, to campaign and be elected to his seat.

As historic events were unfolding in Poland, Congressman Dingell stood firmly in support of the Solidarity Movement and led a Congressional delegation to Gdańsk, which helped secure Congressional support for Poland's democratic aspirations. The Congressman worked with Congressional leadership to secure an invitation for

Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa to address a joint session of Congress, a momentous event and the first time in history such an honor was given to a non-dignitary.

As Dingell rose to become Dean of the House, his presence and influence on the Hill became ever more pronounced. No matter which party controlled Congress or the White House, Congressman Dingell was always active, often behind the scenes, promoting his legislative priorities. Whether it was working to secure material aid during Poland's democratic transformation or ensuring NATO expansion stayed at the top of the political agenda, Congressman Dingell worked to get it done. His years of experience meant he always knew which doors to knock on, and he championed building coalitions and consensus among fellow legislators. Perhaps that's why he never let a Fat Tuesday go by without passing out some delicious Polish doughnuts known as *paczki* to friends and colleagues on Capitol Hill.

It is hard to find men of such caliber as John Dingell, Jr., today: fiercely loyal to their cause, but with an understanding of the need to compromise. Fortunately, John Dingell will always serve as a role model for future generations and remind us all of the meaning of public service. In recognition for his decades-long work, Congressman Dingell was awarded the Commander Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland as well as the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom. These two distinctions were mounted side-by-side in his home following his retirement from Congress, a testament to the Congressman's pride in the country he dedicated his life to, as well as the country of his forefathers.



Ambassador John Davis'
official portrait

JOHN R. DAVIS, JR.

1927-

When Ambassador John Davis was asked what led him to join the U.S. Foreign Service, he responded that he wanted to, “overthrow communism, clearly, and save the world for democracy.” While unmistakably a tongue-in-cheek answer, his contributions to the ultimate success of democratic transformation in Poland are unquestionable.

John Davis was born in 1927 in the town of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. After brief service in the United States Navy during the last years of World War II, he graduated from the University of Southern California and in 1953 officially joined the foreign service.

Over the course of Ambassador Davis’s distinguished 39-year diplomatic career, which took him from Jakarta to Rome, he fulfilled three tours of duty in the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw totaling 13 years. He served as consul and economic officer from 1960-1963, Deputy Chief of Mission from 1973-1976, and from 1983-1990 he headed the Embassy, first as Chargé d’affaires from 1983-1987 and then as Ambassador from 1988-1990. As the chief U.S. diplomat in the country, Ambassador Davis not only had a front-row seat to the historic events underway in Poland during the 1980s, but in fact he played a significant role as a trusted interlocutor during the course of the transition, helping ensure that it remained on track and ultimately succeeded.

When Ambassador Davis arrived in Warsaw in 1983, U.S.-Poland ties were at their nadir following the crackdown on Solidarity and the imposition of martial law by the Polish communist authorities. Fortunately, Ambassador Davis was no stranger to Poland. He was fluent in the language and possessed an extensive network of contacts in both official government circles and among the underground democratic opposition. Known to ask questions rather than to give answers, Davis developed rapport with the various factions in a highly fragmented Polish society. He openly developed relations with Solidarity leaders and, together with his wife Helen, hosted salons for dissidents at his residence. Helen even taught English to some freshmen Solidarity legislators. This mutual respect was put to good use when events continued to develop in Poland and the difficult steps of transforming the country were initiated through the Round Table Agreement and subsequent elec-

tions that led to the overwhelming victory of Solidarity. It was in the midst of all this that President George H.W. Bush visited Warsaw in July 1989.

Perhaps the most significant part of the President’s visit was the luncheon served at Ambassador Davis’s residence, which gathered together the communist leadership as well as the democratically elected Solidarity officials. This event not only was highly symbolic, described as “jailers and the formerly jailed” sitting at the same table, but also allowed President Bush to reinforce how important it was to the United States that the transformation in Poland continue, and that it remain peaceful at a time when events on the ground were moving fast. Thanks to the trust that Ambassador Davis commanded at this sensitive time, he could arrange for this precarious gathering, which allowed for much-needed dialogue among all parties involved in the transition of power.

Following the conclusion of his posting to Warsaw, Ambassador Davis received the Department of State’s Distinguished Service Award for 1991. Thanks to Ambassador Davis’s diplomatic prowess and keen desire to understand Poland and its people to the best of his ability, he helped create room for contact between opposing factions at a time when that contact was needed most. His steady presence during an otherwise volatile time can truly be appreciated with the passage of time.



Zbigniew Brzeziński, 1977



Zbigniew Brzeziński, President Carter,
and Secretary of State Vance
at the White House, 1977

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZIŃSKI

1928-2017

On a pier in the Gdynia harbor a plaque marks the spot from which Zbigniew Brzeziński departed Poland on October 12, 1938, dedicated to, “a man whose contributions to the cause of Polish freedom were invaluable.”

Brzeziński's father, Tadeusz, was a Polish diplomat, and his career shaped Brzeziński's childhood. From 1931-1935 he was sent to Germany where, while performing his diplomatic duties, he also issued Polish documents to German Jews, enabling some to escape Hitler's tightening grip on the country. In 1938, the elder Brzeziński was posted to Montreal, and the entire family, including 10-year-old Zbigniew, departed for Canada. Unbeknownst to them, it would be the last time they would step foot in free Poland for over 50 years.

Zbigniew Brzeziński earned bachelor's and master's degrees at McGill University in Canada. Had it not been for a bit of bad luck, he may never have made it to the United States. He initially applied to study in the United Kingdom but was rejected for a scholarship, and instead went to Harvard University, where in three years he earned a Ph.D. in political science and became an instructor. It would not be the only case of a rejection that would positively shape his life, and perhaps even the course of world events.

As Brzeziński gained prominence in academia as a Sovietologist and foreign policy thinker, he was unexpectedly denied tenure by Harvard University. This defining moment led Brzeziński to move to Columbia University, and thus closer to the power center of Washington, D.C.

As Professor Stephen Szabo writes, “Brzeziński was always fascinated by ideas, but unlike most academics, he wanted to translate ideas into policy, theory into practice.” Brzeziński did just that, helping to establish the Trilateral Commission, which he went on to lead as its executive director, and advising the Hubert Humphrey presidential campaign.

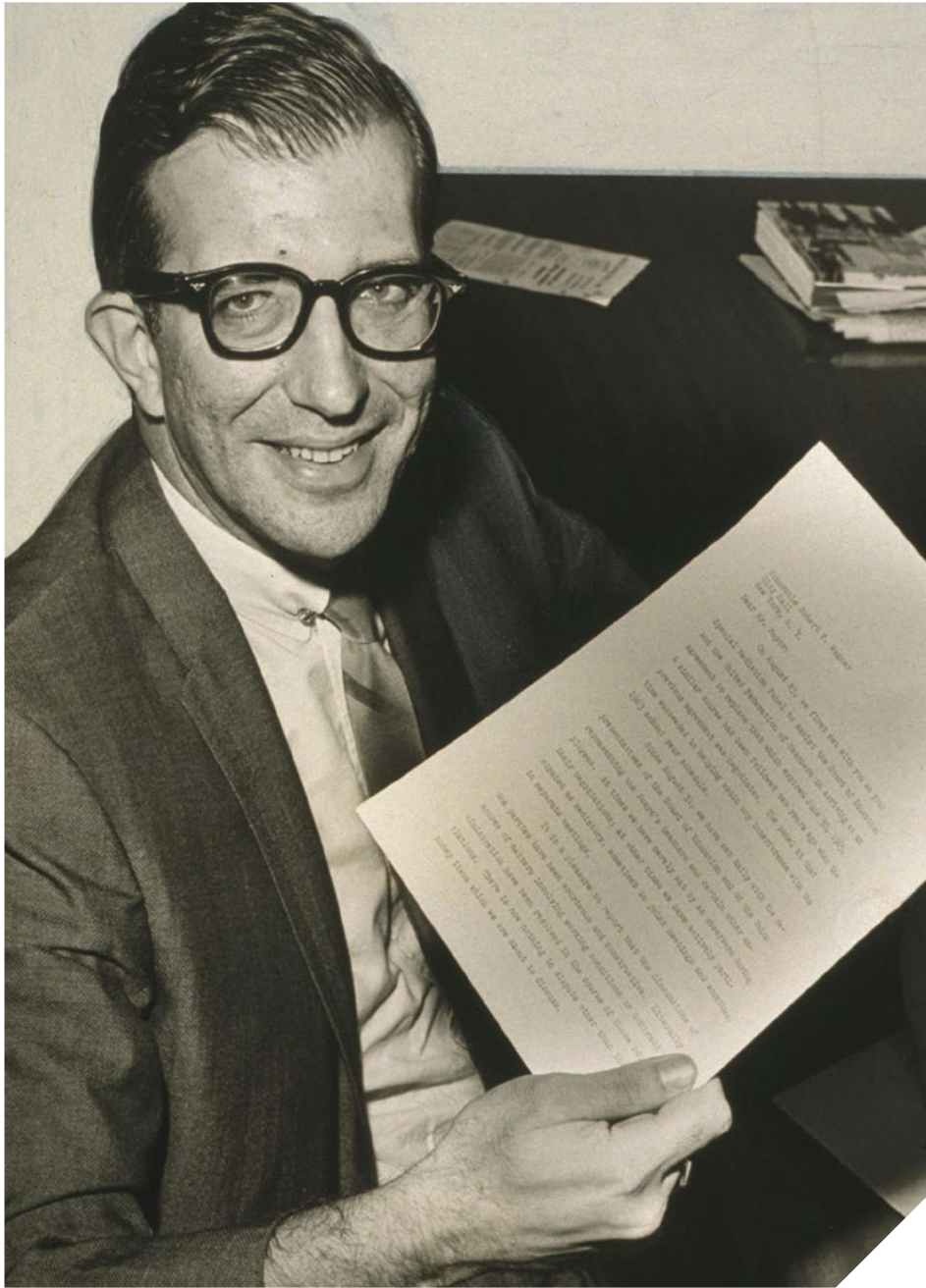
In 1975, Brzeziński became chief foreign policy advisor to the Jimmy Carter presidential campaign. Following Carter's election, the President appointed Brzeziński to serve as his National Security Advisor, where he crafted policies that promoted global stability and human rights. Brzeziński was valued as an advisor for his immense intellect, straightforwardness, and ability to boil down intricate issues.

