

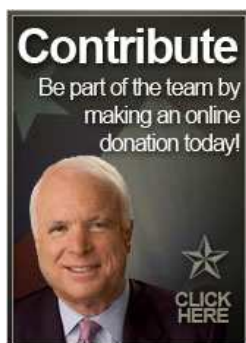


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John McCain's Address to the Hudson Institute

September 27, 2007

Thank you for that very generous introduction. It's an honor to appear at the Hudson Institute. Your work in promoting global security, prosperity, and freedom is well known. Your founder, Herman Kahn, virtually invented the modern field of strategic studies, and today Hudson scholars carry on his tradition of honest, original and far-sighted thinking about America's situation in the world, and the challenges and opportunities we find as we continue the work of preceding American generations to make this world less threatening to our security and more hospitable to our values.

It has been an interesting two weeks. General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker returned from Iraq and gave Congress and the country an honest assessment of progress in Iraq and the problems we still face and a cogent explanation of how the long overdue change in our tactics and objectives have produced greater success there than we had achieved for the first four years of the war. But in a campaign season that has, regrettably, seen too many occasions when statesmanship has surrendered to pandering, leading Democrats and presidential candidates spurn a clear-eyed assessment of the opportunities and difficulties ahead and a strategic grasp of the consequences of an American defeat for whistling past the grave yard alternatives, which seldom rise above the level of soundbites and that lack, either by design or inexperience, even a crude understanding of the realities of our situation.

Thankfully, efforts in Congress to deny General Petraeus and American forces in Iraq the support necessary to continue their counterinsurgency successes have lost support since the summer. That is, I believe, largely attributable to the fact that it is becoming clearer to Americans, and to members of Congress for whom our situation in Iraq is a substantially greater concern than an election that is more than a year away, that after four years of reinforcing failure in Iraq, we are beginning to get things right there. That is a great credit to General Petraeus, the architect as well as the commander of the counterinsurgency. It is an even greater credit to the men and women he has the honor to command, who have bid good-bye again to their families, while no doubt directing some well-deserved abuse at those of us who have put them in this situation, and then shouldered a rifle and risked everything - everything - for our sake. On this point I hope we all agree, Republicans and Democrats. It is an honor to live in country so well defended by such brave patriots.

But Democrats who aspire to the office of commander in chief ought to be able to demonstrate that their positions on Iraq and the long war against Islamic extremists are the product of sober reasoning and their promise of more realistic statecraft is based on, well, reality. Instead, they argue we will mysteriously have MORE leverage to induce difficult political reforms in Iraq when we announce we are leaving. They argue the war is lost just as we have finally begun making progress and al Qaeda's fortunes have taken a decided turn for the worse in Iraq. They argue nothing has changed in Iraq over the last six months despite the incontrovertible evidence of improvements. They argue we can fight al Qaeda better by ceding the battlefield to them in Iraq.

They refuse to consider the consequences of defeat: an empowered Iran, a victorious al Qaeda, a terrorist safe haven, civil war, genocide, and a wider regional war.

They are circumspect to the point of political cowardice to the far left wing of their party that smears General Petraeus, a man for whom personal honor is no small thing.

They are silent about Syria's export of suicide bombers, and Iran's exports of training, weapons and equipment that is being used to kill and maim American soldiers. They offer nothing other than generalities based on a withdrawal that amounts to defeat.

If we choose to lose in Iraq, one of the many dire consequences will be a surge of another type: a surge of al Qaeda into Afghanistan. The level of violence will increase, casualties will increase, and political progress will slow. How long will it then take before the same advocates of surrender in Iraq, begin demanding an end to our mission in Afghanistan, and a "surge in diplomacy" aimed at a negotiated stalemate with the Taliban?

It is no less true today than it has been in the past: defeatism will not buy peace in our time. It will only make our future less secure and our world less safe.

