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Renewing American Leadership

By Barack Obama

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Summary: After Iraq, we may be tempted to turn inward. That would be a mistake. The American moment is not over, but it must be seized anew. We must bring the war to a responsible end and then renew our leadership -- military, diplomatic, moral -- to confront new threats and capitalize on new opportunities. America cannot meet this century's challenges alone; the world cannot meet them without America.

Barack Obama is a Democratic Senator from Illinois and a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination.

COMMON SECURITY FOR OUR COMMON HUMANITY

At moments of great peril in the last century, American leaders such as Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John F. Kennedy managed both to protect the American people and to expand opportunity for the next generation. What is more, they ensured that America, by deed and example, led and lifted the world -- that we stood for and fought for the freedoms sought by billions of people beyond our borders.

As Roosevelt built the most formidable military the world had ever seen, his Four Freedoms gave purpose to our struggle against fascism. Truman championed a bold new architecture to respond to the Soviet threat -- one that paired military strength with the Marshall Plan and helped secure the peace and well-being of nations around the world. As colonialism crumbled and the Soviet Union achieved effective nuclear parity, Kennedy modernized our military doctrine, strengthened our conventional forces, and created the Peace Corps and the Alliance for Progress. They used our strengths to show people everywhere America at its best.

Today, we are again called to provide visionary leadership. This century's threats are at least as dangerous as and in some ways more complex than those we have confronted in the past. They come from weapons that can kill on a mass scale and from global terrorists who respond to alienation or perceived injustice with murderous nihilism. They come from rogue states allied to terrorists and from rising powers that could challenge both America and the international foundation of liberal democracy. They come from weak states that cannot control their territory or provide for their people. And they come from a warming planet that will spur new diseases, spawn more devastating natural disasters, and catalyze deadly conflicts.

To recognize the number and complexity of these threats is not to give way to pessimism. Rather, it is a call to action. These threats demand a new vision of leadership in the twenty-first century -- a vision that draws from the past but is not bound by outdated thinking. The Bush administration responded to the unconventional attacks of 9/11 with conventional thinking of the past, largely viewing problems as state-based and principally amenable to military solutions. It was this tragically misguided view that led us into a war in Iraq that never should have been authorized and never should have been waged. In the wake of Iraq and Abu Ghraib, the world has lost trust in our purposes and our principles.

After thousands of lives lost and billions of dollars spent, many Americans may be tempted to turn inward and cede our leadership in world affairs. But this is a mistake we must not make. America cannot meet the threats of this century alone, and the world cannot meet them without America. We can neither retreat from the world nor try to bully it into submission. We must lead the world, by deed and by example.

Such leadership demands that we retrieve a fundamental insight of Roosevelt, Truman, and Kennedy -- one that is truer now than ever before: the security and well-being of each and every American depend on the security and well-being of those who live beyond our borders. The mission of the United States is to provide global leadership grounded in the understanding that the world shares a common security and a common humanity.

The American moment is not over, but it must be seized anew. To see American power in terminal decline is to ignore America's great promise and historic purpose in the world. If elected president, I will start renewing that promise and purpose the day I take office.

MOVING BEYOND IRAQ

To renew American leadership in the world, we must first bring the Iraq war to a responsible end and refocus our attention on the broader Middle East. Iraq was a diversion from the fight against the terrorists who struck us on 9/11, and incompetent prosecution of the war by America's civilian leaders compounded the strategic blunder of choosing to wage it in the first place. We have now lost over 3,300 American lives, and thousands more suffer wounds both seen and unseen.

Our servicemen and servicewomen have performed admirably while sacrificing immeasurably. But it is time for our civilian leaders to acknowledge a painful truth: we cannot impose a military solution on a civil war between Sunni and Shiite factions. The best chance we have to leave Iraq a better place is to pressure these warring parties to find a lasting political solution. And the only effective way to apply this pressure is to begin a phased withdrawal of U.S. forces, with the goal of removing all combat brigades from Iraq by March 31, 2008 -- a date consistent with the goal set by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group. This redeployment could be temporarily suspended if the Iraqi government meets the security, political, and economic benchmarks to which it has committed. But we must recognize that, in the end, only Iraqi leaders can bring real peace and stability to their country.

