

## INDISPENSABLE MADELEINE

It was Madeleine who coined one of today's most canonical expressions in diplomacy: America as "the indispensable nation". An epitome of her vision for the role the United States should play in the world, it constitutes a synthesis of the two strands - idealism and pragmatism - that have historically marked the international projection of the United States. It embodies the idiosyncrasy of a great nation made of and by immigrants.

Today, the term emerges as a compendium of her personality and career. MKA was a voice to be reckoned with. In the geopolitical arena, she was authoritative, yet unifying. In her professional life, she was a leader and an unstoppable force. Indispensable Madeleine.

During the interview with NBC in 1998 in which she articulated the now-famous phrase, she added: "We stand tall", "We have a vision", "We are America". In those sentences, she defined herself. Five feet tall, MKA displayed inexhaustible energy, a monumental intellectual stature, and a global vision. Invariably clear and sharp minded, she did not fear controversy - her interactions as US Ambassador to the United Nations with then Secretary-General Butros-Ghali stand out.

As the first female Secretary of State, Madeleine made a difference. Albright never forgot the condescending sexism she encountered upon entering the government - even among her own staff. She was a feminist by conviction and practice. Of few words, but strong momentum (Wendy Sherman, the current number two in Biden's foreign policy team and a long-time collaborator of Albright's, is of the same approach).

The defense and promotion of democracy was her hallmark. In 2000, together with then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Bronisław Geremek, she put together the *Community of Democracies*: a coalition of governments, civil society and the private sector (the openness to these actors bears the mark of MKA) to promote and protect freedoms and strengthen democratic norms and institutions. The meeting, propelled by the governments of the United States, Poland, Chile, the Czech Republic, India, Mali, Portugal, and the Republic of Korea culminated in the Warsaw Declaration, signed by 106 nations. Embracing this legacy, the Biden presidency picked the baton and hosted, amongst their first initiatives in December 2021, a *Summit for Democracy*. One of my last exchanges with Madeleine addressed this topic.

MKA was a true American patriot; optimist; appreciative. Her personal experiences heavily informed her foreign policy decisions. Madeleine was marked by having to twice escape her native Czechoslovakia: her Jewish family emigrated in 1939 and, after returning at the end of the war, was forced to flee again in 1948, this time from communism. She frequently recalled how her family, stumbling through Europe, was invariably pressed about their "return to Prague". In her own words, "in America, it was the opposite. The mere fact that from the very beginning they only asked about our future plans in the country always made us feel at home".

MKA stayed true to her European roots. Her "hurt for Europe" showed in numerous situations, in the Balkans or the eastern flank of NATO. Europe was the backdrop to her work. In her prophetic article, *Putin is Making a Historic Mistake*, published in the New York

Times exactly a month before her death, on the eve of the invasion, Albright rightly anticipated the courage and fierce resistance that the Ukrainians are displaying today, the strengthening of the Alliance, and the difficulties that the Russian army would encounter. But what truly stands out is her incisive judgment of Putin: "He is sure that Americans mirror both his cynicism and his lust for power and that in a world where everyone lies, he is under no obligation to tell the truth."

In Ukraine, it was my honor to co-chair (along with Madeleine), a delegation of observers from the *National Democratic Institute* during the 2014 general elections - one of many extraordinary experiences I owe her. I had arrived in Kyiv a few days earlier. On the afternoon of the day she was supposed to arrive, Madeleine called: "Ana, I am in Gdansk. My connecting flight has been canceled. But don't worry, I'll arrive by car tomorrow around 7am." Although it was a journey that Google Maps estimates between 13 and 16 hours, arrive she did. She quickly changed, and was on time for the internal preparatory meeting at 8.30 sharp. Our stay in Ukraine was intense, peppered with often difficult meetings with the candidates and civil society. When we finally took our leave and said goodbye, late in the night, she casually slipped: "I'm leaving for Brazil tomorrow - I have to take a flight at 6 in the morning to London." This was MKA.

In November 2002, Madeleine and I had agreed to have dinner at Bobby Vans near her office in DC. It was late and she was waiting for me in a booth at the back of the restaurant. I was coming from a meeting at the State Department with her successor, Colin Powell. It had been a long and difficult discussion about Iraq. Before I had even had the chance to sit down, Madeleine gave me one of the intense stares with which she typically underlined important moments and said: "Tough day, huh...". I sat down and looked her in the eyes. Without waiting for a response, she continued: "Well, enjoy it." Noticing my surprise, she went on: "Yes, live the difficulties of the job to the fullest. Precisely the difficulties. In that sense, you have to cherish them. They will define your tenure and will change you as a person."

Indispensable Madeleine.