

In Poland, Romney Chides Russia

July 31, 2012



Romney and his wife, Ann, glad-handing with jubilant Poles on Monday. **Charles Dharapak**

WARSAW — U.S. presidential candidate Mitt Romney has held up Poland's transition from communism to democracy as an example for the rest of the world while saying Russia had faltered on the path to freedom.

"Unfortunately, there are parts of the world today where the desire to be free is met with brutal oppression," Romney said in a speech in the library of Warsaw University, listing Belarus, the Syrian leadership, and Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez.

"And in Russia, once-promising advances toward a free and open society have faltered," he said.

Romney's comments will resonate in Poland, which has a history of occupation by Moscow and has looked to the United States as a friendly counterweight to the Kremlin's influence.

Romney has previously said that Russia is "without question our No. 1 geopolitical foe."

Romney has pledged not to criticize President Barack Obama from foreign soil, but his

comments in Poland appeared designed to highlight differences in the candidates' approach to foreign policy.

Obama has put emphasis on a "reset" in the previously fraught relations with the Kremlin. Some in Poland felt Washington was overlooking its long-standing alliance with Warsaw for the sake of a better relationship with Russia.

In Tuesday's speech, Romney evoked Poland's struggles two decades ago to bring down the Iron Curtain and praised its efforts since then to embrace small government and a market economy — the same model he says is needed to revive spluttering U.S. growth.

"In the 1980s, when other nations doubted that political tyranny could ever be faced down or overcome, the answer was, 'Look to Poland,'" Romney said. "And today, as some wonder about the way forward out of economic recession and fiscal crisis, the answer is to 'Look to Poland' once again."

Alluding to the trade union movement Solidarity, which helped topple Communist rule, Romney said: "I believe it is critical to stand by those who have stood by America. Solidarity was a great movement that freed a nation. And it is with solidarity that America and Poland face the future."

Solidarity on Monday distanced itself from Romney's visit to Poland, saying he had supported attacks on unions in his own country.

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