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Remarks By John McCain on Nuclear Security

May 27, 2008

ARLINGTON, VA -- U.S. Senator John McCain delivered the following remarks as prepared for delivery at the University of Denver in Denver, Colorado, today at 10:00 a.m. MDT (12:00 p.m. EDT):

For much of our history, the world considered the United States a young country. Today, we are the world's oldest constitutional democracy, yet we remain a young nation. We still possess the attributes of youth -- spirit, energy, vitality, and creativity. America will always be young as long as we are looking forward, and leading, to a better world.

Innovative and energetic American leadership is as vital to the world's future today as it was during the Cold War. I have spent my life in public service working to ensure our great nation is strong enough to counter those who wish us ill. To be an effective leader in the 21st century, however, it is not enough to be strong. We must be a model for others. That means not only pursuing our own interests but recognizing that we share interests with peoples across our planet. There is such a thing as good international citizenship, and America must be a good citizen of the world—leading the way to address the danger of global warming and preserve our environment, strengthening existing international institutions and helping to build new ones, and engaging the world in a broad dialogue on the threat of violent extremists, who would, if they could, use weapons of mass destruction to attack us and our allies.

Today we also need to apply our spirit of optimism, energy, and innovation to a crisis that has been building for decades but is now coming to a head: the global spread of nuclear weapons. Forty-five years ago, President John F. Kennedy asked the American people to imagine what the world would look like if nuclear weapons spread beyond the few powers that then held them to the many other nations that sought them. "Stop and think for a moment," he said, "what it would mean to have nuclear weapons in so many hands, in the hands of countries large and small, stable and unstable, responsible and irresponsible, scattered throughout the world." If that happened, he warned, "there would be no rest for anyone."

Kennedy's warning resonates more today than ever before. North Korea pursues a nuclear weapons program to the point where, today, the dictator Kim Jong-Il has tested a nuclear weapon, and almost certainly possesses several more nuclear warheads. And it has shared its nuclear and missile know-how with others, including Syria. It is a vital national interest for the North Korean nuclear program to be completely, verifiably and irreversibly ended. Likewise, we have seen Iran marching with single-minded determination toward the same goal. President Ahmadinejad has threatened to wipe Israel off the face of the earth, and represents a threat to every country in the region – one we cannot ignore or minimize.

Other nations have begun to wonder whether they, too, need to have such weapons, if only in self-defense. As a result, we could find ourselves in a world where a dozen or more nations, small and large, stable and unstable, responsible and irresponsible, have viable nuclear weapons programs. But there is a flip side to President Kennedy's warning. We should stop and think for a moment not only of the perils of a world awash with nuclear weapons, but also of the more hopeful alternative – a world in which there are far fewer such weapons than there are today, and in which proliferation, instability, and nuclear terrorism are far less likely. This is the world it is our responsibility to build.

There is no simple answer to the problem. If you look back over the past two decades, I don't think any of us, Republican or Democrat, can take much satisfaction in what we've accomplished to control nuclear proliferation. Today, some people seem to think they've discovered a brand new cause, something no one before them ever thought of. Many believe all we need to do to end the nuclear programs of hostile governments is have our president talk with leaders in Pyongyang and Tehran, as if we haven't tried talking to these governments repeatedly over the past two decades. Others think military action alone can achieve our goals, as if military actions were not fraught with their own terrible risks. While the use of force may be necessary, it can only be as a last resort not a first step. The truth is we will only address the terrible prospect of the worldwide spread of nuclear arms if we transcend our partisan differences, combine our energies, learn from our past mistakes, and seek practical and effective solutions.

I'd like to suggest some steps we should take to chart a common vision for the future. It is a vision in which the United States returns to a tradition of innovative thinking, broad-minded internationalism, and determined diplomacy, backed by America's great and enduring power to lead. It is a vision not of the United States acting alone, but building and participating in a community of nations all drawn together in this vital common purpose. It is a vision of a responsible America, dedicated to an enduring peace based on freedom.