During the presidential transition between the Carter and Reagan administrations in December 1980, there was a disturbing buildup of Soviet forces along the Polish border in response to Solidarity's rise in Poland. Brzeziński composed a stern warning to Moscow, which President Carter sent directly to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Soon after, the Soviet Union halted its troop movements, and many claimed years later that Carter's message played an important role in deterring a Soviet invasion of Poland.

After his time at the White House, Brzeziński remained highly active in policy circles, always keeping a close eye on events in his native Poland. He taught for many years at the Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, and became involved with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, where he spent over 35 years and eventually established the Zbigniew Brzeziński Institute on Geostrategy.

Among Brzeziński's numerous contributions to foreign policy, renowned scholar Francis Fukuyama noted that his long-term legacy will be defined by two accomplishments: his moral opposition to the USSR and its domination of Eastern Europe, and his consistent recognition of the threat that it posed to the democratic values and institutions of the West. In recognition of his dedicated service, Brzeziński was awarded the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom and Poland's highest distinction, the Order of the White Eagle.

Zbigniew Brzeziński was an intellectual giant whose impact on policy and strategy were immense. As a top-tier strategic thinker, unafraid to speak truth to power, his counsel was sought by many even well into his eighties, and his sage insight on world affairs is sorely missed today.



Albert Shanker, 1965

ALBERT SHANKER

1928-1997

Albert Shanker, an educator and labor organizer who rose to lead one of the largest teachers unions in America, has been described as the most influential figure in public education in the second half of the 20th century. But in addition to his leadership in shaping education policy in America, he also made significant contributions to the promotion of the principles of democracy, trade unionism, and freedom of association around the world.

Albert Shanker was born in New York City in 1928 to working-class Jewish immigrants from Poland, both of whom were union members. Forced to suspend his Ph.D. program at Columbia University just short of graduating due to financial strain, he started to teach as a substitute teacher and began his climb from educator to union organizer and eventually to national labor leader. In 1964, Shanker became president of the United Federation of Teachers, representing New York City teachers, and in 1974 he was elected president of the national American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which had a membership of 700,000.

While being an advocate for sweeping national educational reform, Shanker also viewed the promotion of democracy, both at home and abroad, as central to his professional mission and personal worldview, according to his biographer, Richard Kahlenberg. When Solidarity—the independent, self-governing, and free trade union—was founded in Poland, Shanker immediately became a prominent backer of the movement, and mobilized not only AFT members, but also the broader American labor movement, to support the workers' struggle for fundamental freedoms in Poland.

Shanker was a tireless advocate and generous supporter of Solidarity, including within the AFL-CIO labor federation, where he served on the international affairs committee and became its head in 1989. When the grassroots Committee in Support of Solidarity (CSS) was established in New York City, Shanker and the AFT extended material and financial support to the group.

Following the imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981, Shanker did not hold back in criticizing what was, in his view, an insufficient response from the U.S. administration. "I am deeply disappointed in the failure of this Administration to speak out clearly against martial law in Poland," wrote Shanker in a letter to the White House, adding,

"I urge you to support the demands of Solidarity for the freeing of all those arrested and the lifting of martial law. The United States, as leader of the free world, must say at least this much."

Using all the tools at his disposal, including union publications and his column in the New York Times, Shanker called unequivocally for a stringent U.S. response to the communist crackdown on the Polish people. His focus on the situation in Poland continued throughout the decade even after media attention faded. In 1984, Shanker was appointed to the National Endowment for Democracy's founding board of directors, where he served three terms and played an active role in formulating the policies of aid that supported the people of Poland in their struggle for fundamental freedoms.

Following the fall of the Iron Curtain, Shanker and the AFT established the Education for Democracy/International project to assist teachers in former Eastern Bloc countries, including Poland, in obtaining necessary educational materials and training to both teach democracy and to practice it in their schools and unions.

"Shanker committed himself, the union, union funds, union offices, and his members in a decade-long campaign to support free trade unionism in communist Poland," wrote Eric Chenoweth, former executive director of the CSS and longtime Shanker Institute collaborator. Through his commitment to democracy, trade unionism, and freedom of association, Albert Shanker helped extend those same values to millions behind the Iron Curtain. He was posthumously decorated with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Today the Albert Shanker Institute honors the life and legacy of the late president of the American Federation of Teachers and promotes the causes that were dear to him.



President Ronald Reagan meeting with Nicholas Brady
in the Oval Office, 1988

NICHOLAS BRADY

1930-

By the end of 1989, the winds of change had swept into Poland and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe. Historic political events unfolded at the ballot boxes and before the eyes of the world as TV cameras captured images of the first Solidarity Prime Minister showing the V-for-victory sign, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, and the proclamations of democratic activists-turned-leaders across the region. The long-awaited and dearly sought collapse of Soviet-imposed communism in Central Europe was now a reality. While these moments laid the path for European integration, the road ahead was anything but easy, and the challenges ahead were nothing short of unimaginable.

As the Western world celebrated the triumph of democracy and liberal values, U.S. Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady found himself in the unenviable position of having to be fiscally responsible and realistic in the face of grand proclamations and idealistic hopes.

Brady was a New York City banker who hailed from a family of established industrialists. He served for a few months in the U.S. Senate in 1984 following an appointment by the Governor of New Jersey, and later was appointed by President Reagan to several presidential commissions. In 1988, he was named Treasury Secretary, a position he held through the presidency of George H.W. Bush.

As much of the world marveled at the scenes of democratic triumph in Europe, Brady was grappling with the \$48 billion question: Poland's sovereign debt. Communist Poland had fueled much of its economic and social programs through foreign loans, which, due to the centrally planned system's inefficiencies, it was later unable to afford to repay. By the time Poland's political transformation occurred, the economic debts had ballooned, and it was up to Poland's new democratic authorities to find a solution with Western creditors.

With Poland being billions in debt, and the lethargic communist economy still awaiting reform, Secretary Brady warned that the country was in no position to absorb large outside capital in an efficient manner. But at the same time, concerns were mounting that Poland's precarious economic situation could negatively affect the course of events. Former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski speculated that without immediate debt relief, "Poland

faces, quite literally, the prospect of a major domestic explosion." With this grim prospect, Brady developed the so-called Brady Plan, which included debt-service reduction and the issuing of Brady Bonds. These bonds, named after the Secretary, were issued by developing countries but backed by U.S. Treasury bonds. The bonds were intended to help restructure the issuing nation's debt, in this case Poland, by encouraging investments and assuring bondholders of timely payments of interest.

In 1994 more than \$8 billion worth of Polish debt was converted into Brady Bonds, and by 2012 the bonds were all bought back, concluding their use in Poland. As researchers Rafał Piókarz and Anna Szelągowska write, "Polish Brady bonds enjoyed great interest from investors, which was also caused by the decreased yield of American securities, increased attractiveness of the emerging markets and a relatively high profitability."

Thanks to the Brady Plan, Poland was able to systematically restructure its economy, meet its revamped debt obligations, and continue on its path of transforming to a free-market system without being weighed down by monstrous debt. Brady gave Polish reformers the breathing room they needed to help get the economy up and running. While the economic transformation was undoubtedly difficult and costly, the end result was an efficient, competitive, free-market economy that has become one of modern Poland's defining characteristics.

Decades after Brady left government, his mansion in Washington, D.C., was purchased by the Polish Foreign Ministry to serve as its new Ambassador Residence. The house on Whitehaven Street NW that was home for so long to a friend of Poland is now officially part of Poland's home in the United States.



James A. Baker's III official portrait,
1989

JAMES A. BAKER III

1930-

“The man who ran Washington” and the “most important unelected official since World War II” are just two of the numerous ways that James Baker has been described over the years. A powerful strategist, trusted advisor, and master negotiator, James A. Baker III shaped how Washington, D.C., operated, and left a lasting legacy of achievements, both national and international, from his nearly 15 years of government service.

A Houston man, Baker hailed from a long line of Texas lawyers. He was mostly apolitical—focused on his family and legal work—until he befriended George H.W. Bush, who had recently moved to Texas. The future president had an upbringing similar to Baker’s, and the two quickly became close friends and frequent tennis partners. Baker’s life trajectory changed suddenly in 1970 when his wife, Mary Stuart, passed away from cancer, leaving him with four young boys at home. In an effort to occupy his friend’s mind as he dealt with his immense personal loss, Bush engaged Baker in his run for the U.S. Senate. Although they lost that campaign, the experience gave Baker his first real taste of politics, and it soon became a world in which he was fully immersed.

In 1975, President Ford appointed Baker as Undersecretary of Commerce, his first position in the nation’s capital but by no means his last. Over the coming years, Baker became sought after as a campaign expert, running President Ford’s 1976 re-election campaign, and serving as campaign manager for George H. W. Bush’s 1980 presidential primary run. Following the election of Ronald Reagan, Baker was made White House Chief of Staff and later Secretary of the Treasury, even though he was not tied to the Reagan campaign team, a sign of how valued he was as a tactician and statesman. Baker knew how to cut deals in order to get the necessary votes.

When Vice President Bush sought the White House in 1988, he again called on Baker to serve as his trusted campaign manager, and this time they won. President Bush appointed Baker as his Secretary of State, making him the chief U.S. diplomat during a pivotal time in world affairs.

In the three-and-a-half years that Baker was Secretary of State, the Soviet Union disintegrated and democracy was reborn in Central and Eastern Europe. Although the West won the Cold War, Baker

and Bush did not take a victory lap. Instead, they committed the United States to shepherding the global changes underway. They worked with European allies and international partners to ensure that events unfolded peacefully, and aided emerging democracies on their difficult path of reform, all the while never losing sight of the importance of these historic events.

In December 1989, just weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Baker spoke in Berlin: “The real impulse for change comes from... the peoples of Poland, of Hungary, of Czechoslovakia... They have freed themselves. From the Baltic to the Adriatic, an irresistible movement has gathered force—a movement of, by, and for the people.”

Leaning on skills developed during partisan negotiations in Washington, D.C., Baker engaged with reformers in the Soviet Union, at one point holding nearly weekly meetings with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze as events unfolded at breakneck speed. He worked to ensure that the reunification of Germany progressed without stoking regional tensions. Baker understood the political constraints of his adversaries, and worked to find compromises that advanced the cause of freedom. Partnering with Congress, he sought U.S. funding to secure the Soviet Union’s arsenal of munitions—including nuclear weapons—during a time of great instability, helping to keep the region and the world safe.

Presidential advisor David Gergen described Baker as one of the best Secretaries of State in the 20th century. As a participant in the global events that transformed Poland, Europe, and the world, James Baker held the reigns of American diplomacy at a crucial time and helped herald a new era.



