

ISSUE BRIEF

Poland and the United States: What's Right, What's Not, and What's Next

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Around the time of President Joe Biden's first trip to Europe in June 2021, US-Polish relations experienced a short, but intense, rough patch. Missteps on both sides caused the problems, including fears on the Polish side of a high-handed US attitude and a general lack of consultation on issues (like Nord Stream 2) that Poland regards as critical. Some Poles started questioning the good faith of their biggest ally. The US side, for its part, thought Poland was ignoring US overtures and assuming the worst of the United States. Draft legislation that would target the largest US investment in Poland (the TVN television network) generated US concerns about both the investment climate in Poland and political pressure on independent media. In short order, wiser counsel emerged on both sides, and top-level discussions may have eased the sense of tension.¹ But, the episode suggests that problems have developed in what has been (and should remain) one of the closest transatlantic relations. Both the United States and Poland need to look hard at what this relationship can do for both countries and for the transatlantic relationship, and at the sources of problems.

Sources of Common Strategy

At their best, US-Polish relations have been driven by profound strategic commonality. Both countries developed strategic cultures that—despite inconsistencies—link national interests with universal values, including democracy and the rule of law. Tadeusz Kosciuszko and Kazimierz Pulaski fought for US independence out of commitment to the cause of national freedom linked to Enlightenment values. From President Woodrow Wilson through Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan, US grand strategy was based on a premise that a rules-based world that favors democracy would advance US national interests better than a spheres-of-influence arrangement. Wilson supported Polish independence in 1918 because it fit his emerging grand strategy (and because he had been lobbied by the great Polish pianist and later Polish Prime Minister Ignacy Paderewski,

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¹ Draft legislation in Poland introduced by members of the ruling Law and Justice Party, aimed against the private television network TVN, owned by Discovery and one of the largest US investments in Poland, may be revised to allow for majority media ownership from European and NATO member countries, a move that could resolve the issue and make clear that the intent is to protect media from control by autocratic state like Russia, not democracies like the United States.

not the last time Poles would successfully make their country's case to sympathetic Americans).²

Poland, caught between Germany and Russia, had its own sound reasons to support a rules-based world rather than spheres of influence. Power politics would leave Poland at peril; international politics rooted in principle as well as strength were a matter of national survival. The Polish government (which had fled to London with a large contingent of the Polish military after the Nazi and Soviet attacks at the beginning of World War II) embraced FDR's Atlantic Charter that promised a liberated Europe of free nations backed by the United States. It saw this as the country's only hope. Poles denounced the Yalta Summit arrangements of 1945 that seemed to them to abrogate the promise of the Atlantic Charter, but welcomed Truman's and subsequent US resistance to Joseph Stalin's aggression against Poland and Europe generally.

The Polish democratic opposition, which grew after 1968 and joined with mass workers' protests in 1980 to form the Solidarity movement, held that patriotism in democratic form, not nationalism, was the best answer to communist domination. Poland's democratic breakthrough in 1989 led the way for communism's fall throughout Central and Eastern Europe and the end of divided "Yalta Europe." By the early 1990s, democratic Polish governments started appealing to the United States to put its weight behind NATO enlargement, often making their case in terms of democratic universalism, the Atlantic Charter, and the rules-and-democratic-values system that the United States had successfully advanced in Western Europe after 1945.³ Those arguments fit with the emerging post-Cold War strategies of the George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush administrations, all of which supported NATO and European Union (EU) enlargement.

