News & Media

- Newsroom
- Multimedia
- Media Kit
- Speeches
- Press Releases
- In the News

SEARCH

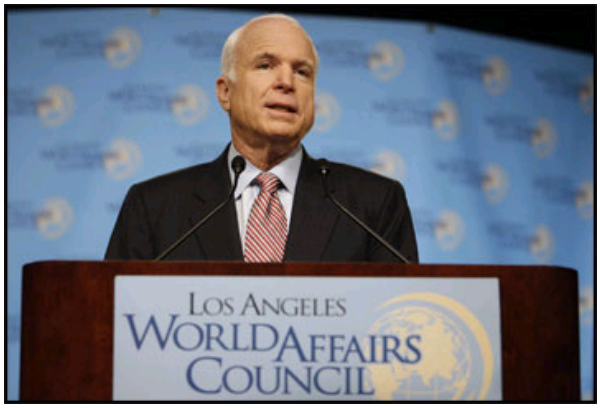
Search this site:
Keyword(s)
Search

Email Print Digg Deli.cio.us

Remarks By John McCain To The Los Angeles World Affairs Council

March 26, 2008

ARLINGTON, VA -- U.S. Senator John McCain's will deliver the following remarks as prepared for delivery today at the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles, California:



- National Review: Democrats' Distortion
- McCain on the War in Iraq

When I was five years old, a car pulled up in front of our house in New London, Connecticut, and a Navy officer rolled down the window, and shouted at my father that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. My father immediately left for the submarine base where he was stationed. I rarely saw him again for four years. My grandfather, who commanded the fast carrier task force under Admiral Halsey, came home from the war exhausted from the burdens he had borne, and died the next day. In Vietnam, where I formed the closest friendships of my life, some of those friends never came home to the country they loved so well. I detest war. It might not be the worst thing to befall human beings, but it is wretched beyond all description. When nations seek to resolve their differences by force of arms, a million tragedies ensue. The lives of a nation's finest patriots are sacrificed. Innocent people suffer and die. Commerce is disrupted; economies are damaged; strategic interests shielded by years of patient statecraft are endangered as the exigencies of war and diplomacy conflict. Not the valor with which it is fought nor the nobility of the cause it serves, can glorify war. Whatever gains are secured, it is loss the veteran remembers most keenly. Only a fool or a fraud sentimentalizes the merciless reality of war. However heady the appeal of a call to arms, however just the cause, we should still shed a tear for all that is lost when war claims its wages from us.

I am an idealist, and I believe it is possible in our time to make the world we live in another, better, more peaceful place, where our interests and those of our allies are more secure, and American ideals that are transforming the world, the principles of free people and free markets, advance even farther than they have. But I am, from hard experience and the judgment it informs, a realistic idealist. I know we must work very hard and very creatively to build new foundations for a stable and enduring peace. We cannot wish the world to be a better place than it is. We have enemies for whom no attack is too cruel, and no innocent life safe, and who would, if they could, strike us with the world's most terrible weapons. There are states that support them, and which might help them acquire those weapons because they share with terrorists the same animating hatred for the West, and will not be placated by fresh appeals to the better angels of their nature. This is the central threat of our time, and we must understand the implications of our decisions on all manner of regional and global challenges could have for our success in defeating it.

President Harry Truman once said of America, "God has created us and brought us to our present position of power and strength for some great purpose." In his time, that purpose was to contain Communism and build the structures of peace and prosperity that could provide safe passage through the Cold War. Now it is our turn. We face a new set of opportunities, and also new dangers. The developments of science and technology have brought us untold prosperity, eradicated disease, and reduced the suffering of millions. We have a chance in our lifetime to raise the world to a new standard of human existence. Yet these same technologies have produced grave new risks, arming a few zealots with the ability to murder millions of innocents, and producing a global industrialization that can in time threaten our planet.

To meet this challenge requires understanding the world we live in, and the central role the United States must play in shaping it for the future. The United States must lead in the 21st century, just as in Truman's day. But leadership today means something different than it did in the years after World War II, when Europe and the other democracies were still recovering from the devastation of war and the United States was the only democratic superpower. Today we are not alone. There is the powerful collective voice of the European Union, and there are the great nations of India and Japan, Australia and Brazil, South Korea and South Africa, Turkey and Israel, to name just a few of the leading democracies. There are also the increasingly powerful nations of China and Russia that wield great influence in the international system.