Zygmunt Rolat, 2013



Zygmunt Rolat with his grandson Henry Rolat Asulin
at the U.S. Department of State, 2018

ZYGMUNT ROLAT

1930-

Zygmunt Rolat was only a teenager when he left Poland but, as he recounts, “my ties to Poland and my Polish citizenship still remain deep in my heart. Of course, I’m a Jew with American citizenship. But Poland is my homeland, and Częstochowa is my little homeland.”

Born in Częstochowa in 1930 to a prominent Jewish family, Rolat had a happy childhood prior to the outbreak of World War II. Just as he was about to enter the 4th grade, however, his life changed forever when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. His mother, his father, and his Polish nanny were killed in the Treblinka extermination camp, and his brother died while taking part in the Częstochowa Ghetto Uprising. Rolat survived the Holocaust working as a forced laborer at a German munitions plant and, when the war ended, he emigrated to the United States with the assistance of the U.S. Committee for European Children. “From the very beginning, to me, the United States was paradise,” described Rolat, who earned degrees from the University of Cincinnati and New York University, even though his primary education was interrupted for several years due to the war. He became a successful businessman and philanthropist in New York City.

Rolat returned to Poland for the first time in 1967, determined to show his children the land of their ancestors and the significant places in his “little homeland” of Częstochowa. “When I began travelling to Poland,” explained Rolat, “my links to the country strengthened even more”—so much so that in his later years Rolat became a passionate promoter of Jewish life and heritage in Poland. He became, as he described it, “a builder, building bridges of reconciliation,” and in the process fostering ties and understanding between the American Jewish community and Poland.

“Jews lived in Poland for a thousand years... Jews enriched Poland as its commercial and cultural engine. Jews fought in Poland’s wars. Polish Jews who emigrated and their descendants won Nobel prizes, enriched the world and played a key role in building the State of Israel. My children and grandchildren, young Jews everywhere and Polish young people must know this, and the memory must live,” said Rolat, explaining the motivations that fueled his numerous and wide-ranging undertakings over the past two decades.

In an effort to promote the history of Jewish life in his hometown, Rolat established the World Society of Częstochowa Jews, created the “Jews of Częstochowa” exhibit which now forms the core exhibition of the museum by the same name, and in 2004 he organized the first meeting of Częstochowa Jews since World War II. Through his passion, Rolat sparked a renewed remembrance and rediscovery of shared Polish-Jewish history, both in his native Częstochowa but also in Poland more broadly. Promoting the one-thousand-year history of Jewish life and culture in Poland became his life’s calling.

In one of his principal undertakings, Rolat became a founding donor of the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and he continues to serve on the museum’s council. According to Rolat, the museum is where visitors can come “to better understand past and contemporary Jewish culture.” Polin, which opened in 2013, is today one of the most-visited museums in Warsaw, attracting both foreign tourists and Poles alike.

Over the years, Zygmunt Rolat has received countless awards and recognitions, including Honorary Citizenship of the City of Częstochowa, as well as the Commander Cross with Star of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland. Thanks to his dedication, generosity, and vision, today countless bridges of memory and mutual understanding exist. This dedication was especially evident during the 2018 Yom HaShoah commemoration organized by the State Department in cooperation with the Embassies of Poland and Israel, where Zygmunt Rolat was the event’s keynote speaker. As part of the event, he invited his grandson Henry for a joint conversation focused on recalling the past, promoting tolerance, and ensuring that the history of the Holocaust is never forgotten.



Tad Taube (courtesy of Taube Philanthropies)

TAD TAUBE

1931-

Thaddeus “Tad” Taube was just eight years old when his family, mindful of the escalating sense of uncertainty in Europe and fearful for what may come next, decided to flee Poland for the United States. As he traveled by train across Nazi Germany to Paris, and later aboard the Queen Mary to New York City, Tad could not know what was to come.

Two months later, Nazi Germany invaded his homeland and, over the course of its occupation, systematically extinguished Jewish life in Poland, which had existed and flourished for centuries. “Jews were a part of Poland for a thousand years,” said Taube, explaining, “We cannot forget about the richness of their lives and their contributions to society. Poland would not be what it is without the Jews.” As an adult, Tad Taube has dedicated his time and treasure to rejuvenating not only the memory of Jewish life in Poland, but Jewish life itself.

Taube was born in 1931 in Kraków but spent most of his childhood years in Toruń and later Warsaw. His upbringing reflected the multi-ethnic tapestry of pre-war Poland. He was reared by secular Jewish parents who spoke German at home, and attended a French Catholic school where he had catechism classes with a rabbi.

In 1939 he joined his parents in the United States, where he quickly learned English, had a brief spell as a child actor in Hollywood, and went on to serve as an officer in the U.S. Air Force. After earning degrees at Stanford University, he became a successful real estate investor and businessman. While achieving success in America, he did not lose his ancestral ties, explaining that, “the reality of my Polish background was always part of me. It has never left my consciousness even for a minute and I’m very proud of it.”

Beginning in the 1980s, and continuing to this day, Taube has been a generous philanthropist, supporting causes near to his heart. None, perhaps, have consumed so much of his time and efforts as his dedication to the rebirth of Jewish life in his native Poland.

In 2003 he established the Jewish Heritage Initiative in Poland in order to support Jewish heritage and life in Poland, as well as build ties between the American Jewish community and Poland. These efforts were further expanded in 2009 with the establishment of the Taube Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland, which works

to connect descendants of East European Jews, inside and outside Poland, with their ancestral roots and promote Jewish projects in Poland. Over the years the center, which has since been renamed the Center of Jewish Life and Learning, has distributed hundreds of grants to numerous cultural, heritage, and historical initiatives in Poland, including the Jewish Community Center of Kraków, the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, and the annual Jewish Cultural Festival in Kraków, to name a few. Taube was also an early and stalwart supporter of the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

In addition to his work in Poland, Taube has gone to great lengths to promote his homeland in the California Bay Area, where he has lived for most of his life. Since 2007, he has served as Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland first in Belmont, California, then in San Francisco. In 2009, he helped establish a Sister City partnership between San Francisco and Kraków. In recognition of his lifelong contributions to building ties between the people of Poland and the United States, Taube was awarded the Commander Cross with Star of the Order of Merit.

“I have been responsible, to a large extent, for the Jewish rebirth of Poland,” Taube explains, continuing, “it’s a tremendous level of satisfaction for me to be able to come back to the country of my birth and to be able to make a contribution to our culture here.”



Richard Lugar

RICHARD LUGAR

1932-2019

From his earliest days, Richard Lugar embodied the characteristics of a scholar and a statesman. As an Eagle Scout, a high-school valedictorian, and a top graduate in his university class, Lugar displayed an insatiable appetite for knowledge and expertise. He continued to broaden his horizons as a Rhodes Scholar and through his service in the Navy, experiences that would mold the character of a man who became one of the most intellectually respected members of Congress.

Elected to the United States Senate as a Republican in 1977 following a successful mayorship of Indianapolis, Indiana, Senator Lugar was quickly recognized as a highly respected voice on foreign policy, and his advice was sought by colleagues and government officials. He twice served as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, from 1985-1987 and again from 2003-2007.

As a fifth-generation native of Indiana, Senator Lugar's roots in the American heartland stretched deep. Yet his conviction that prosperity at home depended on international security and peace abroad meant that his focus was split between his two great passions, farming and foreign affairs.

Due to his strong foreign policy bona fides, when he visited Poland in 1993 and became one of the Senate's earliest and most vocal proponents of NATO enlargement, the position quickly gained heightened legitimacy.

"If NATO is to survive," argued Lugar, "then it must be transformed from an alliance for collective defense against a specific threat into an alliance in the service of shared values and common strategic interests." Senator Lugar did not beat around the bush when he said in 1993, "It is now time for a new mission and new membership." This clarion call for NATO expansion ensured that the topic would become one of the top foreign policy priorities for the coming years in Washington, D.C.

As Chairman of the European Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Lugar used his position to convene hearings in 1995 on the future of NATO and to explore paths to expand its membership. In this approach he was not afraid to look beyond party lines to build consensus around the issue, in accordance with his belief in bipartisanship. In the end this consensus

prevailed, when in 1998 the United States Senate, by a vote of 80-19, consented to the expansion of NATO.

In the years following Poland's accession to NATO, Senator Lugar remained a close friend and supporter of bilateral ties. A strong proponent of cultural exchange programs, in 2007 Senator Lugar introduced legislation that created the United States-Poland Parliamentary Youth Exchange Program Act, which further strengthened the people-to-people bonds between the United States and Poland.

During the course of his lifetime of service, Senator Lugar was awarded the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom, was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, and was decorated by the President of Poland with the Commander Cross with Star of the Order of Merit. Throughout the course of his life, the Senator from Indiana helped improve the lives not only of his constituents, but also of people around the world by making it collectively a more safe, more prosperous, and more free place.



Pete Domenici

PETE DOMENICI

1932-2017

“It was like nothing I had ever experienced or read in a novel,” said Senator Pete Domenici, remarking on his visit to Warsaw in the fall of 1989. In the wake of the first elections in Poland in forty years that were open to the opposition, and in the midst of widespread socio-political and economic transformation, change was not only in the air, it was happening on the ground, including in the halls of Poland’s parliament. Inspired by what he saw, Senator Domenici initiated the Gift of Democracy program, which supported Poland and the entire region as it embarked on a difficult but determined path to democratic self-governance.

Pete Domenici was born in 1932 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to immigrants from Italy. Following law school, he was elected in 1966 to the Albuquerque City Commission and became its Chairman, the city’s chief executive. Not long after, Domenici was elected to the United States Senate as a Republican, where he represented New Mexico from 1973 to 2009. During the course of his six terms in the Senate, he chaired the Senate Energy Committee and the Senate Budget Committee.

In September 1989, Domenici accompanied former Vice President Walter Mondale and other legislators from the U.S. and Western Europe to a conference in Warsaw that was ostensibly about the role of parliament in formulating national economic policy. When they arrived, however, they discovered that rather than discussing theory and policies, there was a hunger among Polish parliamentarians for insight on the practical nuts and bolts of legislative governance.

The visit had a tremendous effect on the Senator, who recalled, “Most of them [newly-elected Polish legislators] had never been in any public office. A year ago, some of them were in jail. They come from tractor factories, from shipyards. One was a doctor. They’re impetuous and impatient—and frightened. They’re afraid if they don’t show success, things will go back... but they want to do it right. They want to protect their democracy.”