Neither Poland nor the United States always adhered to these approaches. In the 1920s and 1930s, the United States abandoned leadership in Europe, leaving the weakened British and French democracies to handle both

Adolf Hitler and Stalin simultaneously. In that same period, Poland's governments sometimes sought to strengthen the democracies' resistance to Hitler and Stalin, but also spent time and energy in fights with their neighbors Czechoslovakia and Lithuania, and sometimes failed to address the needs of minorities such as Jews or Ukrainians. During World War II, Walter Lippmann, the United States' most influential foreign policy journalist, argued essentially that the Atlantic Charter should only apply to Western Europe; that realism demanded that the United States accept a sphere-of-influence arrangement with Stalin, allowing Eastern Europe to come under Soviet control.⁴ Truman did not accept this argument, but some later presidents did. President Richard Nixon's détente tacitly acknowledged the division of Europe and the Iron Curtain as the price of peace, and such arguments persist to this day.

Nevertheless, during the critical early period of post-Cold War policy setting, the United States and Poland, joined by key allies (including Germany, which supported NATO enlargement early) invested in applying a democratic-values strategy—the Atlantic Charter axioms—to as much of Europe as possible. George H.W. Bush was key in setting the parameters of the German reunification that kept Germany inside Western institutions and gave final confirmation of Germany's eastern borders (addressing one of Poland's chief concerns). Bill Clinton led the way on NATO enlargement, with Poland invited in the first group of former Warsaw Pact countries in 1997. For nearly twenty years after 1989, democratic and free-market transformation advanced across the continent, and NATO and EU enlargement followed.

Subsequent Russian claims notwithstanding, the United States never promised that NATO would not enlarge, nor that the United States would otherwise respect the former line of the Iron Curtain as the border of Kremlin domination.⁵ Indeed, rather than a punitive settlement (as was the case of the Versailles Treaty's treatment of Germany after World War I), the United States embraced post-Soviet Russia, offering it assistance, though perhaps

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- 2 The piano as the background to a larger geopolitical game returned almost three decades later. "[F]or reasons of Cold War intrigue, Poland did not take part in the UN's founding deliberations in San Francisco in 1945. Poland was there in spirit, however. At the UN's 1945 jubilee concert, the legendary Polish pianist Artur Schnabel angrily observed that the flag of Poland was not present in the hall. So he played the Polish national anthem. *Very loudly. And won a tumultuous ovation.*" "Speech by Radosław Sikorski, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, UN Human Rights Council (25 Feb 2013)," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, April 20, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160420031240/http://mfa.gov.pl/resource/7454faea-fc21-42ed-bd06-76b677d1a79d:JCR>.
- 3 Dan Fried, working in the US embassy in Warsaw from 1990–1993 and on the National Security Council (NSC) staff from 1993–1997, was the frequent recipient of these arguments. Fear of a revanchist Russia was only part of the Polish argument.
- 4 This is especially interesting given that Walter Lippmann had been one of the foreign policy specialists who had helped draft Wilson's Fourteen Points.
- 5 Robert Kupiecki, "Through the Eyes of a Strategist and Diplomat: The Polish-American Relations Post-1918," *Brookings*, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2014/11/06/did-nato-promise-not-to-enlarge-gorbachev-says-no/>.



US President Joe Biden stands next to Poland's President Andrzej Duda during a plenary session at a NATO summit in Brussels, Belgium, June 14, 2021. Olivier Matthys/Pool via REUTERS (14 June 2021).

not enough, and an honorable place in the post-Cold War order (e.g., membership in the Group of Eight (G8)). Neither Poland nor any of the countries subjugated by the Soviet Union for forty-five years sought to extract reparations or to isolate or punish Moscow.

In the end, Vladimir Putin chose the course of repression at home and revanche abroad, seeing it in Russia's vital interests that its former Soviet neighbors—especially Belarus and Ukraine, whose existence as sovereign states or even peoples Moscow questions—remain under its control, unreformed, corrupt, and divided. Acting against the best interests of those countries, Putin's approach is inherently unstable; countries usually tire of poverty and corruption, especially when they are tools of foreign control. Yet, Putin has shown himself ready to start wars to maintain such control.

