

From Franklin to Lafayette: The Enduring Atlantic Alliance

Delivered by Compatriot Davis Richardson in Lviv, Ukraine During BRAVE1 Defense Tech Valley

Thank you everyone in this room for joining us this evening.

This has been a truly incredible summit. Overwhelming actually, the level of innovation we are seeing. But more important than the technology, are the people who build these tools, and the people who use them. Despite all the media headlines about frontline innovations, about defense technology and geopolitics, what happens here is fundamentally a story about people, and human civilization as a whole.

I am often asked, “*You are an American— why are you here?*”

The answer is simple.

“Because what happens here matters.”

Not only to Europe. Not only to NATO. But to the United States, and to the broader inheritance of free societies that generations before us struggled to build and defend.



Compatriot Richardson with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, Julie Davis.

As a member of the Sons of the American Revolution, whose ancestors fought to establish the American Republic, these connections are deeply personal.

The American Revolution itself was not won in isolation. It was secured through alliance, sacrifice, and the belief that liberty was not merely a local concern, but a principle with international consequence. The American founding generation understood that the survival of the young republic depended not only upon military courage, but upon diplomacy, intellectual exchange, and the cultivation of relationships abroad.

Benjamin Franklin embodied this reality perhaps better than any other founder.

When Franklin arrived in Paris during the Revolutionary War, he did not merely serve as an emissary of a distant rebellion. He became a symbol of the American experiment itself. Through diplomacy, personal relationships, cultural fluency, and strategic persuasion, Franklin helped secure the French alliance that proved indispensable to American independence. He understood that nations are influenced not only by force, but by perception, credibility, and shared ideals.



Franklin's presence in Europe demonstrated an early form of American soft power — one rooted in intellect, civic virtue, scientific curiosity, and confidence in democratic possibility. He moved comfortably between political leaders, philosophers, scientists, and aristocrats because he recognized that durable alliances are built not only through treaties, but through human relationships and cultural understanding.

Thomas Jefferson carried forward many of those same traditions during his years abroad.

As Minister to France following Franklin, Jefferson observed Europe at a moment of profound political and philosophical transformation. His experiences overseas reinforced his belief that the American republic represented something historically unique: a constitutional system grounded not in inherited aristocracy, but in citizenship, local governance, and individual liberty. At the same time, Jefferson remained deeply engaged with European intellectual life, architecture, agriculture, science, and political thought, reflecting an understanding that America's development would always remain connected to the broader Atlantic world.

The founders never viewed the United States as isolated from international affairs. From the earliest days of the republic, they recognized that America's security and prosperity would depend upon maintaining productive relationships abroad while preserving the distinct civic principles that defined the nation at home.

The arrival of the Marquis de Lafayette — a young French aristocrat who crossed the Atlantic to support a distant cause he believed transcended borders — remains one of history's most enduring examples of this spirit.

Lafayette understood something fundamental: that free societies survive not simply through military strength, but through shared conviction, civic trust, and enduring alliances between peoples willing to defend them. Lafayette's decision to cross the Atlantic and support the American cause reflected more than youthful idealism. It represented an early understanding that liberty, once threatened in one place, inevitably concerns free people elsewhere. His relationship with George Washington became not merely a military partnership, but a lasting symbol of transatlantic cooperation grounded in shared principles and mutual respect.

More than two centuries later, these bonds continue to shape the modern Atlantic alliance.



The relationship between the United States and Europe has endured through revolutions, world wars, economic crises, and periods of political uncertainty because it has always rested upon something deeper than temporary political alignment. It is rooted in a shared civilizational inheritance: constitutional government, rule of law, civic participation, religious liberty, and the belief that free societies carry both rights and responsibilities.

That same lesson echoes today.

During the Revolutionary War, ordinary citizens became participants in history. Merchants, farmers, writers, officers, craftsmen, and immigrants alike contributed to a common struggle larger than themselves. The Revolution succeeded because institutions, alliances, and civic commitment converged at a moment of profound uncertainty.

Every generation faces periods of disruption that test the resilience of democratic societies and the strength of the institutions that sustain them. While the nature of conflict and competition has evolved dramatically since the eighteenth century, the underlying challenges confronting free nations remain strikingly familiar. Technological change, information fragmentation, political polarization, and geopolitical instability have created a world in which democratic societies are once again being asked to adapt under pressure while preserving civic cohesion and public trust.

Questions once viewed as abstract are becoming increasingly immediate:

- How do free societies preserve cohesion during prolonged instability?
- How do democratic nations maintain public trust in an era of information warfare?
- How do alliances endure amid political polarization and strategic fatigue?

These are not solely military questions. They are civic ones.

The founders of the American Republic understood that liberty required more than declarations and constitutions. It required institutions capable of sustaining civic responsibility across generations.

The transatlantic alliance that emerged from the Revolutionary era and evolved through two world wars and the founding of NATO remains one of the great stabilizing achievements of modern history. Yet alliances ultimately depend upon people — upon relationships, shared principles, and the willingness of individuals to act with courage and conviction during uncertain times.

That truth connected Lafayette to Washington.

And it continues to connect democratic nations today.

History rarely repeats itself perfectly. But it often rhymes across generations.

As America approaches its semiquincentennial, there is an opportunity to revisit not only the events of 1776, but the enduring principles that allowed the American experiment to succeed: civic virtue, institutional resilience, alliance-building, and a belief that free societies are strengthened through cooperation rather than isolation.

Those choices remain as consequential today as they were in 1776.

Thank you so much for coming out this evening. And more importantly, to being committed to the same mission and values.



U.S. Ambassador Julie Davis, Defense Attaché General Brad Nicholson, and U.S. Embassy Staff During Compatriot Richardson's Speech