In such a world, where power of all kinds is more widely and evenly distributed, the United States cannot lead by virtue of

its power alone. We must be strong politically, economically, and militarily. But we must also lead by attracting others to our cause, by demonstrating once again the virtues of freedom and democracy, by defending the rules of international civilized society and by creating the new international institutions necessary to advance the peace and freedoms we cherish. Perhaps above all, leadership in today's world means accepting and fulfilling our responsibilities as a great nation.

One of those responsibilities is to be a good and reliable ally to our fellow democracies. We cannot build an enduring peace based on freedom by ourselves, and we do not want to. We have to strengthen our global alliances as the core of a new global compact -- a League of Democracies -- that can harness the vast influence of the more than one hundred democratic nations around the world to advance our values and defend our shared interests.

At the heart of this new compact must be mutual respect and trust. Recall the words of our founders in the Declaration of Independence, that we pay "decent respect to the opinions of mankind." Our great power does not mean we can do whatever we want whenever we want, nor should we assume we have all the wisdom and knowledge necessary to succeed. We need to listen to the views and respect the collective will of our democratic allies. When we believe international action is necessary, whether military, economic, or diplomatic, we will try to persuade our friends that we are right. But we, in return, must be willing to be persuaded by them.

America must be a model citizen if we want others to look to us as a model. How we behave at home affects how we are perceived abroad. We must fight the terrorists and at the same time defend the rights that are the foundation of our society. We can't torture or treat inhumanely suspected terrorists we have captured. I believe we should close Guantanamo and work with our allies to forge a new international understanding on the disposition of dangerous detainees under our control.

There is such a thing as international good citizenship. We need to be good stewards of our planet and join with other nations to help preserve our common home. The risks of global warming have no borders. We and the other nations of the world must get serious about substantially reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the coming years or we will hand off a much-diminished world to our grandchildren. We need a successor to the Kyoto Treaty, a cap-and-trade system that delivers the necessary environmental impact in an economically responsible manner. We Americans must lead by example and encourage the participation of the rest of the world, including most importantly, the developing economic powerhouses of China and India.

Four and a half decades ago, John Kennedy described the people of Latin America as our "firm and ancient friends, united by history and experience and by our determination to advance the values of American civilization." With globalization, our hemisphere has grown closer, more integrated, and more interdependent. Latin America today is increasingly vital to the fortunes of the United States. Americans north and south share a common geography and a common destiny. The countries of Latin America are the natural partners of the United States, and our northern neighbor Canada.

Relations with our southern neighbors must be governed by mutual respect, not by an imperial impulse or by anti-American demagoguery. The promise of North, Central, and South American life is too great for that. I believe the Americas can and must be the model for a new 21st century relationship between North and South. Ours can be the first completely democratic hemisphere, where trade is free across all borders, where the rule of law and the power of free markets advance the security and prosperity of all.

Power in the world today is moving east; the Asia-Pacific region is on the rise. Together with our democratic partner of many decades, Japan, we can grasp the opportunities present in the unfolding world and this century can become safe -- both American and Asian, both prosperous and free. Asia has made enormous strides in recent decades. Its economic achievements are well known; less known is that more people live under democratic rule in Asia than in any other region of the world.

Dealing with a rising China will be a central challenge for the next American president. Recent prosperity in China has brought more people out of poverty faster than during any other time in human history. China's newfound power implies responsibilities. China could bolster its claim that it is "peacefully rising" by being more transparent about its significant military buildup, by working with the world to isolate pariah states such as Burma, Sudan and Zimbabwe, and by ceasing its efforts to establish regional forums and economic arrangements designed to exclude America from Asia.

China and the United States are not destined to be adversaries. We have numerous overlapping interests and hope to see our relationship evolve in a manner that benefits both countries and, in turn, the Asia-Pacific region and the world. But until China moves toward political liberalization, our relationship will be based on periodically shared interests rather than the bedrock of shared values.

The United States did not single-handedly win the Cold War; the transatlantic alliance did, in concert with partners around the world. The bonds we share with Europe in terms of history, values, and interests are unique. Americans should welcome the rise of a strong, confident European Union as we continue to support a strong NATO. The future of the transatlantic relationship lies in confronting the challenges of the twenty-first century worldwide: developing a common energy policy, creating a transatlantic common market tying our economies more closely together, addressing the dangers posed by a revanchist Russia, and institutionalizing our cooperation on issues such as climate change, foreign assistance, and democracy promotion.

We should start by ensuring that the G-8, the group of eight highly industrialized states, becomes again a club of leading market democracies: it should include Brazil and India but exclude Russia. Rather than tolerate Russia's nuclear blackmail or cyber attacks, Western nations should make clear that the solidarity of NATO, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, is indivisible and that the organization's doors remain open to all democracies committed to the defense of freedom.