This week as well, Columbia University hosted Iranian President Ahmadinejad, the Holocaust denier committed to the destruction of Israel, whose regime targets American soldiers with IEDs in Iraq and Afghanistan. But while Columbia welcomed Iran's leader on campus, one organization remains unwelcome on the Columbia campus: the ROTC. It is unconscionable that Columbia, Harvard and other great American universities remain

closed to ROTC, whose graduates represent the bulk of the officers commissioned into our Armed Forces each year. Some academic elites may not like ROTC, and they are free to voice their objections. But they are wrong, and I stand with the many graduates of these institutions who for years have been trying in vain to bring ROTC back to their campuses. I fear for our future when terrorist leaders are welcome at our most prestigious centers of learning, universities conceived to strengthen and nurture the ideals of Western liberal political thought, and young men and women who volunteered to risk their lives to defend those ideals are not.

Prevailing in Iraq and Afghanistan are critical to defeating the threat posed by radical Islamic extremists, but are not the last battle in this global challenge. We are in a long war, a war I am afraid the US government is not adequately prepared to fight. The next president will need tested experience, political courage and strategic clarity to make sound and difficult decisions, even when those decisions are not, as few critical decisions ever are, immediately or decidedly popular. Tough talk or managerial successes in the private sector aren't adequate assurance that their authors have the experience or qualities necessary for such a singular responsibility. We have to make far-reaching reforms to our government to prepare for the long threat our enemies plan for us, and the cruel and desperate means they will employ to harm us. You don't just talk about or manage such changes, you lead them.

The nature of the threat confronting America changed radically between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Twin Towers, and yet our governmental structures have not kept pace.

No one who has visited our servicemen and women in Iraq or Afghanistan can doubt their skills, their bravery, or their dedication. But it is equally impossible to doubt that, as I have said for years, they are overstretched and under-resourced.

I am glad to see that troop increases are in the pipeline but current plans are not enough. As president, I would bring the army and Marines from the currently planned level of roughly 750,000 to 900,000. This will cost real money, some additional billions annually, but it will not require a draft any more than similar levels did in the 1980s. It is vitally important for the next president to issue a call to service, to summon the young men and women of America to defend their country and its noble ideals. I am confident that this generation will answer the summons just as so many of us did in previous generations.

Along with more personnel, the military will require additional equipment for the expanded force, to modernize for the future, and to make up for losses suffered in the current wars. We can partially offset some of this additional investment by cutting wasteful federal spending, including unnecessary Pentagon programs and an often dysfunctional procurement system. But we can also afford to spend more on our defense. Our defense budget currently consumes less than 4 cents of every dollar that our booming economy generates - far less than we spent during the Cold War.

While we enlarge the armed forces, we must also transform them. To a large extent, our military is still configured to fight enemies that no longer exist. Our stealth bombers, aircraft carriers, and nuclear submarines may make the difference in a future conflict, but they do little to win our current struggles against terrorists from the Horn of Africa to the Hindu Kush.

What we need today are more soldiers and more civilians with the right kind of skills to fight a global counterinsurgency. The bulk of our effort must be directed toward helping friendly governments and their security forces to resist our common foes. Toward that end, I would immediately implement an idea offered by Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, a veteran of Iraq and one of the army's brightest strategic thinkers. We should create an Army Advisor Corps with 20,000 soldiers that would work with friendly militaries abroad. I would increase the number of personnel in information operations, Special Forces, civil affairs, military policing, military intelligence, and other disciplines.

We must strive to enhance our understanding of foreign cultures - the human terrain on which we fight. We need to launch a crash program in both civilian and military schools to increase the number of experts in strategic languages such as Arabic and Pashto. We need to require students at our service academies to spend time studying abroad. And we need to enhance the Foreign Area career field within the military while creating a new field in strategic interrogation. In this way we could produce more interrogators who can attain critical knowledge from detainees using advanced psychological techniques and not the kind of repugnant tactics that are rightly prohibited by the Geneva Conventions.