Upon returning to Washington, D.C., Senator Domenici immediately went to work on Capitol Hill, exploring how to effectively convey practical aid and expertise from the U.S. Congress to the newly democratic Polish parliament. The next month, Congress passed the United States Congressional Gift of Democracy to Poland Res-

olution, which authorized Congress to dispatch experts to Poland in order to assess the training and equipment needs of the Polish Parliament—Sejm and Senate—and report to the Congress on its findings.

Armed with these findings, Congress later established the Frost-Solomon Task Force, another mechanism to support parliamentarianism and democratic self-governance in Poland and the wider region. Through Domenici’s Gift of Democracy initiative, the Polish parliament became the first legislative body in Central and Eastern Europe to receive American assistance.

While championing the measure on the floor of the Senate, Senator Domenici declared, “Frequently, it’s not the big things that count. Sometimes it’s the small gifts that carry with them not only great symbolism but a real spirit of kinship, and that’s what I think about this first Gift of Democracy from the premiere parliament in the world, the United States Congress, to a brand new one, which may be on the verge of causing a tidal wave of new democracies if indeed they succeed.”

For his dedication to Poland’s self-governance and support of Poland-U.S. ties, Senator Pete Domenici posthumously received the Commander Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland in 2019.



President Barack Obama awards Senator Barbara Mikulski the Presidential Medal of Freedom, 2015



Barbara Mikulski, 1978

BARBARA MIKULSKI

1936-

“When my great-grandmother came to this country from Poland in 1886, she had little money in her pocket, but she had big dreams in her heart. Women didn’t even have the right to vote. One hundred years to the year that she landed in this country, I landed in the Senate. That is what opportunity means in the United States of America,” said Senator Barbara Mikulski, reflecting on her familial history all the way back to her great-grandmother Eleanor Kurek, who hailed from a small village south of Kraków.

Senator Mikulski has never shied away from boldly proclaiming her Polish heritage. In fact, the Senator is not known to shy away from any task, no matter how daunting.

A native of Baltimore, Maryland, Mikulski was raised in the city’s east-side immigrant enclave of Highlandtown. It was a proud community with a strong work ethic, which was, Mikulski said, “not an empty euphemism but a way of life.” It was where her parents ran a grocery store and her grandparents established Mikulski’s Bakery, the first Polish bakery in Baltimore. The neighborhood was but a stone’s throw from the towering Pulaski statue in Patterson Park, erected by the city’s vibrant Polish-American community. So when Highlandtown, neighboring Fells Point, and many other working-class communities in Baltimore were threatened with destruction due to a planned highway construction project, Mikulski did not back down from the powers that be and rallied efforts to successfully block the project.

This spirit of determination fueled Mikulski’s unlikely trajectory to high office. From her first election as a Democrat to the Baltimore City Council in 1971, to her 10 years in the United States House of Representatives from 1977-1987, to becoming the longest-serving female Senator in the United States Senate from 1987-2017, and the first woman to chair the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee, Mikulski set new precedent every step of the way.

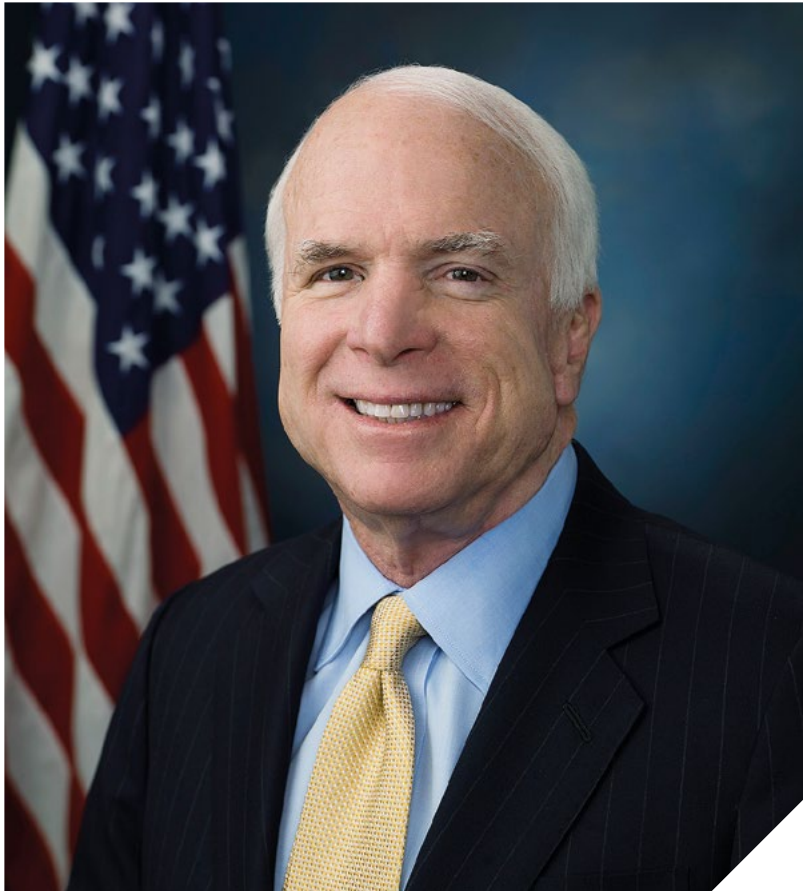
Both in her community and later in elected office, Mikulski was always a strong advocate on behalf of *Polonia*, the people of Poland, and the strengthening of Poland-U.S. relations. Through regular visits to Poland, she knew the true face of Soviet-imposed communism and staunchly advocated for freedom and democracy for captive nations behind the Iron Curtain. Following the crack-

down of martial law in Poland in 1981, Mikulski spearheaded legislation that allowed Polish political refugees to settle legally in the United States. After the transformations of 1989, she was an ardent champion of Poland’s accession to NATO, and continued working tirelessly to make bilateral ties between the two countries as strong as they could be by serving as co-chair of the Senate Poland Caucus and fighting for Poland’s inclusion in the Visa Waiver Program.

A fiery orator, Mikulski’s speeches on Polish issues never lacked passion. Whether speaking at the annual commemoration before Baltimore’s National Katyń Memorial, which she helped erect, or from the lectern in the United States Senate, Senator Mikulski was always someone you wanted on your side of a debate.

Known to all as Senator Barb, she was devoted to her constituents throughout her decades of public service, never forgetting where she came from or the values her family instilled in her. “My Polish heritage has given me an identity and a set of beliefs that make me the Senator I am with a belief in freedom, a belief in people, and a belief that we must always speak truth to power,” Mikulski asserted.

In 2013 Senator Mikulski was awarded one of Poland’s highest state distinctions, the Commander Cross with Star of the Order of *Polonia Restituta*, and in 2015 she joined the elite list of Americans to be awarded the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor. Through a lifetime of public service, Senator Mikulski has distinguished herself for her dedication to her country and her commitment to building bridges with the land of her ancestors, Poland. Today, the Mikulski name is renowned throughout not only Maryland, but also the United States, Poland, and beyond.



John McCain, 2009



Senator John McCain with Poland's Deputy Minister of National Defense Tomasz Szatkowski and Ambassador Piotr Wilczek, 2017

JOHN MCCAIN

1936–2018

It is difficult to find a more devoted friend of freedom-seeking people around the world than the late Senator John McCain. For over four decades, the people of Poland were relegated to that category, yearning for freedom from behind the Iron Curtain. Today, thanks in-part to the support of John McCain, Poland is a security provider, a champion of fundamental freedoms, and an unwavering NATO ally.

“One of the deepest pleasures of my professional life has been watching the progress of the Polish people—from noble resistance, to national liberation, to democratic triumph. In just one generation, Poland has transformed itself from a captive state of an evil empire to a democratic driver of continental unity—from an object of the struggle for a Europe whole, free, and at peace to an architect of that dream’s expansion on behalf of others,” said Senator McCain in 2011.

The heroic life story of Senator John McCain is marked by profound courage, dedication, and sacrifice. McCain’s experience as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, where for five and a half years he was subject to the most trying conditions, led him to always stand in solidarity with those who were denied their inherent freedoms.

John McCain was elected to Congress in 1982, representing Arizona, where he served two terms. Only a few months into his term, McCain assisted a Polish Solidarity dissident seeking to relocate his family to Arizona after being forced to flee his homeland following the imposition of martial law. It was but one instance out of so many in John McCain’s lifetime when, time and again, he exhibited unwavering commitment to the values he held dear.

In 1986, McCain was elected to the United States Senate, where he served until 2018, and eventually chaired the Commerce Committee, Indian Affairs Committee, and Armed Services Committee.

In Washington, D.C., Senator McCain was a forceful advocate for NATO membership for Poland. In 1994, the Senate passed McCain’s amendment, which called on the President to urge NATO to declare criteria and timetables for new members. Later, McCain was actively involved in the Senate NATO Observer Group, which helped guide Senate approval of NATO expansion. “The Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary share our Western values, our Western standards, and

there is no reason or excuse for the unending delay,” the Senator declared in 1996.

Following Poland’s accession into NATO, Senator McCain remained a resolute partner. He advocated for U.S. export of liquefied natural gas to Central and Eastern Europe in order to reduce the region’s dependence on a single supplier of energy. As Chairman, he went to great lengths to resolve Poland’s Visa Waiver Program exclusion, pledging to explore every possible legislative avenue, including in the framework of defense funding to secure Poland’s admission into the visa-free travel scheme.

“I have always been, and will always be, a proud champion of Poland and its people. I will never tire in that quest,” declared Senator McCain. How fortunate Poland was to have a dear friend in Senator McCain.

In 2011, John McCain was awarded the Commander Cross with Star of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland, “for having been a champion of freedom in Poland’s darkest hours and for having been a champion of the enlargement of NATO.” Following the presentation, Senator McCain stated, “I’m deeply honored and very humbled and I will always be inspired by the example that the Polish people have displayed for courage and their dedication to freedom, which is still an example to the entire world.” May Poland always live up to the ideals that the late Senator McCain dedicated his life to promoting.



Madeleine Albright



Madeleine Albright at the Residence of Ambassador Piotr Wilczek, 2019

MADELEINE ALBRIGHT

1937-

Madeleine Albright was forced to emigrate from her native Czechoslovakia when the communists took control of the country in 1948, and, although an exile, she became a trailblazer in her new home: The United States of America.

Albright earned a doctorate in public law and government from Columbia University, and quickly became ensconced in research and entered Democratic Party politics. She worked for Polish-American Senator Edmund Muskie, and later for her former mentor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, on President Carter's National Security Council. In the early 1980s she learned Polish—her third Slavic language—in order to study the role of the press in the Solidarity movement, which she had a chance to observe up close during a visit to Poland in November 1981.