While Africa's problems -- poverty, corruption, disease, and instability -- are well known, we must refocus on the bright promise offered by many countries on that continent. We must strongly engage on a political, economic, and security level with friendly governments across Africa, but insist on improvements in transparency and the rule of law. Many

African nations will not reach their true potential without external assistance to combat entrenched problems, such as HIV/AIDS, that afflict Africans disproportionately. I will establish the goal of eradicating malaria on the continent -- the number one killer of African children under the age of five. In addition to saving millions of lives in the world's poorest regions, such a campaign would do much to add luster to America's image in the world.

We also share an obligation with the world's other great powers to halt and reverse the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The United States and the international community must work together and do all in our power to contain and reverse North Korea's nuclear weapons program and to prevent Iran -- a nation whose President has repeatedly expressed a desire to wipe Israel from the face of the earth -- from obtaining a nuclear weapon. We should work to reduce nuclear arsenals all around the world, starting with our own. Forty years ago, the five declared nuclear powers came together in support of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and pledged to end the arms race and move toward nuclear disarmament. The time has come to renew that commitment. We do not need all the weapons currently in our arsenal. The United States should lead a global effort at nuclear disarmament consistent with our vital interests and the cause of peace.

If we are successful in pulling together a global coalition for peace and freedom -- if we lead by shouldering our international responsibilities and pointing the way to a better and safer future for humanity, I believe we will gain tangible benefits as a nation.

It will strengthen us to confront the transcendent challenge of our time: the threat of radical Islamic terrorism. This challenge is transcendent not because it is the only one we face. There are many dangers in today's world, and our foreign policy must be agile and effective at dealing with all of them. But the threat posed by the terrorists is unique. They alone devote all their energies and indeed their very lives to murdering innocent men, women, and children. They alone seek nuclear weapons and other tools of mass destruction not to defend themselves or to enhance their prestige or to give them a stronger hand in world affairs but to use against us wherever and whenever they can. Any president who does not regard this threat as transcending all others does not deserve to sit in the White House, for he or she does not take seriously enough the first and most basic duty a president has -- to protect the lives of the American people.

We learned through the tragic experience of September 11 that passive defense alone cannot protect us. We must protect our borders. But we must also have an aggressive strategy of confronting and rooting out the terrorists wherever they seek to operate, and deny them bases in failed or failing states. Today al Qaeda and other terrorist networks operate across the globe, seeking out opportunities in Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Africa, and in the Middle East.

Prevailing in this struggle will require far more than military force. It will require the use of all elements of our national power: public diplomacy; development assistance; law enforcement training; expansion of economic opportunity; and robust intelligence capabilities. I have called for major changes in how our government faces the challenge of radical Islamic extremism by much greater resources for and integration of civilian efforts to prevent conflict and to address post-conflict challenges. Our goal must be to win the "hearts and minds" of the vast majority of moderate Muslims who do not want their future controlled by a minority of violent extremists. In this struggle, scholarships will be far more important than smart bombs.

We also need to build the international structures for a durable peace in which the radical extremists are gradually eclipsed by the more powerful forces of freedom and tolerance. Our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan are critical in this respect and cannot be viewed in isolation from our broader strategy. In the troubled and often dangerous region they occupy, these two nations can either be sources of extremism and instability or they can in time become pillars of stability, tolerance, and democracy.

For decades in the greater Middle East, we had a strategy of relying on autocrats to provide order and stability. We relied on the Shah of Iran, the autocratic rulers of Egypt, the generals of Pakistan, the Saudi royal family, and even, for a time, on Saddam Hussein. In the late 1970s that strategy began to unravel. The Shah was overthrown by the radical Islamic revolution that now rules in Tehran. The ensuing ferment in the Muslim world produced increasing instability. The autocrats clamped down with ever greater repression, while also surreptitiously aiding Islamic radicalism abroad in the hopes that they would not become its victims. It was a toxic and explosive mixture. The oppression of the autocrats blended with the radical Islamists' dogmatic theology to produce a perfect storm of intolerance and hatred.

We can no longer delude ourselves that relying on these out-dated autocracies is the safest bet. They no longer provide lasting stability, only the illusion of it. We must not act rashly or demand change overnight. But neither can we pretend the status quo is sustainable, stable, or in our interests. Change is occurring whether we want it or not. The only question for us is whether we shape this change in ways that benefit humanity or let our enemies seize it for their hateful purposes. We must help expand the power and reach of freedom, using all our many strengths as a free people. This is not just idealism. It is the truest kind of realism. It is the democracies of the world that will provide the pillars upon which we can and must build an enduring peace.