Even as we increase our military capacity, we must also increase our civilian capacity so that an undue burden does not again fall on our soldiers as it has in Afghanistan and Iraq, where the civilian agencies of our government have too often been missing in action. The State Department and other agencies need to enhance their ability to send more experts to rebuild war-torn lands - or, better still, bolster peaceful development to reduce the chances of war breaking out in the first place.

To better coordinate our disparate efforts, I would ask Congress for a civilian follow-on to the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act which fostered a culture of joint operations within the separate military services. Today we need similar legislation to ensure that civil servants and soldiers train and work together in peacetime so that they can cooperate effectively in wartime and in postwar reconstruction.

As president, I would revitalize our public diplomacy. In 1998, the Clinton Administration and we in Congress agreed to abolish the United States Information Agency and put its public diplomacy functions inside the State Department. This was a mistake. Dismantling an agency dedicated to promoting America's message amounted to unilateral disarmament in the struggle of ideas. Communicating our government's views on day-to-day issues is what the State Department does. But communicating the idea of America, our purpose, our past and our future is a different task. We need to re-create an independent agency with the sole purpose of getting America's message to the world - a critical element in combating Islamic extremism. The cold war was won not with a tank battle in the Fulda Gap, but by winning the hearts and minds of the people that democracy was

better than communism. And so it must be in our struggle with Islamic extremism. We must win this war by convincing the world that freedom is better than rule by terror.

We also need to develop a deployable police presence to, when necessary, help maintain law and order where it is lacking, and to train foreign police forces to counter Islamic extremism and other threats. In the end, dollars, experts, and police must work together to address the interrelated issues of political freedom, good governance, and economic development.

I would also set up a new civil-military agency patterned after the Office of Strategic Services in World War II. A modern-day OSS could draw together unconventional warfare, civil-affairs, paramilitary and psychological-warfare specialists from the military together with covert-action operators from our intelligence agencies and experts in anthropology, advertising, foreign cultures, and numerous other disciplines from inside and outside government. In the spirit of the original OSS, this would be a small, nimble, can-do organization that would fight terrorist subversion across the world and in cyberspace. It could take risks that our bureaucracies today are afraid to take - risks such as infiltrating agents who lack diplomatic cover into terrorist organizations. It could even lead in the front-line efforts to rebuild failed states. A cadre of such undercover operatives would allow us to gain the intelligence on terrorist activities that we don't get today from our high-tech surveillance systems and from a CIA clandestine service that works almost entirely out of our embassies abroad.

These are not measures that will pay quick dividends. We must understand that we confront a lengthy struggle - a long war - that will not be won quickly or easily. But we will win it.

While our ultimate victory is not in doubt, the length and intensity of this struggle remain to be determined. It's up to us. We have historically important choices to make, all of us, the American people, their President, and their Members of Congress. We must recognize that our enemies are in this fight to win, and so must we be. We must use our strengths, our resources, our inventiveness and our fortitude - qualities that have distinguished us through history and which have never failed us - to defeat our unpardonable foe. We must act boldly and with confidence that history has not yet assigned us a challenge that we cannot meet successfully. Though we regret the mistakes we have made in this war, they must not cause us self doubt. We must learn from them, as Americans have always learned from our mistakes, and fight smarter and harder. Though we mourn the losses we have already incurred in this war, we must not let our grief weary us so that we cannot do the work that is ours to do.

These are the decisions confronting American voters in this election, and they will confront the person you elect President. In November, 2008 the American people will decide with their votes how and where this war will be fought or if it will be fought at all. I have told you how I intend to fight this war. Other candidates will argue for a different course. Democratic candidates for President will argue for the course of cutting our losses and withdrawing from the threat in the vain hope it will not follow us here. I cannot join them in such wishful and very dangerous thinking. Peace at any price is an illusion and its costs are always more tragic than the sacrifices victory requires. I will stand where I stand today and trust you to give me a fair hearing. There is too much at stake in this election for any candidate to do less. Thank you.

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