When the Democrats returned to the White House in 1993, President Bill Clinton appointed Albright UN Ambassador. Four years later she became Secretary of State, the first woman to hold this most senior cabinet post. It was in this role that Albright had the ability to bridge the divide that, for half a century, had separated her two homelands.

As the newly democratic states of Central and Eastern Europe regained complete control over their sovereignty and foreign policy following the events of 1989, they began to seek membership in NATO. It was a grueling, tedious, and uncertain process, but one that ultimately ended jubilantly with Secretary Albright receiving the protocols of accession during a ceremony at the Truman Library. In her remarks, the Secretary emphasized, "History will record March 12, 1999 as the day the people of Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland strode through NATO's open door and assumed their rightful place in NATO's councils.... The promise of nothing about you, without you, is now formalized. You are truly allies. You are truly home." Poland's entry into NATO was a result of many years of debate and persuasion, a process during which Secretary Albright was determined to right history's wrongs.

When Albright became Secretary of State, NATO expansion talks were already well underway, but perhaps the hardest task was still ahead: securing ratification in the United States Senate. It was up to Albright, as the U.S. top diplomat, to assuage Congressional concerns over defense costs and to justify to skeptics America's contin-

ued involvement in NATO. She spoke of a moral imperative for NATO expansion, describing it as, "among the most significant foreign and defense policy issues of our time," which would strengthen the alliance, defend democracy, and prevent future conflict in Europe. In the end, through her testimony and diplomatic leadership, Albright helped to ensure that any remaining traces of the dividing line between East and West were forever removed in Europe.

In 2000, Secretary Albright and her Polish counterpart, Foreign Minister Bronisław Geremek, established the Community of Democracies (CoD), an intergovernmental coalition of democratic states. During a 2019 CoD commemorative event at the Polish Ambassador's residence in Washington, D.C., Albright recalled, "As Secretary of State, I found that if I ran down the list of challenges faced by the world—from terrorism and war to poverty and pollution—democracy was the surest path to progress." The CoD, headquartered in Warsaw, continues to function to this day as an important platform for dialogue and discussion.

For her commitment to securing Poland's accession to NATO, Madeleine Albright was awarded the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland. The world today is no less complex than it was two decades ago, in 1999, when Poland joined NATO, but as the Secretary asserted then, "for whatever challenges the future may bring... it will be in our interest to have a vigorous and larger alliance with those European democracies that share our values and our determination to defend them." Today, the NATO alliance counts 30 members, including Poland and the United States, committed to facing together whatever challenges may arise.



Tom Kahn (third from the left), Colorado Women's College, 1967

TOM KAHN

1938-1992

“What has occurred in Poland—and not occurred in any other part of the Eastern bloc—is a working-class rebellion, well organized, which has institutionalized itself as an independent power center,” explained Tom Kahn. A Social Democrat and passionate labor organizer, Kahn was at the heart of the American labor movement’s unwavering support for Poland’s Solidarity movement during the course of its decade-long struggle.

Tom Kahn was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1938 and became immersed in democratic socialist philosophy during his formative years. He graduated from Howard University in 1961 and helped organize the 1963 March on Washington, as well as other civil rights protests. During this time, Kahn also wrote and ghostwrote numerous speeches and articles for leading activists and labor leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bayard Rustin.

In 1972, Kahn joined the AFL-CIO as special assistant to the president for international affairs, and served as editor of the International Affairs Department’s *Free Trade Union News*. His international portfolio meant that when strikes broke out in Gdańsk and across Poland in the summer of 1980, Kahn was quickly tapped to supervise all of the labor federation’s Poland-related activities.

Within days of Solidarity’s signing the August Agreements in 1980, the AFL-CIO established the Polish Workers Aid Fund, which Kahn oversaw. Over the coming months, the fund raised over \$300,000 for the Solidarity trade union, which was delivered to Poland in the form of equipment and supplies, as requested by the Polish trade unionists. Kahn quickly developed a network of contacts with Polish labor organizers, and served as a conduit for information about Poland to the wider American labor movement.

“To do all in our power to nourish and extend the life of Solidarity is the overriding compelling mission of the AFL-CIO in the present Polish situation. It is an obligation from which we could not shrink without doing damage to the *raison d’être* of the American labor movement itself,” declared Kahn in early 1981.

When the communist authorities outlawed Solidarity in December 1981 following the imposition of martial law, Kahn’s activism, and that of the AFL-CIO, redoubled. The Polish Workers Aid Fund raised significant additional funds for supplies, which were smuggled to

the now-underground Solidarity union. This large-scale, practical support helped Solidarity continue to function. Kahn also became a board member of the newly established Committee in Support of Solidarity, and secured AFL-CIO funding for its efforts.

With AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland’s ironclad support for Solidarity, Kahn engaged in determined advocacy for U.S. measures in support of Polish workers. Using the *Free Trade Union News*, Kahn brought the Polish struggle to the kitchen tables of millions of American workers. He also testified before Congress and spoke in numerous engagements, incessantly lobbying for support for Polish workers.

Named International Affairs director of the AFL-CIO in 1986, Kahn continued to monitor and actively support the Polish unionists in their democracy efforts and was an unwavering advocate for the Polish workers. As his lifelong friend, Rachelle Horowitz, recalled, “his political awakening had taken place during the 1956 uprisings in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Then he had been able only to march and protest. This time [1980], he was in a position to do something more: he could actually aid the revolution.”

For over a decade, Kahn dedicated himself to the peaceful struggle for freedom, especially the freedom of association, by the Polish workers, and in so doing became one of the strongest champions of the Polish people in Washington, D.C. “Freedom of association is, in our view, the bedrock human right on which all the others depend for their defense and protection,” declared Kahn during a Congressional hearing on Poland. Tom Kahn passed away in 1992 at the age of 53, having lived to see Poland’s democratic transformation, a cause to which he contributed mightily.



Hank Brown

HANK BROWN

1940-

Today, NATO expansion in Central and Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War can be looked back on as a foregone conclusion, but had it not been for a cohort of proponents in the U.S. Congress who favored action over inertia, the path to membership for Poland and her neighbors may have been a much longer and less certain prospect.

Senator Hank Brown of Colorado served just one term in the United States Senate, from 1991-1997, but in that time he was, as his colleague would later describe him, “one of the most effective advocates of securing freedom and peace for the people of Europe.”

Throughout 1994, Senator Brown worked with fellow senators from across the political spectrum to pass legislation in support of NATO expansion. After initial efforts were stymied, Brown sought out alternative avenues to advance the cause, including by attaching the legislation as an amendment. Thanks to his initiative, the U.S. Congress passed the Brown Amendment to the NATO Participation Act. This legislation authorized the U.S. President to establish a program to provide military aid to Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, in order to prepare them for full NATO membership. It also called on the U.S. and other NATO members to furnish assistance to those states in order to facilitate their transition to full NATO membership.

For Poland and her neighbors, this legislation was a critical display of bipartisan Congressional support for their NATO-minded ambitions. It was, as Senator Brown declared after the passage of the legislation, “A signal to the world that the United States wants to move toward NATO membership for those countries.”

The political significance of the legislation spearheaded by Senator Brown can be seen even more fully when viewed in hindsight. The Brown Amendment came nearly three full years ahead of President Clinton’s eventual announcement of NATO expansion and nearly five years before Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic became official NATO members. That is to say, it came at a time when NATO expansion was neither certain, nor foreordained.

Although just a freshman Republican member of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, Senator Brown’s leadership on the issue of NATO expansion continued with the NATO Participation Act amendments

of 1995 and the NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act of 1996, signed into law by President Clinton. Soft-spoken and with no direct ties, neither personal nor constituent, to Central Europe, on paper Brown may have seemed an unlikely champion of aggressive NATO expansion eastward. Yet his continued leadership on the issue explains why Brown was described as, “the key [NATO] pro-enlargement legislator in the Senate.”

“He didn’t have a go-along-to-get-along attitude,” said Senator Brown’s former chief of staff, Bill Brack, “he based decisions not on what was popular, but what he thought was the right thing to do.” Fortunately, NATO expansion proved to be—with time—both popular and the right thing to do. But it was Senator Brown who was among the first to take bold, public declarations to ensure that expansion became a reality, and worked across party lines to achieve this goal.

In recognition of his leadership, Brown was awarded Poland’s Commander Cross of the Order of Merit, and the city of Kraków presented him an honorary citizenship, making Brown, as one newspaper quipped, “The Krakowian from Colorado.”

What ultimately inspired Brown’s bold advocacy for Poland’s membership in NATO? “The year before I was born the world saw Poland disappear as it was engulfed by Germany and the Soviet Union... because our support was ambiguous, because those of good faith, who believe in democracy did not stand together, each country fell separately to the totalitarian aggressors...,” said Brown from the floor of the Senate in 1994, adding, “I do not want for this generation, for it to be said that we did not do what we could to make sure that these same events do not happen again.”



Martin Frost, 2003

MARTIN FROST

1942-

Growing up, Martin Frost never intended to become a Congressman. Only after he graduated from the University of Missouri and became a journalist did he realize that he had what it takes. As he later recounted, “Like most journalists, I met a bunch of Congressmen and I decided these guys weren’t so special,” adding, “I could do that.” And so, following law school and military service in the Army Reserves, Martin Frost was elected to Congress in 1978 to represent the 24th district of Texas.

During his 13 terms in Congress, Frost rose in the ranks of the Democratic Party, becoming a popular and well-respected leader as well as the first Jewish Congressman to be elected to a House of Representatives leadership post. Too shy, as he once admitted, to be a journalist, Frost instead became an effective legislator and coalition builder, working to pursue bipartisan solutions for the pressing challenges of the era. “Without bipartisanship, we cannot accomplish great things. We can only fight,” Frost said.

A great vehicle of bipartisanship that embodied the best of America’s values was the Frost-Solomon House Task Force, named after its chair Martin Frost and ranking member Gerald Solomon. This body, officially the House Special Task Force on the Development of Parliamentary Institutions in Eastern Europe, was established in 1990 by Speaker of the House Tom Foley and Republican Leader Robert Michael as a mechanism for the U.S. House of Representatives to provide tangible assistance to the legislatures of emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe.

Over the course of nearly half a century of Soviet domination, the parliaments behind the Iron Curtain had atrophied under the dictate of the party-state. When communism fell, the newly democratic countries had parliaments in name only, with hardly the experience or capacity to serve as legitimate governing institutions. Thus, over the course of the next six years, the Frost-Solomon Task Force assisted a dozen parliaments in the region, including the Polish Sejm and Senat, as they undertook the urgently necessary task of transforming into robust legislative bodies.

