

Remarks at the Solidarity Workers Monument in Gdansk

July 11, 1989

The President. Hello, Lech Walesa! Hello, Solidarnosc! Hello, Polska! And congratulations on what you've done since I last visited: the first free elections in modern Polska. Poland has a special place in the American heart and in my heart. And when you hurt, we feel pain. And when you dream, we feel hope. And when you succeed, we feel joy. It goes far beyond diplomatic relations; it's more like family relations -- and coming to Poland is like coming home. This special kinship is the kinship of an ancient dream -- a recurring dream -- the dream of freedom. "They are accustomed to liberty," wrote a Byzantine historian about the Slavic people more than a thousand years ago. And the spirit of the Poles has been conveyed across the centuries and across the oceans, a dream that would not die.

That dream was severely tested here in Gdansk. Fifty years ago this summer, the predawn quiet of this peaceful Baltic harbor was shattered by the thunder from the 15-inch guns of Nazi warship Schleswig-Holstein. Within the hour, iron panzers rolled across the Polish frontier, and Europe was plunged into darkness that would engulf the world. For Poland the choices were few: surrender to tyranny or resist against impossible odds. And in the brutal fighting that followed, you set a standard for courage that will never be forgotten. In World War II, Poland lost everything -- except her honor, except her dreams.

Before Poland fell, you gave the allies "Enigma," the Nazis' secret coding machine. Breaking the unbreakable Axis codes saved tens of thousands of allied lives, of American lives; and for this, you have the enduring gratitude of the American people. And ultimately, "Enigma" and freedom fighters played a major role in winning the Second World War.

But for you, the war's end did not end the darkness. The cold war brought a long and chilly night of sorrow and hardship -- and the dream was again denied. And yet there were glimmers of the long-awaited dawn. In the summer of 1980, you occupied the shipyards where we stand. And a patriotic electrician clambered over these iron gates and emerged as one of the heroes of our times -- Lech Walesa. And above your streets a graceful monument rose, in the tradition of our own Statue of Liberty, to become a symbol recognized around the world as a beacon of hope.

But the hope, like the dawn, proved fleeting. For under cover of darkness, the electrician was arrested and your movement outlawed. And in the icy cold of a savage winter, a modern nation was sealed off from the outside world.

But still the dream would not die. In the wintry darkness, candles appeared in silent protest, lighting the windows of your villages, of your cities. And as the years unfolded and as the world watched in wonder, you -- the Polish people and your leaders -- turned despair into hope, turned darkness into dreams.

Hope and hard work were the foundation of Poland's resurrection as a state in 1918. Against enormous odds, confidence and determination made that dream a reality. And these same qualities have brought you to this new crossroads in history. Your time has come. It is Poland's time of possibilities; its time of responsibilities. It is Poland's time of destiny, a time when dreams can live again -- Solidarity reborn, productive negotiations between the Government of Poland and the Polish people, and the first fruits of democracy, elections. At another time, in another city, where the human spirit was being tested, a great American President spoke eloquently about the struggle for liberty. Today the world watches the inevitable outcome of that struggle.

Today, to those who think that hopes can be forever suppressed, I say: Let them look at Poland! To those who think that freedom can be forever denied, I say: Let them look at Poland! And to those who think that dreams can be forever repressed, I say: Look at Poland! For here in Poland, the dream is alive.

Yes, today the brave workers of Gdansk stand beside this monument as a beacon of hope, a symbol of that dream. And the brave workers of Gdansk know Poland is not alone. America stands with you.

Audience members. President Bush! President Bush! President Bush!

The President. Because Americans are so free to dream, we feel a special kinship with those who dream of a better future. Here in Poland, the United States supports the roundtable accords and applauds the wisdom, tenacity, and patience of one of Poland's great leaders -- Lech Walesa. And again -- --

Audience members. Lech Walesa! Lech Walesa! Lech Walesa!

The President. And we cheer a movement that has touched the imagination of the world. That movement is Solidarnosc. And we applaud those who have made this progress possible: the Polish people. We recognize, too, that the Polish Government has shown wisdom and creativity and courage in proceeding with these historic steps.

Poles and Americans share a commitment to overcome the division of Europe and to redeem the promise that is the birthright of men and women throughout the world. Poles and Americans want Europe to be whole and free. A more democratic Poland can be a more prosperous Poland. The roundtable provisions, as they continue to be carried out, can liberate the energy of a dynamic people to work together to build a better life.

We understand the legacy of distrust and shattered dreams as Poles of all political complexions travel together down the path of negotiation and compromise. Your challenge is to rise above distrust and bring the Polish people together toward a common purpose.

Speaking before the new Parliament and the Senate -- your freely elected Senate -- I outlined steps that America is prepared to take to assist Poland as you move forward on

the path of reform. It will not be easy. Sacrifice and economic hardship have already been the lot of the Polish people. And hard times are not yet at an end. Economic reform requires hard work and restraint before the benefits are realized. And it requires patience and determination. But the Polish people are no strangers to hard work and have taught the world about determination.

So, I say follow your dream of a better life for you and for your children. You can see a new and prosperous Poland not overnight, not in a year -- but, yes, a new and prosperous Poland in your lifetime. It has been done by Polish people before. Hopeful immigrants came to that magical place called America and built a new life for themselves in a single generation. And it can be done by Polish people again. But this time, it will be done in Poland.

Just before I left a few days ago, I was asked in my beautiful Oval Office in the White House by one of your journalists if I would leave Poland and go to America, were I a young Pole. And I answered that in this time of bright promise, of historic transition, of unique opportunity, I would want to stay in Poland and be a part of it, help make the dream come true for all the Polish people. The magic of America -- --

Audience members. President Bush! President Bush! President Bush!

The President. The magic of America is not found in the majesty of her land. And, yes, our country has been blessed. But Poland, too, is a land of natural beauty -- ample timber and ore and water and coal, abundant agriculture potential -- and a talented, creative people that is determined to succeed.

No, the magic of America is in an idea. I described it in my first moments as President of the United States: "We know what works: Freedom works. We know what's right: Freedom is right. We know how to secure a more just and prosperous land for man on Earth." And today you can rediscover a new land -- a land of your dreams, a land of your own making, a Poland strong and proud.

Poland is where World War II began. And Poland is where, and why, the cold war got started. And it is here, in Poland, where we can work to end the division of Europe. It is in your power to help end the division of Europe. I can think of no finer or more capable people with whom to entrust this mission. And just as a son of Poland has shown the world the heights of spiritual leadership in the Vatican, so the people of Poland can show the world what a free people with commitment and energy can accomplish.

A new century is almost upon us. It is alive with possibilities. And in your quest for a better future for yourselves and for those wonderful children that I saw coming in from the airport -- in that quest America stands shoulder to shoulder with the Polish people in solidarity. Americans and Poles both know that nothing can stop an idea whose time has come. The dream is a Poland reborn, and the dream is alive.

Poland is not lost while Poles still live. I came here to assure you we will help Poland. Goodbye, God bless you, and God save this wonderful country of Poland!

Note: The President spoke at 2:32 p.m. outside the Lenin Shipyard. In his remarks, he referred to Solidarity leader Lech Walesa. Earlier, the President participated in a wreath-laying ceremony at the monument.