Convinced that the United States and the democratic West threaten Kremlin control over its claimed sphere of influence and even Putin's kleptocratic and patrimonial system inside Russia, the Kremlin has deepened and extended its aggression. It now includes assassinations and attempted assassinations, including with a nerve agent inside Europe; cyber operations, including disinformation targeting the United States and Europe (including Poland); ransomware attacks against US critical infrastructure (by Russian groups, not necessarily the Russian government); and a return to near-Soviet levels of repression at home and hostility toward Western contacts with Russian society. A generation after the fall of the Soviet Union, Putin's Russia has emerged as an active threat to Europe.⁶

Given this context, much of the strategic commonality in US and Polish strategic thinking remains relevant. The

6 This judgment is shared by the June 16 European Commission/External Action Service report on EU relations with Russia. "[Russia] tries to enforce its own geopolitical sphere of influence based mostly on zero-sum logic. In doing so, the government often challenges and undermines international law...The Russian leadership uses a variety of instruments to influence, interfere in, weaken or even seek to destabilize the EU and its Member States." "Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council on EU-Russia Relations—Push Back, Constrain and Engage," European Union, June 16, 2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021JC0020>.

United States (especially in the Biden era) and Poland share an interest in resisting Putin's aggression. Moreover, they generally agree that they should do so in the name of a rules-and-values-based international system, challenging Putin's *machtpolitik* alternative. President Biden made support for such a system the core theme of his June trip to Europe. Both the government and the liberal opposition in Poland have spoken in similar terms, although some of the current Polish government's language and actions demonstrate skepticism about such an order in the name of national sovereignty as a supreme value.

Poland and the United States share assessments of Putin's Russia, including its corrupt and aggressive nature, and generally agree on the right policy approach to it. They agree on the need to support Ukraine's independence, territorial integrity, and democratic, rule-of-law transformation. Both support Belarusian democracy—to which end Poland, along with Lithuania, has supported Belarusian democratic opposition leaders who have fled to Warsaw (and Vilnius). And, they agree on the importance of NATO's capability to deter and resist Putin's aggression, both in conventional and cyber terms. They share views—reflected in the US-EU Summit Communique on June 15—that the United States and Europe should use their regulatory powers to strengthen the rules-based system, thus contending with China and Russia from a stronger position. That is a solid agenda for continued close US-Polish cooperation, both bilaterally and through the EU and NATO.

Such an agenda, rooted in a long history of shared strategic thinking and successful application of it in and after 1989, makes it important to consider the underlying causes of the recent episode of a sharp tone in US-Polish relations.

Sources of Friction

An immediate substantive cause of the friction included the US handling of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. Nord Stream 2 has long been criticized as a tool that will give Putin additional energy leverage over Ukraine and Central Europe. Indeed, Putin recently and publicly confirmed his intention to use Nord Stream 2 to cut gas flows through Ukraine if that country did not demonstrate what the Kremlin considers an acceptable attitude.⁷ For that reason, Ukraine, Poland, the Baltics, many Germans, a majority of the European Parliament, and many others— including

Americans across the political spectrum—oppose the project.

The Biden administration opposes Nord Stream 2 as well. But, with the pipeline 95 percent complete, the Biden administration believes that it cannot be stopped, except through measures so harsh that they would alienate Germany, ironically giving Putin a political win. Instead, the Biden administration is seeking German cooperation on ways to mitigate Nord Stream 2's risks, possibly including alternative gas sources, contingency sanctions, and demonopolization and stronger protections for the gas pipeline through Ukraine that provides that country with needed transit fees. To that end, the administration has imposed some Nord Stream 2 sanctions, but has waived others.

The Biden administration has a case for its policy, but its way of proceeding was flawed. It seemed to give away its leverage through the waivers before it had received sufficient assurances that Germany would help address Nord Stream 2's risks. Moreover, the administration did not consult with either Ukraine or Poland as effectively or early as it should have. Thus, its initial bilateral discussions with the Germans on Nord Stream 2 appeared to be taking place over the heads of the more vulnerable Europeans. The Poles and Ukrainians reacted with anger, mistaking tactical clumsiness for strategic weakness and acquiescence to Putin at their expense.