Congressional leaders knew that successful democratic transition depended on establishing effective democratic legislatures, and through the Frost-Solomon Task Force they sought to guide reforms,

instill best practices, and provide the tools necessary for the functioning of a vigorous parliament that faced the herculean task of legislating the transformation of a state.

The task force brought together the various technical components of the legislative process in the United States, such as the Congressional Research Service and the Library of Congress, and made their procedures accessible to partner nations through staff training and exchanges, study visits, and courses on IT and legislative research. Equally important, the Congress oversaw the transfer of several million dollars’ worth of equipment to the Polish Parliament, including printers and computers—fundamental pieces of equipment in running a legislative body but sorely lacking in a region that was emerging from the grips of a planned economy.

Throughout this period, Congressman Frost dedicated himself to this mission of supporting the transition of Central and East European parliaments on their path toward effective legislative governance. Equally important was his emphasis on bipartisanship in the process, instilling in his European counterparts the importance of finding common ground with your political adversary and working together for the greater good. During the course of the task force’s six years, great strides were made in Poland and the rest of the region, and much goodwill was created between legislators on both sides of the Atlantic.

In recognition of his work, Congressman Frost was awarded the Commander Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland. Today the House Democratic Partnership continues Congressman Frost’s legacy of bipartisan legislative outreach by advising emerging parliaments around the world and helping them travel the path that Poland and her neighbors had taken three decades earlier.



Newt Gingrich



Newt Gingrich with Ambassador
Piotr Wilczek, 2017

NEWT GINGRICH

1943-

Washington, D.C.'s, political scene was rocked by the 1994 Republican Revolution, which gave the GOP majorities in both houses of Congress for the first time in 40 years. At the center of this political tidal wave was Republican standard-bearer Newt Gingrich.

A university professor by training with a doctorate in European History, Newt Gingrich was first elected to Congress in 1978 to represent Georgia's 6th Congressional District. When the Republicans won the House in 1994, Gingrich, as the de facto leader of the resurgent majority, was elected Speaker, and his electoral platform, the Contract with America, became Washington's playbook.

At the time, Poland and her neighbors were working to secure commitments from NATO for a timeline of expansion and for NATO to officially name candidates for membership. Meanwhile, some political leaders in Europe and the United States were seeking to balance desires to expand NATO with an effort to secure a working partnership with Russia. The new Republican majority lent their strong support in this debate to Central Europe's budding democracies. "NATO enlargement was one of its [Contract with America] key planks and those Congressmen who rode to power on the Contract's coattails were signed up to it," wrote Ron Asmus in *Opening NATO's Door*.

Specifically, Gingrich's Contract with America called for bringing Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary into NATO by January 1999, arguing that the U.S. and NATO should expand the frontier of freedom eastward without asking Moscow for permission.

One of the first pieces of legislation that Speaker Gingrich brought to the floor in 1995 was H.R. 7. This bill included the NATO Expansion Act, which called for NATO membership for Poland and other Visegrad States, as well as for the U.S. to furnish appropriate assistance to enable these countries to achieve membership. The House of Representatives passed the bill 281-141 and, in so doing, made the historically significant declaration of officially endorsing NATO enlargement.

Over the coming years Speaker Gingrich sustained political support for NATO expansion, saying in 1996, "In the spirit of a safer, freer and more secure world, the time has come to once again enlarge NATO's

membership." As NATO enlargement increasingly became a domestic political issue in America, Gingrich continued to loudly advocate for expansion, saying, "The principle here is very simple. The people of Poland, as their neighbors in Hungary and Czech Republic and others, believe that they should as a free people have the right to live in safety and in security. NATO is a defensive alliance. It threatens no one. But it offers the strength of Western Europe and the United States in protecting small countries who seek the right to live in freedom and in peace."

While the "freedom summer for Eastern Europe" did not come in 1996, Poland, alongside Hungary and the Czech Republic, became NATO members in March 1999, a historic feat that Speaker Gingrich and his leadership in Congress helped make a reality.

Following his career in Congress, Gingrich has remained active on the national stage. In 2010, together with his wife Callista, the Gingriches produced a documentary entitled *Nine Days that Changed the World*, which details the significance of Pope John Paul II's first pilgrimage to communist Poland in 1979. It was an event that helped inspire the rise of Solidarity and led to the eventual toppling of communism in Central and Eastern Europe and a fully free Poland.

Today, thanks to the NATO Alliance, the people of Poland are free to live, as Speaker Gingrich said, in peace and security, as together with allied partners they contributed to the collective security of the entire Alliance.



Strobe Talbott
(photo credit: K. Lambert, courtesy
of Brookings Institution)

STROBE TALBOTT

1946-

Strobe Talbott was the most important architect of American policy toward Russia in the Clinton administration. Serious and intellectual, he was described as exuding a “straight-arrow quality” that made him well respected by colleagues.

Born Nelson Strobridge Talbott III to an investment banking family in Dayton, Ohio, Talbott was primed for success from a young age. He followed in his father’s and grandfather’s footsteps by attending the prestigious Hotchkiss School in Connecticut and then Yale University. Talbott studied Russian language and literature, and developed a strong connection to that region, even translating Khrushchev’s memoirs into English. He subsequently became a Rhodes Scholar and left for Oxford, where fate intervened as he became roommates with the future President of the United States, Bill Clinton.

In his professional career, Talbott was a star foreign policy commentator at *Time* magazine, where he worked for 21 years serving as a correspondent in Eastern Europe, as well as covering the State Department and the White House, among other assignments. When Clinton was elected to the White House, he asked his old friend Talbott to serve as Ambassador at Large and Special Advisor to the Secretary of State for the New Independent States, in order to manage relations with the states arising out of the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

“Talbott was the president’s closest friend among his foreign policy advisers and the undisputed master of U.S. policy toward Russia,” according to international relations scholar Jim Goldgier. This personal relationship and deep understanding of the region made Talbott an important and well-regarded figure in the Clinton administration’s foreign policy apparatus.

Due to his portfolio’s focus on Russia, Talbott was initially, as his State Department colleague Ron Asmus wrote, “the most important, powerful, and articulate proponent of a cautious approach to [NATO] expansion.” He was concerned not to negatively affect the nascent ties with Russia during its delicate time of transition. A speedy NATO expansion, Talbott cautioned, could destabilize an already precarious situation in the region. However, when Talbott was promoted to Deputy Secretary of State in 1994, his policy posi-

tion began to evolve as his responsibilities expanded to overseeing the entire architecture of European security.

In 1995, Talbott published “Why NATO Should Grow” in the *New York Review of Books*, publicly declaring that, “enlarging NATO in a way that encourages European integration and enhances European security—the policy the administration is determined to pursue—will benefit all the peoples of the continent, and the larger transatlantic community as well.”

As the die was cast on the administration’s approach, Talbott worked to see that NATO’s expansion was a success. Understanding that NATO was as much a political organization as it was a military one, he declared in 1997 that, “NATO is a catalyst for strengthening the values and institutions that the Allies have in common: democracy, rule of law, respect for human and civil rights, tolerance of ethnic and religious differences, and civilian control of the military.... We want to do for the Central and East Europeans what we did for Western Europe; we want to finish the historic project we started in 1949—making war in Europe impossible.”

Talbott is notable for being the first journalist to serve in such a high-ranking position at the State Department. Following his service in government, he became president of the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. For strengthening Poland-U.S. bilateral relations, including through the admission of Poland to NATO, Strobe Talbott was awarded the Commander Cross of the Order of the Republic of Poland. To again quote Asmus, “[Talbott] was not afraid to change his mind if he became convinced of the merits of another position.” May we all be confident enough in our convictions to listen to those with whom we may not agree. Sometimes we may find that there is more that unites us than we think.



Chuck Hagel arriving at Powidz Air Base, Poland, 2014

CHUCK HAGEL

1946-

Chuck Hagel was never one to take the easy way out. When he was drafted into the military in 1967 with orders to deploy to Germany, he instead volunteered for duty in Vietnam as an infantry squad leader. His front-line service earned him recognition for gallantry and two Purple Heart Medals, as well as a lifetime of understanding the price of freedom. These lessons guided his pursuit of public service and shaped his approach to decision making.

Chuck Hagel's story begins in, and in large part is defined by, Nebraska. As a fourth-generation cornhusker, his family's ties to the state run all the way back to 1888 when his great-grandparents, Tomasz Kąkolewski and Katarzyna Budnikowska, emigrated from Poland and settled in Nebraska. They were part of a wave of settlers who made a home for themselves in the Nebraska prairie, building farmsteads, forming communities, and becoming Americans.

Nebraska voters twice elected Hagel to the United States Senate (1997-2009) where he quickly joined the ranks of other strong supporters advocating for NATO expansion. During his time in the Senate, as well as his service to three U.S. administrations, both Republican and Democratic, Hagel championed bipartisan consensus as the only way democracy would work. For this reason, he was described as uniquely nonpartisan in an ever-more-partisan age, because he always strove to put the interests of his country above all else.

These values were on display when Hagel was appointed to serve as Secretary of Defense under President Barack Obama (2013-2015), during a time that was defined by a number of international crises.

When Russia unlawfully invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea in 2014, Secretary Hagel was at the forefront of the U.S. response, overseeing the repositioning of strategic assets to reassure front-line NATO allies in Central Europe. Under his watch, the United States immediately expanded aviation training with NATO allies and deployed ground forces for rotational training in Poland and the Baltic States.

Secretary Hagel saw Russian aggression as a means to renew the resolve of NATO members to strengthen the Alliance. He led the charge for all NATO members to increase defense budgets, a call that

was enshrined at the 2014 NATO Wales Summit, where all alliance members pledged to spend two percent of their GDP on defense within the next 10 years. Poland proudly became one of the first members to meet this defense goal.

That same year, Secretary Hagel traveled to Poland. While meeting with his Polish counterparts, he was invited to the small village of Dąbrówka Kościelna, not far from where today American forces regularly train with their Polish partners, building interoperability and exchanging expertise.

There the Secretary visited the local church where over a century earlier, in 1882, his great-grandparents were married. "I am very proud of my Polish heritage. And I know all of my family is," Hagel said after the visit. Reflecting on his Polish ties, he added, "We are all shaped by where we come from, and our families... and I'm very proud of that shaping."

Following his time in government, Hagel continues his commitment to service, including to the Polish-American community, serving for several years as Honorary Co-Chair of the Polish American Advisory Council. For his longstanding commitment to strong Poland-U.S. ties, Chuck Hagel was awarded Poland's Commander Cross with Star of the Order of Merit.