If you look at the great arc that extends from the Middle East through Central Asia and the Asian subcontinent all the way to Southeast Asia, you can see those pillars of democracy stretching across the entire expanse, from Turkey and Israel to India and Indonesia. Iraq and Afghanistan lie at the heart of that region. And whether they eventually become stable democracies themselves, or are allowed to sink back into chaos and extremism, will determine not only the fate of that critical part of the world, but our fate, as well.

That is the broad strategic perspective through which to view our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many people ask, how should we define success? Success in Iraq and Afghanistan is the establishment of peaceful, stable, prosperous, democratic states that pose no threat to neighbors and contribute to the defeat of terrorists. It is the triumph of religious tolerance over violent radicalism.

Those who argue that our goals in Iraq are unachievable are wrong, just as they were wrong a year ago when they declared the war in Iraq already lost. Since June 2007 sectarian and ethnic violence in Iraq has been reduced by 90 percent. Overall civilian deaths have been reduced by more than 70 percent. Deaths of coalition forces have fallen by 70 percent. The dramatic reduction in violence has opened the way for a return to something approaching normal political and economic life for the average Iraqi. People are going back to work. Markets are open. Oil revenues are climbing.

Inflation is down. Iraq's economy is expected to grown by roughly 7 percent in 2008. Political reconciliation is occurring across Iraq at the local and provincial grassroots level. Sunni and Shi'a chased from their homes by terrorist and sectarian violence are returning. Political progress at the national level has been far too slow, but there is progress.

Critics say that the "surge" of troops isn't a solution in itself, that we must make progress toward Iraqi self-sufficiency. I agree. Iraqis themselves must increasingly take responsibility for their own security, and they must become responsible political actors. It does not follow from this, however, that we should now recklessly retreat from Iraq regardless of the consequences. We must take the course of prudence and responsibility, and help Iraqis move closer to the day when they no longer need our help.

That is the route of responsible statesmanship. We have incurred a moral responsibility in Iraq. It would be an unconscionable act of betrayal, a stain on our character as a great nation, if we were to walk away from the Iraqi people and consign them to the horrendous violence, ethnic cleansing, and possibly genocide that would follow a reckless, irresponsible, and premature withdrawal. Our critics say America needs to repair its image in the world. How can they argue at the same time for the morally reprehensible abandonment of our responsibilities in Iraq?

Those who claim we should withdraw from Iraq in order to fight Al Qaeda more effectively elsewhere are making a dangerous mistake. Whether they were there before is immaterial, al Qaeda is in Iraq now, as it is in the borderlands between Pakistan and Afghanistan, in Somalia, and in Indonesia. If we withdraw prematurely from Iraq, al Qaeda in Iraq will survive, proclaim victory and continue to provoke sectarian tensions that, while they have been subdued by the success of the surge, still exist, as various factions of Sunni and Shi'a have yet to move beyond their ancient hatreds, and are ripe for provocation by al Qaeda. Civil war in Iraq could easily descend into genocide, and destabilize the entire region as neighboring powers come to the aid of their favored factions. I believe a reckless and premature withdrawal would be a terrible defeat for our security interests and our values. Iran will also view our premature withdrawal as a victory, and the biggest state supporter of terrorists, a country with nuclear ambitions and a stated desire to destroy the State of Israel, will see its influence in the Middle East grow significantly. These consequences of our defeat would threaten us for years, and those who argue for it, as both Democratic candidates do, are arguing for a course that would eventually draw us into a wider and more difficult war that would entail far greater dangers and sacrifices than we have suffered to date. I do not argue against withdrawal, any more than I argued several years ago for the change in tactics and additional forces that are now succeeding in Iraq, because I am somehow indifferent to war and the suffering it inflicts on too many American families. I hold my position because I hate war, and I know very well and very personally how grievous its wages are. But I know, too, that we must sometimes pay those wages to avoid paying even higher ones later.

I run for President because I want to keep the country I love and have served all my life safe, and to rise to the challenges of our times, as generations before us rose to theirs. I run for President because I know it is incumbent on America, more than any other nation on earth, to lead in building the foundations for a stable and enduring peace, a peace built on the strength of our commitment to it, on the transformative ideals on which we were founded, on our ability to see around the corner of history, and on our courage and wisdom to make hard choices. I run because I believe, as strongly as I ever have, that it is within our power to make in our time another, better world than we inherited.

Thank you.