The nightmare of a "Second Yalta" weighs heavily on Polish strategic culture; the Poles worry about US (or German) deals with Moscow over their heads. There are sound and bitter historic reasons for this. The Poles brought this perspective to the Nord Stream 2 issue.

Polish concerns about Nord Stream 2 were magnified by the transition from the Donald Trump to Biden presidencies, a change that the Polish government feared would put it at a disadvantage.

The Trump administration, and Trump himself, was friendly toward the Polish government, seeing it as an ideological soulmate in Europe—in Trump's view, a right-wing, nationalist-minded, and Euroskeptic government matching the Trump administration's own views. The Polish government sometimes played to this and received both

⁷ Katya Golubkova and Vladimir Soldatkin, "Ukraine Must Show Good Will If It Wants Russian Gas Transit, Putin Says," Reuters, June 4, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/ukraine-must-show-good-will-if-it-wants-russian-gas-transit-putin-says-2021-06-04/>.

public support from Trump (and presidential visits in both directions) and policy support on key issues. That included a deepening of the US-Polish military relationship begun under President Barack Obama (who decided to send a US armored brigade to Poland on a rotational basis, a major step), and inclusion of Poland in the Visa Waiver Program (for which much credit goes to Georgette Mosbacher, the Trump administration's ambassador to Poland).

From a strategic perspective, this mutual infatuation was a strange one. The Polish government did share some ideological outlook with the Trump White House: courting the religious right, skepticism about transnational institutions such as the EU, opposition to the supposed domination of the "liberal" media in the public discourse, and rejecting liberal orthodoxy as "political correctness." From a Polish perspective, excellent relations with the Trump administration could compensate for tensions with Germany and the European Commission over issues of the rule of law. But, the optics of Poland's pro-Trump stance increased the sense of Poland's isolation in Europe.

At the same time, the Trump administration exaggerated the depth of Polish Euroskepticism, especially among its wider society. The EU is popular in Poland and a "Polexit" is unlikely. The more responsible wing of the Trump foreign policy team was aware of this, and was able to use Trump's own biases to conduct sound policy toward Poland.

The Poles' courting of Trump was understandable and yielded achievements, but the ideological cordiality masked a strategic gulf between Poland and the Trump White House. Trump's notorious softness toward Putin put him at odds with the Polish view that Putin and Putinism are a threat to Poland and to Europe as a whole, a view shared by the government and liberal opposition. Trump regarded Ukraine from the perspective of his own domestic political fortunes; Poland sees Ukraine's independence from the Kremlin as key for its own security. At a deeper level, Trump appeared to believe in just the sort of *machtropolitik* and sphere-of-influence approach that Poles—with good reason—fear and hate.

Nevertheless, despite the profound gap between Polish and Trump worldviews, the Poles were comfortable with

that administration. The Polish government felt it had easy access to the Trump White House and, while it had not taken a partisan pro-Trump stance in US politics (as did Israel and, to some degree, Hungary), was apprehensive about its standing with the incoming Biden team. It did not help the initial atmospherics that some figures from Poland's ruling party and the Polish public (and strongly pro-government) TV network gave credence to false views that the US 2020 presidential election was either unfair or tainted with outright fraud.⁸ Still, the Biden administration should not hold Poland's working with the Trump administration against it; the Poles, like every other government, had to work with the US government in office.

Polish concerns were intensified by the lack of an early Biden call with Polish President Andrzej Duda. The Biden administration accepted President Duda's (and Romanian President Klaus Iohannis') invitation to an online regional summit of NATO's eastern members (the "Bucharest Nine"), but this did not seem to register with the Polish leadership. Several senior-level US-Polish contacts took place, but the lack of presidential-level contact grated on Warsaw. In that context, US mistakes in the handling of Nord Stream 2 prompted an expression of frustration by Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau and a storm on Polish Twitter accusing the Biden administration of ignoring key security interests.⁹ Poles started questioning US intentions.