At the same time, we must launch a comprehensive regional and international diplomatic initiative to help broker an end to the civil war in Iraq, prevent its spread, and limit the suffering of the Iraqi people. To gain credibility in this effort, we must make clear that we seek no permanent bases in Iraq. We should leave behind only a minimal over-the-horizon military force in the region to protect American personnel and facilities, continue training Iraqi security forces, and root out al Qaeda.

The morass in Iraq has made it immeasurably harder to confront and work through the many other problems in the region -- and it has made many of those problems considerably more dangerous. Changing the dynamic in Iraq will allow us to focus our attention and influence on resolving the festering conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians -- a task that the Bush administration neglected for years.

For more than three decades, Israelis, Palestinians, Arab leaders, and the rest of the world have looked to America to lead the effort to build the road to a lasting peace. In recent years, they have all too often looked in vain. Our starting point must always be a clear and strong commitment to the security of Israel, our strongest ally in the region and its only established democracy. That commitment is all the more important as we contend with growing threats in the region -- a strengthened Iran, a chaotic Iraq, the resurgence of al Qaeda, the reinvigoration of Hamas and Hezbollah. Now more than ever, we must strive to secure a lasting settlement of the conflict with two states living side by side in peace and security. To do so, we must help the Israelis identify and strengthen those partners who are truly committed to peace, while isolating those who seek conflict and instability. Sustained American leadership for peace and security will require patient effort and the personal commitment of the president of the United States. That is a commitment I will make.

Throughout the Middle East, we must harness American power to reinvigorate American diplomacy. Tough-minded diplomacy, backed by the whole range of instruments of American power -- political, economic, and military -- could bring success even when dealing with long-standing adversaries such as Iran and Syria. Our policy of issuing threats and relying on intermediaries to curb Iran's nuclear program, sponsorship of terrorism, and regional aggression is failing. Although we must not rule out using military force, we should not hesitate to talk directly to Iran. Our diplomacy should aim to raise the cost for Iran of continuing its nuclear program by applying tougher sanctions and increasing pressure from its key trading partners. The world must work to stop Iran's uranium-enrichment program and prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. It is far too dangerous to have nuclear weapons in the hands of a radical theocracy. At the same time, we must show Iran -- and especially the Iranian people -- what could be gained from fundamental change: economic engagement, security assurances, and diplomatic relations. Diplomacy combined with pressure could also reorient Syria away from its radical agenda to a more moderate stance -- which could, in turn, help stabilize Iraq, isolate Iran, free Lebanon from Damascus' grip, and better secure Israel.

REVITALIZING THE MILITARY

To renew American leadership in the world, we must immediately begin working to revitalize our military. A strong military is, more than anything, necessary to sustain peace. Unfortunately, the U.S. Army and the Marine Corps, according to our military leaders, are facing a crisis. The Pentagon cannot certify a single army unit within the United States as fully ready to respond in the event of a new crisis or emergency beyond Iraq; 88 percent of the National Guard is not ready to deploy overseas.

We must use this moment both to rebuild our military and to prepare it for the missions of the future. We must retain the capacity to swiftly defeat any conventional threat to our country and our vital interests. But we must also become better prepared to put boots on the ground in order to take on foes that fight asymmetrical and highly adaptive campaigns on a global scale.

We should expand our ground forces by adding 65,000 soldiers to the army and 27,000 marines. Bolstering these forces is about more than meeting quotas. We must recruit the very best and invest in their capacity to succeed. That means providing our servicemen and servicewomen with first-rate equipment, armor, incentives, and training -- including in foreign languages and other critical skills. Each major defense program should be reevaluated in light of current needs, gaps in the field, and likely future threat scenarios. Our military will have to rebuild some capabilities and transform others. At the same time, we need to commit sufficient funding to enable the National Guard to regain a state of readiness.

Enhancing our military will not be enough. As commander in chief, I would also use our armed forces wisely. When we send our men and women into harm's way, I will clearly define the mission, seek out the advice of our military commanders, objectively evaluate intelligence, and ensure that our troops have the resources and the support they need. I will not hesitate to use force, unilaterally if necessary, to protect the American people or our vital interests whenever we are attacked or imminently threatened.

We must also consider using military force in circumstances beyond self-defense in order to provide for the common security that underpins global stability -- to support friends, participate in stability and reconstruction operations, or confront mass atrocities. But when we do use force in situations other than self-defense, we should make every effort to garner the clear support and participation of others -- as President George H. W. Bush did when we led the effort to oust Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1991. The consequences of forgetting that lesson in the context of the current conflict in Iraq have been grave.