John Lenczowski
(courtesy of the Institute
of World Politics)

JOHN LENCZOWSKI

1950-

Like so many other Polish exiles, John Lenczowski's parents could not return to their home once the fighting ended in World War II. With the communists in control of their native Poland, returning was simply not an option. His father, George Lenczowski, was a Polish diplomat who served during the war with the Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade at Tobruk. In the United States, he became a respected scholar and longtime professor of political science at the University of California, Berkeley. John Lenczowski followed in his father's academic footsteps, earning his B.A. at the University of California, Berkeley, followed by an M.A. and a Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C.

When Ronald Reagan, an avowed anti-communist, was elected president in 1980, Lenczowski was determined to join in his effort to win the Cold War. He was hired as Special Advisor to the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Larry Eagleburger, at the State Department's Bureau of European Affairs. Lenczowski, convinced that the United States was trailing the Soviets in information warfare, worked to bolster America's public diplomacy efforts. He prioritized additional funding for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and his efforts were successful as President Reagan allocated \$2.5 billion to modernize the outlets.

When communist authorities cracked down on Solidarity in December 1981, Lenczowski cabled U.S. diplomatic missions around the world, alerting the American diplomatic corps of the planned "day of Solidarity with the Polish people," and encouraging diplomats to leverage local media outlets to amplify news of the oppression underway in Poland and of the Western world's outpouring of support for the Polish workers.

While at the State Department, Lenczowski was delegated to the newly formed Active Measures Working Group, an inter-agency group established to respond to Soviet disinformation. The working group successfully brought to the U.S. government's attention the dangerous extent of Soviet active measures operations—including disinformation, forgeries, and covert political-influence operations—and policy measures for how to effectively combat them. According to Fletcher Schoen and Christopher Lamb, Lenczowski, "effec-

tively communicated the proactive and confrontational attitude of the Reagan administration, so group members knew there was political pressure to overcome routine coordination challenges among their respective organizations." This was especially important as, according to Schoen and Lamb, at the time many in the State Department were of the opinion that it was best not to engage with Soviet disinformation at all.

From 1983 to 1987, Lenczowski was Director of European and Soviet Affairs at the National Security Council and served as principal Soviet affairs adviser to President Reagan. After leaving the White House, Lenczowski served as a professor at the national security studies program at Georgetown University. In 1990 Lenczowski founded the Institute of World Politics (IWP) in Washington, D.C., which has since become an independent graduate school of national security and international affairs. The IWP, which Lenczowski heads as president, educates American foreign policy scholars and practitioners, equipping them with the tools and insight to confront the challenges of our multipolar world. The IWP also houses the Kościuszko Chair of Polish Studies, which promotes Poland's history and culture to the American public. The Kościuszko Chair was the brainchild of Lady Blanka Rosenstiel, who has served as Poland's Honorary Consul in Miami since 1998.

According to Lenczowski, "It was U.S. public diplomacy—specifically our effort to connect with the oppressed peoples of that empire, to bear moral witness, to give the people courage and to show that moral resistance was possible—that was the decisive element in the ultimate collapse of communism." Through his work in government during the Reagan years, and his academic leadership in the years after, Lenczowski has helped to erase divisions and build bonds linking the people of Poland and the United States.



George Weigel
(courtesy of G. Weigel)

GEORGE WEIGEL

1951-

In December 1995, scholar George Weigel was in Rome to deliver a conference keynote address when he unexpectedly received an invitation to join the Pope for dinner at the Vatican. During the course of that meal, the Pope invited Weigel to become his biographer, an event that forever changed Weigel's life, and brought to countless readers around the world an even greater understanding of the incredible life of Pope John Paul II.

The election of Karol Wojtyła to the chair of St. Peter and his subsequent 27-year papacy had a tremendous impact on the global Roman Catholic community as well as his native Poland. John Paul II's tenure has been described as the first truly global pontificate in history. The Pope traveled the world, meeting millions along the way and inspiring events that would change individual lives and the course of human history. From inspiring a revolution of conscience and the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland to galvanizing a generation of faithful around the world that would be called the "John Paul II Generation," the Pope's messages and moral authority reached the far corners of the globe.

In *Witness to Hope*, the authoritative biography of Pope John Paul II, Weigel captured the Pope's life, work, and impact on humanity, as well as his "genuine nobility of spirit." But in order to properly present the Pope's life to a global audience, Weigel first had to familiarize readers with the place where John Paul II came from: Poland. Weigel expertly explores the intricacies of Poland's extensive—and at times tragic—history, rich culture, and distinct geography so as to convey to readers their impact on the formation of Karol Wojtyła's identity and outlook. In doing so, Weigel not only created a renowned biography of Pope John Paul II, but also highlighted the importance of culture as a driving force of history and shared the story of Poland with a global audience.

Following the publication of *Witness to Hope*, Weigel became recognized as an international authority figure on the life and teaching of Pope John Paul II, and has continued to author numerous books on Catholicism and the Roman Catholic Church. One of his more recent publications is *City of Saints: A Pilgrimage to John Paul II's Kraków*, which brings readers on a moving journey to the historic Polish city where the Pope spent his early years and served as a bishop and an archbishop.

Born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland, Weigel received a B.A. from St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore and an M.A. from the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, Ontario. From 1989 through 1996, he was president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a think tank in Washington, D.C., where he continues to serve as a Distinguished Senior Fellow and Chair of Catholic Studies.

For the past decades, in collaboration with Father Richard John Neuhaus, philosopher Michael Novak, Father Maciej Zięba, O.P., and other people of good faith in Poland and in the U.S., George Weigel has helped organize the *Tertio Millennio* Seminars on the Free Society in Kraków. These annual gatherings bring together students from North America and Central and Eastern Europe to engage in dialogue based on the teachings of Pope Saint John Paul II, in order to help prepare Catholic leaders of the 21st century. With nearly a thousand graduates, the *Tertio Millennio* Seminars have created lifelong people-to-people bonds while also deepening dialogue on Catholic social doctrine through the study of the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (John Paul II, 1991).

In 2006, George Weigel was awarded Poland's Gold Medal for Merit to Culture—*Gloria Artis*. He was only the second non-Pole to receive this distinction, which is the highest Polish recognition in the field of arts. In presenting the medal, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Kazimierz Ujazdowski, recognized Weigel's, "commemoration and dissemination of knowledge about the life and achievements of one of the most outstanding Poles, and thus also knowledge about the culture and history of Poland." Acknowledging the award, Weigel declared, "It has been one of the privileges of my life to help the world know a little more about Poland, its dramatic history, and its unique culture, which I believe has important things to teach the world."



Bill Frist

BILL FRIST

1952-

At the bedrock of Poland-U.S. relations are the rich, genuine, and longstanding people-to-people ties between Poles and Americans. These ties have been developed over decades due to migration and family ancestry, common frontline service in global conflicts, and a shared love of freedom. History, unfortunately, has often erected barriers to impede these human connections. This was acutely felt when the Iron Curtain isolated Poland and the Eastern Bloc from the rest of the world.

Ever since Poland regained its democratic control in 1989, it has sought to establish ever-closer ties with the United States, so that official bilateral relations could match the deep-seated friendship that has always existed between our two nations.

One hurdle that had long hindered the development of these ties was Poland's exclusion from the Visa Waiver Program, which allows citizens of specific countries to travel to the United States for up to 90 days without having to obtain a visa. This exclusion had long been a thorn in the side of an otherwise very strong partnership, and it was a thorn that Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist was determined to resolve.

When he ran for Senate in 1994, Bill Frist was an outsider and political novice. He had never held office before, having dedicated his professional career to medicine, where he worked for 16 years as a surgeon specializing in heart and lung transplants. With his election as a Republican to the Senate from Tennessee, he embarked on a trailblazing political career that was defined by his character and unlikely trajectory.

Only eight years after he entered the Senate, Frist was elected Senate Majority Leader, having served fewer total years in Congress than any person chosen to lead that body in history. His seeming dearth of Congressional experience was supplemented by his experience outside of politics. This balance of private-sector experience and public service explains why Frist referred to himself as a citizen legislator, and it defined his leadership style. He employed humility and compassion, as a doctor does at a patient's bedside, and his methodical demeanor meant that if he saw something that was not right, he would work to address it.

Such was Frist's approach when he learned of Poland's exclusion from the Visa Waiver Program. Senator Frist saw Poland as a strong American ally, actively standing side-by-side with America in foreign conflicts, shouldering the burden of the defense of common values. However, those same soldiers that served alongside Americans in Afghanistan were then unable to visit the United States without a visa. This, according to Frist, was unacceptable.

Together with Senators Barbara Mikulski and Rick Santorum, Frist used his influence to advocate for Poland's inclusion in the Visa Waiver Program, and in 2006 the Senate passed the amendment that would do just that.

"Allowing our allies in the war on terror to participate in the visa waiver program is a simple way to express appreciation for their contributions and foster continued goodwill," Frist said, championing the legislation.

Thanks to the many friends of Poland on Capitol Hill and the work of Majority Leader Frist, the cause of Poland's inclusion into the Visa Waiver Program gained political momentum, but it was not enough. The amendment, part of an effort to enact comprehensive immigration reform, never became law. It took another decade, until 2019, when Poland, at last, was invited to join the program, which now allows Polish citizens to travel to the United States with ease. A long-overdue thorn that so many had sought to pluck, including the surgeon from Tennessee, had finally been successfully removed.

Senator Frist left Congress in 2006 after completing two terms in office, fulfilling a promise he made to his voters when he first ran in 1994. He resumed his work in the medical field, living up in the highest sense to his belief in serving as a citizen legislator.



Ronald Asmus (center), 2004
(photo credit: Pavol Demes /
German Marshall Fund)

RONALD ASMUS

1957-2011

Although NATO entered the 1990s on a triumphant note, the decade saw the alliance's *raison d'être* tested perhaps unlike any other. Jolted by the sudden collapse of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of its Cold War adversary, the North Atlantic alliance entered an uncertain period as questions arose about what next steps it should take, or whether it should continue to exist at all. During this period of introspection, expansion arose as one of many key decisions that transformed NATO into the world's pre-eminent, modern collective security organization that it is today. But it was a long decade, and initially NATO expansion was neither seriously considered nor all too popular. In fact, NATO was not "top of mind" for many policy makers at the time.