In an atmosphere of mutual wariness, it is easy to envisage a situation in which a single issue (say, US skepticism or misunderstanding about an amendment to the Polish law regulating restitution of private property lost during World War II) might lead to a sudden deterioration of bilateral relations, leading to lasting damage.

Realizing the problem, the Biden administration reacted wisely by arranging a bilateral meeting between Biden and Duda at the NATO summit, and followed up with a call between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Rau. Two productive meetings at the deputy-minister level (between Polish MFA Deputy Minister Marcin Przydacz and State Department Counselor Derek Chollet) established a channel for substantive consultations. Polish President Duda issued a statement praising Biden's handling of the June 16 meeting with Putin. Anxiety in Warsaw and

8 In general, events in the United States were largely instrumentalized in a bitterly divided Polish society. On January 6, 2021, in an official tweet, Polish public TV (supposedly a nonpartisan outfit) compared the rioters at the Capitol Hill to the "behavior of the Polish opposition in the Sejm." [tvp.info \(@tvp.info\), "#USA Zamieszki na Kapitolu. Czesc demonstrantow zaczela zachowywac sie na Sali obrad jak polska opozycja #wieszwiececi,"](https://twitter.com/tvp_info/status/1346927489902211073?s=20) Twitter, January 6, 2021, 4:11 p.m., https://twitter.com/tvp_info/status/1346927489902211073?s=20.

9 "Minister Zbigniew Rau's Interview to Rzeczpospolita," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland, June 11, 2021, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/Minister-Zbigniew-Rau-gives-interview-to-Rzeczpospolita>.



Servicemen from Poland take part in a large military exercise entitled “Three Swords-2021” involving more than 1,200 servicemen and more than 200 combat vehicles from Ukraine, US, Poland and Lithuania at Yavoriv training ground in Lviv region, Ukraine July 27, 2021. REUTERS/Gleb Garanich (27 July 2021).

frustration in Washington both eased, but they returned again when members of the governing Law and Justice Party introduced legislation attacking the US investment in the independent television network TVN—legislation that seemed to target both independent media and US investment in Poland at the same time.

The rapidity with which the US-Polish relationship fell into a tense dust-up suggests *deeper issues are at play*.

The Polish government’s foreign policy is generally consistent with its liberal predecessors, especially on Russia and Europe’s east, NATO, and the United States. But, at home, it is not only socially conservative but sometimes hard-edge right wing, especially on issues of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) rights. It has fallen into disputes with the EU and generated massive controversy at home by appearing to exert partisan political

influence on the judiciary.¹⁰ It has used the power of the state to put pressure on liberal-minded media, e.g., by having a state-run energy company buy up regional media and appear to change their editorial line and senior staff in a more pro-government direction, steering state-run companies not to advertise in “opposition” newspapers, and, even before the legislation, putting pressure on the independent, US-owned television network TVN-24. Ambassador Mosbacher and the State Department pushed back on some of this, especially on media freedom. But, the Polish government may have concluded that it had the tacit support of President Trump, who was himself no fan of a free press and generally tried to politicize independent US institutions.

The Biden administration, however, has made support for democracy a pillar of its foreign policy, including support for free media and an independent judiciary, and is forward

¹⁰ The so-called “LGBT-free” zones established by local governments in Poland stirred significant controversy in Europe. For example, French Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Clément Beaune publicly asserted, in March 2021, that his request to visit one of the “LGBT-free” zones in southern Poland had been spurned, underlining worsening relations between Paris and Warsaw. Anti-German overtones, moreover, have been present in some of the maneuvers and proclamations of the Polish political leadership. For example, President Andrzej Duda, responding to criticism in *Die Welt* and other news outlets, proclaimed on the campaign trail in July 2020 that “he rejects the idea of Germans selecting Poland’s president.”

leaning in support of LGBTQ rights. It is likely to apply those policy priorities to relations with Poland. Its knowledge of Poland is often thin and based on exaggerated and oversimplified assessments. Elections in Poland are still free, and the liberal opposition continues to win them, including in most major cities. The Polish Senate is controlled by the liberal opposition, and Polish civil society is free and active.