A quarter of a century ago, President Ronald Reagan declared, "our dream is to see the day when nuclear weapons will be banished from the face of the Earth." That is my dream, too. It is a distant and difficult goal. And we must proceed toward it prudently and pragmatically, and with a focused concern for our security and the security of allies who depend on us. But the Cold War ended almost twenty years ago, and the time has come to take further measures to reduce dramatically the number of nuclear weapons in the world's arsenals. It is time for the United States to show the kind of leadership the world expects from us, in the tradition of American presidents who worked to reduce the nuclear threat to

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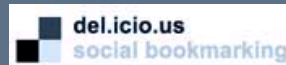


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mankind.

Our highest priority must be to reduce the danger that nuclear weapons will ever be used. Such weapons, while still important to deter an attack with weapons of mass destruction against us and our allies, represent the most abhorrent and indiscriminate form of warfare known to man. We do, quite literally, possess the means to destroy all of mankind. We must seek to do all we can to ensure that nuclear weapons will never again be used.

While working closely with allies who rely on our nuclear umbrella for their security, I would ask the Joint Chiefs of Staff to engage in a comprehensive review of all aspects of our nuclear strategy and policy. I would keep an open mind on all responsible proposals. At the same time, we must continue to deploy a safe and reliable nuclear deterrent, robust missile defenses and superior conventional forces that are capable of defending the United States and our allies. But I will seek to reduce the size of our nuclear arsenal to the lowest number possible consistent with our security requirements and global commitments. Today we deploy thousands of nuclear warheads. It is my hope to move as rapidly as possible to a significantly smaller force.

While we have serious differences, with the end of the Cold War, Russia and the United States are no longer mortal enemies. As our two countries possess the overwhelming majority of the world's nuclear weapons, we have a special responsibility to reduce their number. I believe we should reduce our nuclear forces to the lowest level we judge necessary, and we should be prepared to enter into a new arms control agreement with Russia reflecting the nuclear reductions I will seek. Further, we should be able to agree with Russia on binding verification measures based on those currently in effect under the START Agreement, to enhance confidence and transparency. In close consultation with our allies, I would also like to explore ways we and Russia can reduce – and hopefully eliminate – deployments of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. I also believe we should work with Russia to build confidence in our missile defense program, including through such initiatives as the sharing of early warning data and prior notification of missile launches.

There are other areas in which we can work in partnership with Russia to strengthen protections against weapons of mass destruction. I would seriously consider Russia's recent proposal to work together to globalize the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. I would also redouble our common efforts to reduce the risk that nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons may fall into the hands of terrorists or unfriendly governments.

I believe we should also begin a dialogue with China on strategic and nuclear issues. We have important shared interests with China and should begin discussing ways to achieve the greatest possible transparency and cooperation on nuclear force structure and doctrine. We should work with China to encourage conformity with the practices of the other four nuclear weapon states recognized in the Non-Proliferation Treaty, including working toward nuclear arsenal reductions and toward a moratorium on the production of additional fissile material.

I believe we must also address nuclear testing. As president I will pledge to continue America's current moratorium on testing, but also begin a dialogue with our allies, and with the U.S. Senate, to identify ways we can move forward to limit testing in a verifiable manner that does not undermine the security or viability of our nuclear deterrent. This would include taking another look at the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to see what can be done to overcome the shortcomings that prevented it from entering into force. I opposed that treaty in 1999, but said at the time I would keep an open mind about future developments.

I would only support the development of any new type of nuclear weapon that is absolutely essential for the viability of our deterrent, that results in making possible further decreases in the size of our nuclear arsenal, and furthers our global nuclear security goals. I would cancel all further work on the so-called Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, a weapon that does not make strategic or political sense.

Finally, we cannot achieve our non-proliferation goals on our own. We must strengthen existing international treaties and institutions to combat proliferation, and develop new ones when necessary. We should move quickly with other nations to negotiate a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty to end production of the most dangerous nuclear materials. The international community needs to improve its ability to interdict the spread of nuclear weapons and material under the Proliferation Security Initiative. And we need to increase funding for our own non-proliferation efforts, including the Cooperative Threat Reduction programs established by the landmark Nunn-Lugar legislation, and ensure the highest possible standards of security for existing nuclear materials.