HALTING THE SPREAD OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

To renew American leadership in the world, we must confront the most urgent threat to the security of America and the world -- the spread of nuclear weapons, material, and technology and the risk that a nuclear device will fall into the hands of terrorists. The explosion of one such device would bring catastrophe, dwarfing the devastation of 9/11 and shaking every corner of the globe.

As George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn have warned, our current measures are not sufficient to meet the nuclear threat. The nonproliferation regime is being challenged, and new civilian nuclear programs could spread the means to make nuclear weapons. Al Qaeda has made it a goal to bring a "Hiroshima" to the United States. Terrorists need not build a nuclear weapon from scratch; they need only steal or buy a weapon or the material to assemble one. There is now highly enriched uranium -- some of it poorly secured -- sitting in civilian nuclear facilities in over 40 countries around the world. In the former Soviet Union, there are approximately 15,000-16,000 nuclear weapons and stockpiles of uranium and plutonium capable of making another 40,000 weapons -- all scattered across 11 time zones. People have already been caught trying to smuggle nuclear material to sell on the black market.

As president, I will work with other nations to secure, destroy, and stop the spread of these weapons in order to dramatically reduce the nuclear dangers for our nation and the world. America must lead a global effort to secure all nuclear weapons and material at vulnerable sites within four years -- the most effective way to prevent terrorists from acquiring a bomb.

This will require the active cooperation of Russia. Although we must not shy away from pushing for more democracy and accountability in Russia, we must work with the country in areas of common interest -- above all, in making sure that nuclear weapons and material are secure. We must also work with Russia to update and scale back our dangerously outdated Cold War nuclear postures and de-emphasize the role of nuclear weapons. America must not rush to produce a new generation of nuclear warheads. And we should take advantage of recent technological advances to build bipartisan consensus behind ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. All of this can be done while maintaining a strong nuclear deterrent. These steps will ultimately strengthen, not weaken, our security.

As we lock down existing nuclear stockpiles, I will work to negotiate a verifiable global ban on the production of new nuclear weapons material. We must also stop the spread of nuclear weapons technology and ensure that countries cannot build -- or come to the brink of building -- a weapons program under the auspices of developing peaceful nuclear power. That is why my administration will immediately provide \$50 million to jump-start the creation of an International Atomic Energy Agency-controlled nuclear fuel bank and work to update the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. We must also fully implement the law Senator Richard Lugar and I passed to help the United States and our allies detect and stop the smuggling of weapons of mass destruction throughout the world.

Finally, we must develop a strong international coalition to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Iran and North Korea could trigger regional arms races, creating dangerous nuclear flashpoints in the Middle East and East Asia. In confronting these threats, I will not take the military option off the table. But our first measure must be sustained, direct, and aggressive diplomacy -- the kind that the Bush administration has been unable and unwilling to use.

COMBATING GLOBAL TERRORISM

To renew American leadership in the world, we must forge a more effective global response to the terrorism that came to our shores on an unprecedented scale on 9/11. From Bali to London, Baghdad to Algiers, Mumbai to Mombasa to Madrid, terrorists who reject modernity, oppose America, and distort Islam have killed and mutilated tens of thousands of people just this decade. Because this enemy operates globally, it must be confronted globally.

We must refocus our efforts on Afghanistan and Pakistan -- the central front in our war against al Qaeda -- so that we are confronting terrorists where their roots run deepest. Success in Afghanistan is still possible, but only if we act quickly, judiciously, and decisively. We should pursue an integrated strategy that reinforces our troops in Afghanistan and works to remove the limitations placed by some NATO allies on their forces. Our strategy must also include sustained diplomacy to isolate the Taliban and more effective development programs that target aid to areas where the Taliban are making inroads.

I will join with our allies in insisting -- not simply requesting -- that Pakistan crack down on the Taliban, pursue Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants, and end its relationship with all terrorist groups. At the same time, I will encourage dialogue between Pakistan and India to work toward resolving their dispute over Kashmir and between Afghanistan and Pakistan to resolve their historic differences and develop the Pashtun border region. If Pakistan can look toward the east with greater confidence, it will be less likely to believe that its interests are best advanced through cooperation with the Taliban.