But, it is fair to say that values have become a potential point of tension between the Biden administration and the Polish government. That is ironic because Biden himself has a record of supporting Poland's democratic opposition in the 1980s and democratic Poland's accession to NATO in the 1990s. His own record on resisting Putin's aggression is close to Poland's. (Poland provided important political support for Georgia after Putin attacked in 2008; in that same year, then-Senator and vice-presidential candidate Biden helped the outgoing George W. Bush administration provide financial support for Georgia, possibly saving that country's sovereignty.) It is doubly ironic because, in accepting the key role of democratic values in foreign policy, Biden has accepted a premise long championed by Poland. In principle, a values gap does not exist—the Polish government still holds that democracy is critical—but it appears to exist in practice.

The Way Ahead

The spate of top-level US-Polish meetings around the time of the Biden trip to Europe cleared the air, and opened the way for the Biden administration and Polish government to build on the many points of strategic commonality. The goal should include a renewed framework for common action about Putin's Russia and Europe's east, and which fits with Biden's announced strategy of strengthening the rules-based international order that favors democracy. In that better context, issues of values need to be addressed. In the United States, both the administration and members of Congress from both parties should be part of a US-Polish dialogue. Likewise, in Poland, government officials and parliamentarians from a range of parties—pro-government and opposition—should be involved. The US-Polish relationship has always been beyond partisanship, and should remain so.

US-Polish agenda: joint efforts in the east. The United States and Poland continue to share approaches, and should work together to advance common efforts bilaterally and, especially, with the EU. Poland played a major role in the June 24 European Council that rejected the French-German proposal for an early EU summit with Putin. That same council reviewed a policy framework (a “Joint Communication” prepared by the EU Commission and External Action Service with the revealing title “Push Back, Constrain, Engage”) for EU-Russia relations that seems compatible with Biden's own approach.¹¹ The Poles' problem with an early Putin meeting appears not to be so much the principle of a meeting (Duda, after all, ended up publicly welcoming the Biden-Putin meeting) as that the meeting appeared to the Poles and many others in Europe as an undeserved “reset” with Putin. The Poles would be an ideal partner for the US government in developing ways to put the respective and similar US and EU Russia policy frameworks into practice, in ways that maintain the confidence of the exposed (and Russia-experienced) eastern members of the EU and NATO. That should include support for democracy in Belarus and Russia, in which both countries and governments are already active.¹² Actions that put Poland and the United States on the same side with values issues are especially welcome. Similarly, the Poles are apt to be close to the United States with respect to support for Ukrainian independence and internal reforms. Polish knowledge of Belarus and Ukraine is deep and can be helpful.

Not all US-Polish common efforts need be focused on Europe's east. While Poland has shown interest in attracting Chinese capital, the government at senior levels has shown awareness of the need for European support to strengthen international rules to limit Chinese gaming of trade and technology, and has expressed support for supply-chain regulations. Senior Polish officials have suggested that Central Europe, Poland included, could benefit from efforts to diversify upstream production from China.

US-Polish agenda: advancing the new US-EU agenda. The Biden administration treats the EU as an ally and friend, rather than an adversary. The US-EU Joint Statement from the June summit was clear that the United States and Europe will cooperate to advance a rules-based order that favors democracy and, on that basis, deal more effectively with authoritarian Russia and China. This is a good point

11 European Commission, 16 June 2021, <https://op.europa.eu/de/publication-detail/-/publication/37a8a099-ce9c-11eb-ac72-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-218597511>

12 After his June 16 meeting with Putin, Biden spoke in support of imprisoned Russian political opposition leader Alexei Navalny; the Polish government has hosted Navalny in Warsaw.