In 2010, an international conference will meet to review the Non-Proliferation Treaty. If I am President, I will seize that opportunity to strengthen and enhance all aspects of the non-proliferation regime. We need to strengthen enforcement of the so-called "atoms for peace" bargain by insisting that countries that receive the benefits of peaceful nuclear cooperation must return or dismantle what they receive if they violate or withdraw from the NPT. We need to increase IAEA funding and enhance the intelligence support it receives. We also need to reverse the burden of proof when it comes to discovering whether a nation is cheating on its NPT commitments. The IAEA shouldn't have to play cat-and-mouse games to prove a country is in compliance. It is for suspected violators to prove they are in compliance. We should establish a requirement by the UN Security Council that international transfers of sensitive nuclear technology must be disclosed in advance to an international authority such as the IAEA, and further require that undisclosed transfers be deemed illicit and subject to interdiction. Finally, to enforce treaty obligations, IAEA member states must be willing to impose sanctions on nations that seek to withdraw from it.

We need to enlist all willing partners in the global battle against nuclear proliferation. I support the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Accord as a means of strengthening our relationship with the world's largest democracy, and further involving India in the fight against proliferation. We should engage actively with both India and Pakistan to improve the security of nuclear stockpiles and weapons materials, and construct a secure global nuclear order that eliminates the likelihood of proliferation and the possibility of nuclear conflict.

As we improve the national and multilateral tools to catch and reverse illicit nuclear programs, I am convinced civilian nuclear energy can be a critical part of our fight against global warming. Civilian nuclear power provides a way for the United States and other responsible nations to achieve energy independence and reduce our dependence on foreign oil and gas. But in order to take advantage of civilian nuclear energy, we must do a better job of ensuring it remains civilian. Some nations use the pretense of civilian nuclear programs as cover for nuclear weapons programs. We need to build an international consensus that exposes this deception, and holds nations accountable for it. We cannot continue allowing nations to enrich and reprocess uranium, ostensibly for civilian purposes, and stand by impotently as they develop

weapons programs.

The most effective way to prevent this deception is to limit the further spread of enrichment and reprocessing. To persuade countries to forego enrichment and reprocessing, I would support international guarantees of nuclear fuel supply to countries that renounce enrichment and reprocessing, as well as the establishment of multinational nuclear enrichment centers in which they can participate. Nations that seek nuclear fuel for legitimate civilian purposes will be able to acquire what they need under international supervision. This is one suggestion Russia and others have made to Iran. Unfortunately, the Iranian government has so far rejected this idea. Perhaps with enough outside pressure and encouragement, they can be persuaded to change their minds before it is too late.

I would seek to establish an international repository for spent nuclear fuel that could collect and safely store materials overseas that might otherwise be reprocessed to acquire bomb-grade materials. It is even possible that such an international center could make it unnecessary to open the proposed spent nuclear fuel storage facility at Yucca Mountain in Nevada.

This is a long list of steps we need to take. It is long because there is no single answer to this crisis, and there are no easy answers. It is long because no nation can meet this dire challenge alone and none can be indifferent to its outcome. The United States cannot and will not stop the spread of nuclear weapons by unilateral action. We must lead concerted and persistent multilateral efforts. As powerful as we are, America's ability to defend ourselves and our allies against the threat of nuclear attack depends on our ability to encourage effective international cooperation. We must strengthen the accords and institutions that make such cooperation possible. No problem we face poses a greater threat to us and the world than nuclear proliferation. In a time when followers of a hateful and remorseless ideology are willing to destroy themselves to destroy us, the threat of suicide bombers with the means to wreak incomprehensible devastation should call the entire world to action. The civilized nations of the world must act as one or we will suffer consequences once thought remote when the threat of mutually assured destruction could deter responsible states from thinking the unthinkable.

Americans have always risen to the challenges of their time. And we have always done so successfully not by hiding from history, but by making history; by encouraging a sometimes reluctant world to follow our lead, and defend civilization from old mistakes and old animosities, and the folly of relying on policies that no longer keep us safe. I want to keep the country I love and have served all my life secure in our freedom. I want us to rise to the challenges of our times, as generations before us rose to theirs. 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 new and better choices. No matter how dangerous the threats we face in our day, it still remains within our power to make in our time another, better world than we inherited. And that, my friends, is what I am running for President to do.

Thank you.

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