Ron Asmus sought to change that when, in 1993, together with F. Stephen Larrabee and Richard Kugler, he published "Building a New NATO" in *Foreign Affairs* magazine. This seminal article made the case for NATO enlargement as part of a more comprehensive overhaul of the alliance to meet the new challenges of its time. NATO expansion, Asmus argued, was necessary not only to stabilize Central and Eastern Europe, but also to ensure that NATO remained relevant and intact. The article was read widely in policy circles, and generated significant interest across Washington, D.C., from the State Department to Capitol Hill.

International agreement based on unanimous consent—which NATO expansion required—is by nature the product of difficult negotiations and hardly ever the result of one single actor. However, there are times in history when one person can have outsized influence on the course of events.

This was true in the case of Ron Asmus, a policy analyst and later diplomat who influenced the progression of NATO expansion from a long-shot idea to ratified reality. Although Asmus was not the only figure to contemplate expansion, he helped kick-start the contentious public debate that concluded in Independence, Missouri, with the signing of the protocols of accession.

A native of Wisconsin, Asmus was the child of emigres from post-war Germany and himself an expert on Germany and Central Europe. During the Cold War, as a university student he visited Europe and, "saw the reality of Europe's division in a divided Ber-

lin...." The visit affected his life's trajectory, setting him on a path to pursue foreign policy studies. After graduate school, he worked for Radio Free Europe in Munich, Germany, which gave him a front-row seat to the events in Central Europe as Solidarity was on the rise in Poland and ever-more prominent cracks were becoming visible in the Iron Curtain.

Undoubtedly, these lived experiences and his family's history shaped Asmus's thinking on NATO, leading him to become one of the earliest advocates of NATO enlargement as he sought to make enlargement the centerpiece of U.S. policy toward Europe. He became part of a budding group of pro-enlargement thinkers in Washington, D.C., who, while initially small in number, over time won more and more converts to their position.

In 1997, Asmus was appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, where he was tasked with overseeing the realization of NATO expansion. Reflecting on his time in government, Asmus wrote, "Much of what I had set out to accomplish when I joined the Administration had been achieved. Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were free and safe in NATO. We had laid the foundation for a more modern Atlantic Alliance...."

For his work promoting NATO expansion, Secretary Asmus was awarded the Commander Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland. Following a long battle with cancer, Ron Asmus passed away in 2011 at the age of 54. But his legacy lives on, including in Poland and Europe, which today are more safe, more free, and more secure, thanks to the work of Ron Asmus.



Dan Lipinski

DAN LIPINSKI

1966-

“Chicago is Poland, but in perfection,” wrote a young Polish girl named Sophia soon after her arrival in the metropolis in 1890.

For the past century and a half, Poles have flocked to Chicago, Illinois, and made their home there, forming neighborhoods, building houses of worship, and becoming part of the city’s rich societal fabric. As Polish-Americans grew into an ever-more-sizeable ethnic group in the city, their power as a voting bloc also rose. Soon enough, they began to elect fellow Polish-Americans to local, state, and eventually federal offices. Although much has changed over the years, many Polish-Americans continue to serve in elected office at all levels of government in the United States, including representing areas of Chicago in Congress.

Democratic Congressman Dan Lipinski served 16 years in the House of Representatives, representing the 3rd Congressional District of Illinois from 2005-2021, the same community that his father, Bill Lipinski, had represented for the previous 22 years. And like his father, Congressman Lipinski proudly identified with his Polish heritage and took a leading role in cultivating ties between Poland and the United States in the halls of Congress.

Throughout his tenure in Congress, Dan Lipinski served as co-chair of the bipartisan House Poland Caucus, which is dedicated to maintaining and strengthening the United States-Poland relationship and to educating others on the political, economic, and security issues facing the region. The caucus, founded in part by his father Congressman Bill Lipinski, has over time continued to grow into a meaningful venue for transatlantic cooperation and for the promotion of legislative measures relevant to Polish-Americans and the Poland-U.S. strategic partnership. Congressman Lipinski and the Poland Caucus led in advocating that the House Armed Services Committee support sustained funding for the European Reassurance Initiative following Russian aggression in Europe. In his capacity as caucus co-chair, the Congressman frequently met with Polish dignitaries visiting the Capitol and championed the causes of his Polish-American constituents.

Over the years, Lipinski backed numerous legislative measures, including supporting the Three Seas Initiative and the historically symbolic legislation that posthumously made Casimir Pulaski an

honorary U.S. citizen, only the 7th individual ever to receive such an honor from Congress. In 2015, Congressman Lipinski was invited to accompany Speaker of the House John Boehner during a bipartisan Congressional delegation to Poland, in recognition of his important voice on Polish matters in the House.

Representing a district that is home to more than 100,000 Polish-Americans, Congressman Lipinski understood better than most the essence of the people-to-people ties that lie at the core of Poland-U.S. relations, and worked tirelessly to enhance these relations. From his earliest days on Capitol Hill, Lipinski was a staunch supporter of Poland’s entry into the Visa Waiver Program, and over the course of his tenure he never tired from seeking a resolution of this issue. From such legislative measures as the Jolt Act to the Allied Nations Travel Modernization Act, Congressman Lipinski continuously sought to engage with his colleagues to find a resolution to Poland’s exclusion from the visa liberalization regime, introducing numerous pieces of stand-alone legislation to achieve this aim.

During his time in Washington, Congressman Lipinski was not only a proud Polish-American but also a great friend of Poland, helping to advance the bilateral ties of our two countries to where they are today: among the strongest they have ever been.



President John F. Kennedy meets with PAC delegation led by
PAC President Charles Rozmarek in the White House, 1961

POLISH AMERICAN CONGRESS

ESTABLISHED 1944

Since its founding, America has served as a beacon of hope. The peoples of the world—Poles among them—have seen it as a land of opportunity and flocked to its shores. Their toil and sacrifices have helped build the United States into what it is today.

As Polish immigrants arrived in increasing numbers during the turn of the 20th century, they earnestly formed a multitude of associations. From religious societies and fraternal organizations to athletic groups and more, Polish-Americans organized to improve their lot. They formed parishes, parochial schools, and political clubs. They established newspapers and community centers. They organized parades and displays of their patriotism, and during wartime they held fundraisers and enlistment drives. American *Polonia*, as the Polish diaspora is known around the world, became a vibrant, proud, and increasingly outward-looking community.

In 1944, as the fate of a free Poland hung in the balance, 2,600 Polish-American activists gathered in Buffalo, New York, to write the opening chapter of a new force in *Polonia*: The Polish American Congress (PAC). Established to unite the efforts of *Polonia* on key matters relating to Poland and the Polish-American community, the PAC became the premier Polish-American advocacy organization, dedicated to amplifying the voice of a united *Polonia* in America.

As freedom-loving Americans, but also as proud Poles, members of the Polish-American community were rightfully outraged that their ancestral land, which was the first to stand up to Nazi German aggression, would, as a result of the war, become a Soviet satellite and lose its sovereignty. The PAC marshaled the efforts of *Polonia* to work against this injustice. The PAC and its members became staunch advocates of a free Poland, and attended the founding meeting of the United Nations in San Francisco to present views on the situation in Central and Eastern Europe. Later they lobbied for legislation to permit more than 140,000 Polish war refugees and military personnel to resettle in the United States, and supported the creation of Radio Free Europe. The PAC also successfully petitioned the U.S. Congress to open an inquiry into the Katyń Massacre, which the bipartisan Madden Committee investigated and officially declared Soviet culpability for the massacre.

The Polish American Congress galvanized Polish-American electoral participation and became a national political force, attracting politicians, including presidential candidates, to its conventions. When the Polish trade union Solidarity was outlawed in 1981, the PAC, working through its charitable foundation, transported more than \$200 million in medicines, foodstuffs, and equipment to the Polish people in cooperation with the U.S. government, the Catholic Church, and American labor organizations.

In 1989, Polish-Americans shared in the joy of their Polish brethren when Poland finally toppled communism and embraced the freedom it so longed for. At the same time, Polish-Americans redoubled their efforts to support Poland by lobbying for U.S. aid to bolster Poland's democratic transformation. In order to ensure that another Yalta could never again take place, the PAC was at the forefront of the Polish-American effort to champion NATO expansion and to secure necessary U.S. political support for Poland's membership in that alliance.

Thanks to the activism and leadership of so many PAC leaders, and to the members who filled its ranks throughout the past 75 years, the PAC has successfully marshaled the political and moral power of the Polish-American community for the benefit of Poland—U.S. ties and the good of *Polonia*. Today, the PAC continues to serve as a pillar of American *Polonia*, strengthening ties and people-to-people connections between our two countries.

In describing the Polish American Congress's mission, founding PAC President Charles Rozmarek once said, "I never saw Poland but I fought for the cause of a free Poland. Never did I and never will I waver in this struggle... Let us love Poland, the land of our fathers. Let us love America, the land of our children."





↑ President Ronald Reagan meets with PAC leaders at the White House on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, 1984

↖ Vice President George H.W. Bush with PAC leaders

← A container of aid for Poland, part of the “Solidarity Express” sponsored by the PAC, August 1982

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Page		Page	
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CONTENTS

5	Acknowledgments	53	James A. Baker III
7	Introduction	55	Zygmunt Rolat
11	Committee in Support of Solidarity	57	Tad Taube
15	Woodrow Wilson	59	Richard Lugar
17	Edward Mandell House	61	Pete Domenici
19	Herbert Hoover	63	Barbara Mikulski
21	Hugh S. Gibson	65	John McCain
23	Merian C. Cooper	67	Madeleine Albright
25	Arthur Bliss Lane	69	Tom Kahn
27	Anthony Joseph Drexel Biddle, Jr.	71	Hank Brown
29	Ronald Reagan	73	Martin Frost
31	Bayard Rustin	75	Newt Gingrich
33	Edward L. Rowny	77	Strobe Talbott
35	Lane Kirkland	79	Chuck Hagel
37	Benjamin Gilman	81	John Lenczowski
39	Bob Dole	83	George Weigel
41	George H.W. Bush	85	Bill Frist
43	John Dingell, Jr.	87	Ronald Asmus
45	John R. Davis, Jr.	89	Dan Lipinski
47	Zbigniew Brzeziński	91	Polish American Congress
49	Albert Shanker		
51	Nicholas Brady		

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I hope that by reading this book you will be inspired, as I was, to look at the human dimension of our transatlantic ties. For beneath the official protocols are the people. It is the people who form the most important component in our relations. It is the people who made history, and it is the people, today, in Warsaw, Washington, D.C., and throughout our two countries, who continue to facilitate our ties, build bridges, and bring us together.

Piotr Wilczek

Ambassador of Poland to the United States