of departure for the United States and Poland to work together—and for Warsaw's voice to carry more weight in Brussels—to tackle thorny issues such as regulation of big tech, especially digital giants; fighting disinformation and cyberattacks; combating corruption (especially from Putin's Russia); post-pandemic recovery and assistance to developing countries; dealing with China's rise and Putin's aggression; promoting democracy in Eurasia and the Middle East/North Africa region; and more. The United States and Poland will have similar views on many, and perhaps most, of these issues. In addition to the Polish government, prominent Polish European officials (e.g., former Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski, who is chairman of the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with the USA, and European Parliamentarian Adam Bielan, who is close to the Polish leadership) could be part of new and active US-Polish efforts with the EU.

US-Polish agenda: Nord Stream 2. US policy emphasizes mitigation measures to address the project's strategic risks. At their June 24 press conference in Berlin, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken publicly declared willingness to take such measures.¹³ Doing so in practice will require Polish and Ukrainian input (and input from the EU Commission involved in energy and demonopolization). Most of all, it will require German willingness to take Nord Stream 2 risks seriously and not regard the issue as a mere US domestic political problem for which Germany has no responsibility.

If Germany acts on this commitment, the United States can help bring together the interested parties to work out a set of solutions, e.g., demonopolization of the gas-transit pipeline through Ukraine, greater support for the Central European "Three Seas Initiative" infrastructure project, and, possibly, contingency sanctions in the event Putin acts against Ukraine or any EU member state in the energy area. If Germany is not willing to play a constructive role in addressing the risks of its own project, the United States may have to reconsider its waiver of sanctions against Nord Stream 2. US thinking about Nord Stream 2 should be informed by all the interested parties: Poland, Ukraine, the Baltic states, and the EU itself.

US-Polish agenda: democratic values. Under Biden, the United States has made support for democracy a core element of its foreign policy. In practice, this is likely to include supporting democracy and democratic movements

worldwide; taking action in support of the rule of law, including fighting corruption through financial transparency and targeting corrupt actors and tyrants; and making democracy and the rule of law general elements in US bilateral relations around the world.

As it does, both generally and with respect to Poland, the United States will have to pick its issues carefully, separating core values from partisan preference. Judicial independence is fundamental to a democratic system, though the United States itself struggles with partisanship in its own judicial system. Cultural issues are complicated: abortion rights are fiercely contested in the United States, and the United States only recently came to accept same-sex marriage as a basic right. But, basic respect for individuals and an end to hate speech and aggressive intolerance may be a place for the United States to take a stand.

Media independence could be a flashpoint. If it passes in its original form, legislation aimed at the US-owned TVN television network would almost certainly trigger new tensions with the United States, simultaneously damaging Poland's reputation as a reliable host for foreign investment and its reputation for respect for media freedom. Foreign ownership of media is an issue on which many governments have limitations; changing the legislation to allow for foreign investment from European and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (including the United States and other developed democracies), has been considered and could resolve the problem.

Looking forward and more generally, the Polish government will have to consider its responsibilities not just to the international and European conventions on democracy that it has agreed to respect, but to its own democratic and constitutional traditions dating back to the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and to the values-and-democracy strategic perspective that Poland brought to reordering post-Cold War Europe, in which it played a leading role.

The US government needs to find the right language to make values arguments with Poland—including humility, given the United States' own struggles with democratic norms. One way to do so is to recall that democracy, the rule of law, and tolerance are traditional Polish and US values, dating from the eighteenth century in the United States and from at least the sixteenth century in Poland; that both

13 "Secretary Antony J. Blinken and German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas at Joint Press Availability," US Department of State, June 23, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-german-foreign-minister-heiko-maas-at-a-joint-press-availability/>.

countries have learned that sovereignty is not absolute, but in both the Enlightenment and Judeo-Christian traditions, a sovereign government is answerable to universal values; and that the United States and Poland have sometimes and seriously fallen from their best traditions, but keep returning to them, for these traditions best express what both countries truly are at their best.

