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Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: Endorsement by US Admirals and Generals

Chicago, IL | March 12, 2008

It is my privilege to be joined by some of the distinguished generals and admirals supporting my campaign. They have defended the American people and stood up for American values with honor and distinction. Between them they have served nine Commanders-in-Chief, and I look forward to continuing to draw on their counsel throughout my campaign and beyond.

As a candidate for the presidency, I know that I am running to be Commander-in-Chief – to safeguard this nation's security, and to keep our sacred trust with the men and women who serve. There is no responsibility that I take more seriously.

This is something that I've talked about throughout this campaign. Because I believe that any candidate for President must present the American people with a clear vision of how we will lead. There are real differences between the candidates, and important issues to debate – from ending the war in Iraq, to combating terrorism, to devising new strategies and new capabilities to confront 21st century threats.

But recently, we've seen a different kind of approach. Instead of a serious, substantive debate, we've heard vague allusions to a "Commander-in-Chief threshold" that seems to be about nothing more than the number of years you've spent in Washington.

This is exactly what's wrong with the national security debate in Washington.

After years of a divisive politics that uses national security as a wedge to drive us apart, how much longer do we have to wait to bring this country together to confront our common enemies?

After years of being told that Democrats have to talk, act and vote like John McCain to pass some Commander-in-Chief test, how many times do we have to learn that tough talk is not a substitute for sound judgment?

After years of a war in Iraq that should've never been authorized, how many more politicians will appeal to the American peoples' fears instead of their hopes?

This moment – in this election – is our chance to put an end to a divisive politics that has done nothing to keep America safe, or to serve our men and women in uniform as well as they are serving us. Because the real Commander-in-Chief threshold doesn't have to do with years tallied up in Washington, it has to do with the judgment and vision that you will bring to the Oval Office.

On the most important national security question since the Cold War, I am the only candidate who opposed the war in Iraq from the beginning. This judgment was not about speeches, it was about whether or not the United States of America would go to war in Iraq. Because we did, we took our eye off al Qaeda; we have lost thousands of lives and spent hundreds of billions of dollars; our military is overstretched; and our security and standing has been set back. So don't tell me that the decision to go to war was just a speech, because it was far more than that to the men and women who have served – and continue to serve heroically in Iraq.

When I spoke out against the war, I said that I was not opposed to all wars. In fact, one of the central

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reasons why I opposed going to war in Iraq is that we had yet to finish the fight against al Qaeda and the Taliban. That remains true today. That is why I have consistently called for an increased commitment to Afghanistan, and why I called last August for at least two additional combat brigades to support our mission there. And that is why I will end the war in Iraq when I am President, and focus on finishing the job in Afghanistan.

I will never hesitate to defend this country and our critical interests. That is why I am the only candidate who has made it clear that we cannot tolerate any safe-haven for terrorists who threaten America. But we must also use all elements of national power to combat the threats of the 21st century, and that means deploying the power of American diplomacy before we deploy our troops. That is why we must be willing to talk to the leaders of all nations – friend and foe.

The threats we face are increasingly unconventional, and they call for new approaches. I have worked on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to combat the challenges of the 21st Century – securing loose weapons and nuclear materials from terrorists; working to stop ethnic killing and genocide in Africa; and investing in our ability to combat epidemic diseases like avian flu that can be deadly at home and sew instability abroad.

And one theme that I hear in talking to military officers – whether generals and admirals, or the mid-level officers who will lead tomorrow's military – is that we need new capabilities to respond to this century's new threats.

We must maintain our overwhelming conventional advantage – and I will. We also need to increase the size of our ground forces by 65,000 soldiers and 27,000 marines to relieve the strain on our troops, and to increase our capacity to put boots on the ground. We need to invest in capabilities like civil affairs, foreign languages, and training foreign militaries, so that we can confront nimble enemies. We need to give our civilian agencies the ability to operate alongside our military in post-conflict zones and on humanitarian missions. And we must inspire a new generation of Americans to serve their country, in the military and in a civilian capacity.

And let me be very clear: when I am Commander-in-Chief, I will seek out, listen to, and respect the views of military commanders. Under this Administration, too often we have seen civilian control turned into an expectation that the uniformed military will be punished if they tell the President what he needs to know, rather than what he wants to hear. When I am President, the buck will stop with me, but we will restore trust and open dialogue between the military and civilian leadership.

Finally, it is the sacred obligation of any Commander in Chief to give the men and women who have served the care and support they have earned. That is what I have tried to do on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee – working to improve care and benefits for wounded warriors and their families, and to enhance screening and treatment for PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury, the signature wounds of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As President, I will ask myself every day whether I am serving our troops and veterans as well as they have served America. That means only sending them into harm's way when we absolutely must; providing them with a clear mission and the equipment they need to do the job; standing by them when they come home; and helping them live their dreams after they leave the service.

Like the men who have joined me on this stage today, my story is only possible in America. It is the story of my grandfather, who marched in Patton's Army; and my father, who crossed the globe to be a part of the dream that my grandfather defended. An America that secures its people, and stands as a light of hope for the world.

That is the America that I will defend as Commander-in-Chief, drawing on the counsel of military commanders and the courage and conviction of the American people. An America where we meet the challenges of the 21st century with sound judgment, clear plans, and a common purpose.



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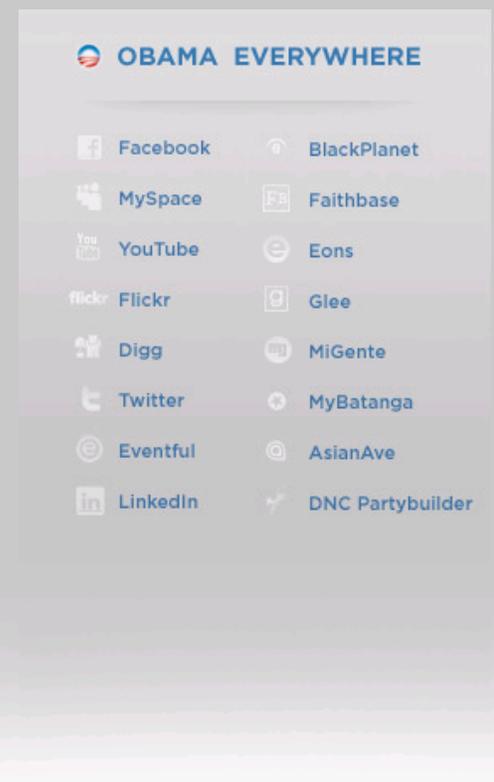
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