

Robert Conquest and dr John Raisian honored by the Republic of Poland with the country's Order of Merit to recognize their contributions to Poland – Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Palo Alto, August 6h, 2009 - <http://www.hoover.org/multimedia/events/52626457.html>

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be at Stanford University. I am so glad that not everybody on campus has left for the summer. On the other hand, on this campus I'm never sure whether I'm at one of the world's most prestigious academic institutions or one of the world's most prestigious golf resorts. Congratulations on having the good sense to live here.

As you all know, I am here today to decorate two distinguished scholars and thinkers of the 20th and 21st century, men who are also great friends of Poland.

It is particularly appropriate that I am making these awards in 2009, a year in which Poland celebrates several important anniversaries. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of World War Two;

- The 20th. anniversary of the of the fall of Communism,
- The 10th anniversary of the first wave of NATO enlargement by a group of former communist countries
- And the 5th anniversary of the UE enlargement which allowed us, along with nine other states, mostly from Central Europe, to join the most successful federation of countries in the world.

This list of anniversaries tells a story: of the European experience of brutal aggressions, of totalitarian systems (both the Nazi and the communist one) as well as of a division of the Continent which was ultimately overcome. It also provides us an excellent set of reasons to express our gratitude to our friends, to people who helped us overcome the trauma of war and occupation, who helped us make the last two decades so successful.

I would like to thank the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace for hosting this gathering. It is indeed a remarkable organization, founded by an extraordinary individual -

President Herbert Hoover. We remember him well: After World War I he helped thousands of Polish citizens impoverished by the war not only to return to a more normal existence – but to mobilize themselves to fight the Red Army, which attempted to conquer Poland between 1919 and 1920.

Since he founded this institution, it has continued to contribute to the development of Polish-American cooperation in the field of policy research and history. The Hoover Institution has always been considered in Poland one of the greatest and most prominent contributors to the world marketplace of ideas. We appreciate and support its promotion of individual, economic, and political freedom, private enterprise and representative government as fundamental values for the United States, Poland and the whole transatlantic community.

In addition, the Hoover Institution's archives have long been home to some of our own history and we have been delighted with your willingness, since 1989, to share many important documents. Over the years the Hoover Institution and the Polish State Archives have conducted many joint projects. In 2001 the Hoover Institution handed over to the Polish State Archives microfilms of 18 collections of nearly 1,5 million pages of documents generated by Polish institutions or related to Poland and Polish history. These materials and documents filled many gaps in our knowledge about our own history, especially from the period of the world wars. The Institution's Polish collection is by far the largest and the most important research collection on past-century-Poland outside Poland itself. There is in-depth coverage of the efforts for the restoration of Poland's independence during the period immediately following World War I, the Polish government in exile during World War II and the Solidarity era. Your work on the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty archives, which are now indexed and made accessible to scholars, is very important to us as well.

We appreciate the great work of everyone who has been involved in this very fruitful cooperation. We are especially thankful to the generous donors, among them certainly Tad and Dianne Taube and their Foundation. I would also like to mention the engagement of Mr. Richard Sousa, director of the library and the archivists, who take care of the collection, as well as Mr. Maciej Siekierski who has such an extraordinary nose for good documents. May I also add here that both Mr. Sousa and his predecessor, Elena Danielson, have been personally helpful to my wife, who has conducted research here, and Mr Siekierski's help has been invaluable.

There is also one more person whose contribution to the success of the Polish-American cooperation is undisputed and greatly appreciated because of his leading role in all the above mentioned projects. Mr. John Raisian, who has been the Tad and Dianne Taube Director of the Hoover Institution since 1989, showed great involvement in Polish-American projects. Dr. Raisian contributed to the professional development of young Polish diplomats in the early 90s, by supporting the Hoover's Diplomat Training Program for people from Poland and former Eastern Block. Our diplomats will never forget their outstanding lecturers including such personalities as Milton Friedman, Edward Teller, George Schultz, Philip Habib, Admiral Stockdale or Robert Conquest. Since then, those diplomats have been appointed to various important positions – one of them is our Permanent Representative to NATO, another one is the Political Director in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and the third one heads a think tank dealing with Central and Eastern Europe.

