

Book Presentation: *Zbig: The Strategy and Statecraft of Zbigniew Brzezinski*

Introduction by: **Jiří Ellinger**, Director of the Department of Middle Eastern and North African States, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

Charles Gati, Professor, Johns Hopkins University

Mr. Ellinger began by introducing Mr. Gati as a leading historian and analyst, alluding to his experience in the theoretical and foreign policy spheres. He also mentioned Gati's previous literary experience, pointing to the success of Gati's *Failed Illusions*, which won an award twice.

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Mr. Gati began his presentation by giving a brief overview of how the book came into existence, explaining that he did not initiate it, but was, in fact, invited to edit it. He pointed out that the absence of books about Brzezinski when there are numerous books on Henry Kissinger, Madeleine Albright, and Condoleezza Rice had seemed strange to him; thus, he committed himself to being the first to publish a book about the man, who continues to hold an important place in both the 20th and the 21st century. The project took two years, and Mr. Gati acknowledged the challenges he faced, but he was of the opinion that overall, he had good luck throughout the process. Mr. Gati explained that his book had three goals, the first of which was to demonstrate Brzezinski's evolution as a scholar of Eastern Europe, as a policy maker, and as a policy advocate. Second, he aimed to put Brzezinski in a historical context, both by presenting him as an individual contributing to the end of the Cold War, and by alluding to his role in breaking up the old foreign policy elite in the United States. He expressed his belief that the latter caused a breakthrough in American politics, rendering it more accessible and inclusive. The final goal of the book was to present several diverse views of Brzezinski, which Mr. Gati accomplished by incorporating various stories and anecdotes, some of which are personal, owing to Mr. Gati's close friendship with Brzezinski, the two having met at Columbia University. These include stories attesting to Brzezinski's "political courage"; his impressive productivity despite his small staff; the extent of the anxiety Brzezinski experienced as national security advisor; and his favourable relationship with Pope John Paul II. The book also addresses the – according to Mr. Gati, false – accusations of anti-Semitism aimed at Brzezinski, and the question of loyalty. Finally, Mr. Gati explained that Brzezinski declined to change his name, since he believed that "people can be American without masking their ethnic identity".

Mr. Ellinger opened the discussion by affirming Brzezinski's amiability and kindness. **Mr. Benáček** then asked for Mr. Gati's opinion on the "big trinity" – Albright, Kissinger, and Brzezinski. **Mr. Gati** prefaced his answer by stating that out of the three, he is most familiar with Brzezinski. He expressed a high opinion of Albright, whom he believes to have been "terrific" as Secretary of State, but he also stated that both Brzezinski and Kissinger had more strategic visions. **Mr. Ellinger** asked whether Brzezinski's legacy was executed in Barack Obama's policies, owing to the fact that Brzezinski was perceived as the one analyst that Obama listened to prior to the 2008 elections. **Mr. Gati** confirmed that Obama had appealed to Brzezinski, but that their relationship cooled as a result of Obama's reluctance to pursue negotiations in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Mr. Gati attributed this reluctance to pressure from the Jewish lobby, and Obama's concern over the "Jewish vote". **Mr. Kakachia** expressed his opinion on Brzezinski by saying that in Georgia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, he initially perceived Brzezinski as a purveyor of freedom, but he and many other Georgians were later disillusioned with him on account of Brzezinski's stance on Chechen and Georgian foreign policies. **Mr. Gati** then discussed the Soviet Union's attitude towards Brzezinski, whom it considered as the most vicious enemy of Communism, and added that Brzezinski in fact cultivated this image. Nonetheless, Mr. Gati pointed out that Brzezinski's image of an idealist committed to defeating

Communism was inaccurate, and that he was in reality a calculating pragmatist ready to compromise with the East.