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Remarks by John McCain After Holding a National Security Roundtable Meeting

October 30, 2008

ARLINGTON, VA -- U.S. Senator John McCain today will deliver the following remarks as prepared for delivery after holding a national security roundtable meeting in Tampa, FL:

Thank you all for joining us. For weeks now, the attention of our country has been focused on the serious financial troubles we face. At such a time, when the jobs and financial security of our people seem at risk, it is hard to spare much thought even for the great and abiding concerns of this nation's security, and the security of our friends and allies across the world. But these dangers have not gone away while we turned our attention elsewhere. And the next president will meet no greater test than defending America from these threats.

My fellow Americans, we're going to get through this economic crisis. And we will even come out stronger -- without the corruption and arrogance that have overtaken both Washington and Wall Street. We're going to pull through these hard times -- and do it together, just as our country has done before.

But when that day arrives, and the worries of financial crisis have fallen away, we will find awaiting our country all of the same great challenges and dangers that were there all along. They mattered before the economic turmoil of the present. They will matter still when it has passed. And in a time of war ... at a moment of danger for our country and the world ... let it not be said of us that we lost sight of these challenges.

Today I consulted with a number of distinguished citizens who know, from experience, what matters most in the affairs of our country. They understand that no responsibility of government is more fundamental than protecting this country from the threats of the world. They are trusted friends and advisors of long standing, including Dr. Henry Kissinger -- a man whose diplomatic experience includes helping to secure the release of me and my fellow POWs from Hanoi. By phone, I conferred as well with former Secretaries of State Shultz and Eagleburger. These gentlemen are always good for sound advice, and, as president, I would be relying on men and women of their caliber and experience.

These statesmen and those who have joined me here today are supporting my candidacy because we share many of the same convictions, and the same assessment of the national security challenges before our country. And with good reason, they question whether my opponent in this election has the wisdom or judgment to serve as commander in chief.

Victory must still be secured, in Iraq and Afghanistan. Senator Obama opposed removing the dictator in Iraq, and now obstinately opposes the need to defend the young democracy in that country -- even with victory so clearly in sight. He cites as his most courageous moment in public life a speech he gave in 2002 -- against a war resolution on which he had no vote, on a matter of national security for which he bore no responsibility. He hopes you will forget the votes he cast when he actually did have responsibility ... his votes to prevent the strategy that is leading to victory, and to deny funding for the troops who are gaining that victory. And now he hopes that in the cloud of crisis at home you will forget the stakes in Iraq -- the disaster and tragedy that would follow if American forces leave in retreat.

With terrorists still plotting new strikes across the world, millions of innocent lives are still at stake, including American lives. Our enemies' violent ambitions must still be prevented - by American vigilance, by diplomacy and cooperation with our partners, and by force of arms as a last resort. In his four years in the Senate, two of them spent running for president, Barack Obama has displayed some impressive qualities. But the question is whether this is a man who has what it takes to protect America from Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda, and other grave threats in the world. And he has given you no reason to answer in the affirmative.

Senator Joe Biden has a way of straying off message and stumbling on the truth, and his most recent warning bears close attention. He cautioned us -- in fact, he guaranteed his listeners -- that because he is untested Barack Obama would only invite an international crisis. And we know well what one of those crises could be -- the success of the Iranian

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regime in its program of acquiring nuclear weapons. If such a thing were to happen, our troubles of today would dramatically escalate, as a nuclear-armed Iran threatened Israel or sparked an uncontrollable nuclear arms race across the region.

In the same way, my opponent assumes far more good will than is warranted from Kim Jong Il, the tyrant of North Korea ... Hugo Chavez, the leader of Venezuela who wishes to export instability to neighboring countries ... and the Castro brothers, who have given Cuba fifty years' worth of socialist misery and are still at it. In each case, Senator Obama presents his plan for direct talks as if no one before had ever considered that. He seems unaware that mere talk has been tried many times, to no avail and that our adversaries recognize such gestures as a sign of weakness.

They will draw similar assumptions from the plans, already proposed by the chairman of the House Finance Committee, Congressman Barney Frank, to cut defense spending by 25 percent. Even with our troops engaged in two wars, and with a force in need of rebuilding, we're getting a glimpse of what one-party rule would look like under Obama, Pelosi, and Reid. Apparently it starts with lowering our defenses and raising our taxes.

Our national security is dependent on our economic security, and the plans of a Democratic dominated Washington would harm both. Raising taxes and unilaterally renegotiating trade agreements as they have promised would make a bad economy even worse, and undermine our national security, even as they slash defense spending. At least when European nations chose the path of higher taxes and cutting defense, they knew that their security would still be guaranteed by America. But if America takes the same path, who will guarantee our security?

In an unusual refrain for a closing argument, Senator Obama has lately taken to telling America that on many great issues, quote, "we don't have to choose." It is a fitting motto for a man who throughout his career has so often voted "present," instead of giving a simple "yes" or "no." But ladies and gentlemen, there is a time for choosing. It is six days away. America has a decision to make, on these fateful questions and more. And when you cast your vote, my fellow citizens, let there be no confusion about the threats we face and the costs of failing to meet them.

I've had to make a few defining choices of my own along the way. One of them came last year, when I told you that I would rather lose an election than see my country lose a war. I chose that course because I know the quality of those who fight our wars, but also because I know the character of the American people. I believed that you, too, would persevere in support of our most fundamental interests in the world -- and you did, America. You gave our troops time to complete their mission, and they almost have. And at a crucial hour in a vital cause, that has made all the difference. Because of that support, our troops will soon come home in victory.

We have passed through a difficult time, and more courage will be needed in the years ahead. But there is a direction to events, and the sacrifices of the present have not been in vain. We will build on our hard-won victories to extend the security of our nation and of every nation that seeks to live in freedom. We will not yield to intimidation, and by our strength we will prevent threats from turning into tragedies. This is America's work in the world, as it has always been in our finest moments. We are called still to spread liberty, to assure justice, to be the makers of peace. And this is the great work I will carry on as your president and commander in chief. Thank you very much.

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