Over the years Dr. Raisian also hosted a great number of scholars who conducted research on Polish history in the magnificent archives of the Hoover Institution – among them, again, my wife. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In some parts of the world, it is still possible to hear statesmen declare that “the fall of Communism was the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century.” It is truly extraordinary, in fact, that an ideology which created hardship and poverty around the world, which repressed and murdered so many millions of people, nevertheless had so many supporters in the non-communist world, people who were ready to stand in its defense, even after its total collapse. An anecdote from the early 90s runs: *socialist ideas are still very much alive in some places on earth, including Havana, Cuba; Pyongyang, North Korea; and Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

This is of course a gross exaggeration, for there were many brilliant scholars, even in places like Harvard, who grasped the true nature of socialistic ideology. Nevertheless, from the time of Bolshevik revolution, American and European intellectuals, writers and academics proved

peculiarly susceptible to its siren song. What the Polish poet - and the Nobel Prize Winner - Czesław Miłosz called *the Hegelian bite* afflicted many influential intellectuals to take part - intentionally or unintentionally - in a battle of ideas, which was one of the most important fronts in the Cold War.

Indeed, for many years, some Western experts portrayed the Soviet experience as a legitimate way of modernization, perhaps cruel, but surely effective. Soviet-style communism was admired for, allegedly, inspiring industrialization, urbanization, access to education, and as a result, many in the West deemed it an alternative and an equal rival to capitalism. As late as 1995, an American author wrote in a Pulitzer Prize winning book that “fascism espouses repugnant ideas, but Communist ideas of equality, solidarity, social justice, an end to misery, and power to the oppressed are indeed beautiful. The New Socialist Man – tireless, cheerful, clean, brave, thrifty, and kind to animals – is an ideal all human should aspire to reach.” (Tina Rosenberg “The Haunted Land”) Other even thought that there might have been a sort of convergence between the two systems down the road.

In the Eastern bloc, we did not believe it, because we saw Communism in action. We saw how ineffective the centrally planned economy was, and how efficiently the institutionalized terror worked. We knew the price of this so called *progress*.

Of course, we were not alone, also because we had at least one great teacher. At a very young age, Mr. Robert Conquest saw through that *riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma*, as Winston Churchill characterized the Soviets. And once he had understood it, he dedicated his life to revealing the diabolic logic hidden under the facade of propaganda and deception. His works, especially his monumental books *The Great Terror* and *The Harvest of Sorrow* brought to light a whole host of unimaginable tales of human suffering. He told the story that many did not want to hear, and stood for truth when it was not easy and fashionable. He gave a compelling testimony about the atrocities committed by the Soviets, which undermined the legitimacy of the Soviet rule and its ideology alike.

His books made a huge impact on the debate about the Soviet Union, both in the West and in the East. In the West, people had always had access to the information about Communism but were not always ready to believe in it. In the East, most of us did not harbor illusions about the utopian ideology under which we lived. We knew that the design - not only its execution -

was flawed. Nevertheless, we longed for confirmation that the West knew what was going on behind the Iron Curtain. Robert Conquest's books gave us such a confirmation. They also transmitted a message of solidarity with the oppressed and gave us hope that the truth would prevail.

Robert Conquest was born in the year of the October Revolution in Russia. Happily, he has outlived the *Evil Empire* and continues his mission of telling the true story about it. As we started saying in the 1990's: "What was socialism? The longest road from capitalism to capitalism."

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ronald Reagan once asked: "How do you tell a Communist? Well, it's someone who reads Marx and Lenin. And how do you tell an anti-Communist? It's someone who understands Marx and Lenin". Robert Conquest has brilliantly understood the legacy of Marx and Lenin. He has done a great deal to help us understand it, too. For this, and for his excellent writing, his superb poetry, his moral integrity and intellectual courage we owe him respect and gratitude.

It is my honor and great pleasure to decorate dr. Robert Conquest and dr. John Raisian with distinction granted by the President of Poland, Mr. Lech Kaczyński, the Commander Cross and the Officer Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland.