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John McCain Addresses the Christians United for Israel

July 18, 2007

U.S. Senator John McCain (R-AZ) addressed the national convention of Christians United for Israel in Washington, DC on Tuesday, July 17th. The remarks as prepared for delivery are below.

"Thank you for the honor of speaking before this gathering, and thank you for the work you do in support of the State of Israel. Your efforts are needed today more than ever, as it is harder to think of a time in recent memory when Israel's national security has faced so many varied challenges.

"The Jewish state has, of course, experienced tough times before - indeed, they have perhaps been the norm rather than the exception. When one thinks back over the conflicts - 1948, the Six Day War, Yom Kippur, Lebanon, the first Gulf War, two intifadas and Lebanon again - it is clear that Israel has been challenged more, in less time, than any nation on earth. Survival in the face of such trials would be impressive; flourishing would seem out of the question.

"Yet Israel has thrived. I would like to believe that Israel's success has been aided by America, Israel's natural partner and ally, and by its supporters here and the world over - several thousand of which are here today. But the tests continue - with Hamas and Hezbollah, in the anti-Semitism so pervasive in the Arab press, in the restive violence in Iraq and elsewhere, and in the vile threats issued routinely by the Iranian president.

"But Israel will survive. Just as it has thrived in the face of armies and terrorists, just as it has prospered in the most dangerous neighborhood on earth, so will it succeed in the face of today's threats. There will always, always be an Israel.

"And just as there will always be a proud, strong Israel, so too will there always be a close and enduring U.S.-Israel relationship. When it comes to the defense of Israel, we simply cannot compromise. In view of the increased threats to Israeli security, American support for Israel should intensify - to include providing needed military equipment and technology and ensuring that Israel maintains its qualitative military edge. Israel's enemies are too numerous, its margin of error too small, and our shared interests and values too great for any other position.

"Israel's strength will be put to the test. The world's chief state sponsor of international terrorism, Iran, defines itself by hostility to Israel and the United States. It is simply tragic that millennia of proud Persian history have culminated in a government today that cannot be counted among those of the world's civilized nations. When the president of Iran calls for Israel to be wiped off of the map, or asks for a world without Zionism, or suggests that Israel's Jewish population return to Europe, or calls the Holocaust a myth, it is clear that we are dealing with an evil man and a very dangerous regime.

"Tehran's continued pursuit of nuclear weapons clearly poses an unacceptable risk. Protected by a nuclear arsenal, Iran would feel unconstrained to sponsor terrorist attacks against any perceived enemy. Its flouting of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty would render that regime obsolete, and could induce Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others to reassess their defense posture. Moderate Gulf states would have to accommodate the new reality, and the world would live, indefinitely, with the possibility that Tehran might pass nuclear materials or weapons to one of its allied terrorist networks. Coupled with its ballistic missile arsenal, an Iranian nuclear capability would pose an immediate and existential threat to the State of Israel.

"UN Security Council action is required to impose progressively tougher political and economic sanctions. Should the Security Council continue to drag its feet, the U.S. must lead a group of like-minded countries in imposing multilateral sanctions outside the UN framework. Iran's need to import refined gasoline, to cite one example, suggests an important vulnerability. And countries such as China and Malaysia, which have signed deals to develop Iranian gas fields, and Russia, which provides weapons systems to Tehran, should know that Iran will be a critical element in American's bilateral relations with each nation. In the meantime, the U.S. should immediately

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investigate whether any of these deals violate the terms of last year's Iran Freedom Support Act.

"The U.S. should also privatize the sanctions effort by launching a disinvestment campaign. By persuading individuals, pension funds, and financial institutions to divest from companies doing business with Iran, we can isolate and delegitimize a hostile government. We will also, as we did with the South Africa disinvestment campaign, increase the debate inside the country about whether the present course serves the interests of the Iranian people or merely those of a misguided elite. Americans and all proponents of freedom need to reassure the millions of Iranians who aspire to self-determination that we support their longing for freedom and democracy.

"And every option must remain on the table. Military action isn't our preference. It remains, as it always must, the last option. We have some way to go diplomatically before we need to contemplate other measures. But it is a simple observation of reality that there is only one thing worse than a military solution, and that, my friends, is a nuclear armed Iran. The regime must understand that it cannot win a showdown with the world.

"Similarly, the leadership of Hamas must be isolated. The Palestinian people are ill-served by a terrorist-led government that refuses to recognize Israel's right to exist, refuses to renounce violence, and refuses to acknowledge prior peace commitments. The United States cannot have normal relations with such a government, one that deliberately targets innocent Israeli civilians in an attempt to terrorize the Jewish population.

"The recent talks between the Israeli government and the government led by President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank are encouraging, and the United States should support this effort. We also must ensure that Israel's people can live in safety until a Palestinian leadership truly committed to peace emerges. No moral nation - neither Israel nor America - can allow terrorists to chart the political course of its people.

"And to speak of terrorism is also to speak of Hezbollah. Israel's chance for enduring peace with Lebanon resides in a government that has a monopoly on authority within its country. That means no independent militias, no Hezbollah fighters, no weapons and equipment flowing to Hezbollah. Yet neither the Lebanese Army nor the international force there is prepared or willing to take on Hezbollah. So long as that is the case, the current pause is likely to enable Hezbollah to regroup, reconstitute, and rearm. There is one bottom line: to achieve lasting peace, sooner or later, one way or another, Hezbollah must be disarmed.

"Now let me turn briefly to Iraq. We have made a great many mistakes in this war, and both Baghdad and Washington remain divided about how to correct them. The situation in Iraq is very difficult, and the temptation is to wash our hands of a messy situation. To follow this impulse, however, portends catastrophe, for Iraq, Israel, and the United States.

"Because a precipitous American withdrawal risks all-out civil war and the emergence of a failed state in the heart of the Middle East, inviting intervention from Iraq's neighbors and the potential for region-wide conflict, we must do all in our power to prevail. This means supporting General Petraeus as he leads our troops in counterinsurgency operations designed to clear areas of terrorists and bring security to the population. It also means pressing the Maliki government to make political progress, which has been sorely lacking. The Iraqi government must seize the opportunity that has been provided it by the "surge" in U.S. forces and make bold steps on reconciliation. It will not come around again.

"Preventing Iraq from falling into the hands of terrorists and extremists is only natural for the United States, and springs from the same interests and values that compel our close relationship with the state of Israel. Violent Islamic extremists would have us believe that there is only one acceptable religious practice, and that those who diverge from it are not entitled to life or liberty. They are wrong, very, very wrong.

"If America stands for anything, it stands for the freedom to follow our own minds and hearts, to determine our own relationship with God. I did not realize just how precious this freedom is until it was taken away. As some in this audience may know, I spent several years as a prisoner of war, a time when all my freedoms were rescinded. And yet it was my very faith in a Supreme Being that sustained me and strengthened me while at the hands of my captors.

"Our founders built in this nation an amazing thing - a democracy that guarantees the right of every citizen to worship God in the way that they choose. We must protect that freedom here in our own country by ensuring that judges do not legislate from the bench to remove religion from the public squares of our communities. And we must support its expansion abroad by standing with those whom, because of their religion and their values, come under threat.

"It is evident that I am speaking, once again, of Israel. The bond between America and Israel is not just a strategic one, though that is important. The more profound tie between our two countries is a

moral one. We are two democracies whose alliance is forged in our common values. To be proudly pro-American and pro-Israeli is not to hold conflicting loyalties. It is about defending the principles that both countries hold dear. That is why today I stand as I believe so many of you do: a Christian, proudly pro-American and proudly pro-Israel."

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