Ambassador Daniel Fried

In the course of his forty-year Foreign Service career, Ambassador Fried played a key role in designing and implementing American policy in Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union. As Special Assistant and NSC Senior Director for Presidents Clinton and Bush, Ambassador to Poland, and Assistant Secretary of State for Europe (2005-09), Ambassador Fried helped craft the policy of NATO enlargement to Central European nations and, in parallel, NATO-Russia relations, thus advancing the goal of Europe whole, free, and at peace. During those years, the West's community of democracy and security grew in Europe. Ambassador Fried helped lead the West's response to Moscow's aggression against Ukraine starting in 2014: as State Department Coordinator for Sanctions Policy, he crafted U.S. sanctions against Russia, the largest U.S. sanctions program to date, and negotiated the imposition of similar sanctions by Europe, Canada, Japan and Australia.

Ambassador Fried became one of the U.S. government's foremost experts on Central and Eastern Europe and Russia. While a student, he lived in Moscow, majored in Soviet Studies and History at Cornell University (BA magna cum laude 1975) and received an MA from Columbia's Russian Institute and School of International Affairs in 1977. He joined the U.S. Foreign Service later that year, serving overseas in Leningrad (Human Rights, Baltic affairs, and Consular Officer), and Belgrade (Political Officer); and in the Office of Soviet Affairs in the State Department. As Polish Desk Officer in the late 1980s, Fried was one of the first in Washington to recognize the impending collapse of Communism in Poland, and helped develop the immediate response of the George H.W. Bush Administration to these developments. As Political Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw (1990-93), Fried witnessed Poland's difficult but ultimately successful free market, democratic transformation, working with successive Polish governments. Ambassador Fried also served as the State Department's first Special Envoy for the Closure of the Guantanamo (GTMO) Detainee Facility. He established

procedures for the transfer of individual detainees and negotiated the transfers of 70 detainees to 20 countries, with improved security outcomes. Ambassador Fried is currently a Weiser Family Distinguished Fellow at the Atlantic Council. He is also on the Board of Directors of the National Endowment for Democracy and a Visiting Professor at Warsaw University.

Ambassador Jakub Wiśniewski

Ambassador Wiśniewski is Vice President for Strategy at GLOBSEC. Jakub Wiśniewski is also the former Polish ambassador to OECD (2014- 2016) and head of foreign policy planning at the Polish Foreign Ministry (2010-2014). He holds PhD in political science from the University of Warsaw and MA in international relations from the University of Łódź. He also served as a board member of Polish leading think-tanks – the Polish Institute of the International Affairs, Center of Eastern Studies, and the Institute of Central-Eastern Europe (2010-2015). As an analyst at the Office of the Committee for European Integration, he was involved in the preparation and negotiation of the Polish accession to the EU. That process encompassed the redefining of Polish ties with external actors (the modification of treaties and agreements and the formulation of the geopolitical shift of the country). He later served as head of policy planning where a central task involved participation in European wide policy debates regarding the development of the European Global Strategy. The discussions revolved around fine-tuning the strategies, vision, and technical instruments of EU foreign policy. Finally, as head of Poland's delegation to the OECD, he participated in discussions that addressed questions concerning Europe's economic and social position in the world and its relations with other Western partners including the United States and Canada. He particularly specialized on the challenges Europe is encountering in the areas of migration, climate change, and the postindustrial transition. He helped shape the EU's status and role within the OECD and connected it to forums such as the G20. As deputy head of Advisory Board of the Eurasia Competitiveness Programme, he further steered the OECD to engage deeper in cooperation with post-soviet countries. In brief, Europe's place in the world and its ambitions have always been at the heart of his professional activity. He is the author of numerous books and research papers on topics ranging from the welfare state and social policy (the European social model in particular) to migration and the future of the EU.

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