Although vigorous action in South Asia and Central Asia should be a starting point, our efforts must be broader. There must be no safe haven for those who plot to kill Americans. To defeat al Qaeda, I will build a twenty-first-century military and twenty-first-century partnerships as strong as the anticommunist alliance that won the Cold War to stay on the offense everywhere from Djibouti to Kandahar.

Here at home, we must strengthen our homeland security and protect the critical infrastructure on which the entire world depends. We can start by spending homeland security dollars on the basis of risk. This means investing more resources to defend mass transit, closing the gaps in our aviation security by screening all cargo on passenger airliners and checking all passengers against a comprehensive watch list, and upgrading port security by ensuring that cargo is screened for radiation.

To succeed, our homeland security and counterterrorism actions must be linked to an intelligence community that deals effectively with the threats we face. Today, we rely largely on the same institutions and practices that were in place before 9/11. We need to revisit intelligence reform, going beyond rearranging boxes on an organizational chart. To keep pace with highly adaptable enemies, we need technologies and practices that enable us to efficiently collect and share information within and across our intelligence agencies. We must invest still more in human intelligence and deploy additional trained operatives and diplomats with specialized knowledge of local cultures and languages. And we should institutionalize the practice of developing competitive assessments of critical threats and strengthen our methodologies of analysis.

Finally, we need a comprehensive strategy to defeat global terrorists -- one that draws on the full range of American power, not just our military might. As a senior U.S. military commander put it, when people have dignity and opportunity, "the chance of extremism being welcomed greatly, if not completely, diminishes." It is for this reason that we need to invest with our allies in strengthening weak states and helping to rebuild failed ones.

In the Islamic world and beyond, combating the terrorists' prophets of fear will require more than lectures on democracy. We need to deepen our knowledge of the circumstances and beliefs that underpin extremism. A crucial debate is occurring within Islam. Some believe in a future of peace, tolerance, development, and democratization. Others embrace a rigid and violent intolerance of personal liberty and the world at large. To empower forces of moderation, America must make every effort to export opportunity -- access to education and health care, trade and investment -- and provide the kind of steady support for political reformers and civil society that enabled our victory in the Cold War. Our beliefs rest on hope; the extremists' rest on fear. That is why we can -- and will -- win this struggle.

REBUILDING OUR PARTNERSHIPS

To renew American leadership in the world, I intend to rebuild the alliances, partnerships, and institutions necessary to confront common threats and enhance common security. Needed reform of these alliances and institutions will not come by bullying other countries to ratify changes we hatch in isolation. It will come when we convince other governments and peoples that they, too, have a stake in effective partnerships.

Too often we have sent the opposite signal to our international partners. In the case of Europe, we dismissed European reservations about the wisdom and necessity of the Iraq war. In Asia, we belittled South Korean efforts to improve relations with the North. In Latin America, from Mexico to Argentina, we failed to adequately address concerns about immigration and equity and economic growth. In Africa, we have allowed genocide to persist for over four years in Darfur and have not done nearly enough to answer the African Union's call for more support to stop the killing. I will rebuild our ties to our allies in Europe and Asia and strengthen our partnerships throughout the Americas and Africa.

Our alliances require constant cooperation and revision if they are to remain effective and relevant. NATO has made tremendous strides over the last 15 years, transforming itself from a Cold War security structure into a partnership for peace. But today, NATO's challenge in Afghanistan has exposed, as Senator Lugar has put it, "the growing discrepancy between NATO's expanding missions and its lagging capabilities." To close this gap, I will rally our NATO allies to contribute more troops to collective security operations and to invest more in reconstruction and stabilization capabilities.

And as we strengthen NATO, we must build new alliances and partnerships in other vital regions. As China rises and Japan and South Korea assert themselves, I will work to forge a more effective framework in Asia that goes beyond bilateral agreements, occasional summits, and ad hoc arrangements, such as the six-party talks on North Korea. We need an inclusive infrastructure with the countries in East Asia that can promote stability and prosperity and help confront transnational threats, from terrorist cells in the Philippines to avian flu in Indonesia. I will also encourage China to play a responsible role as a growing power -- to help lead in addressing the common problems of the twenty-first century. We will compete with China in some areas and cooperate in others. Our essential challenge is to build a relationship that broadens cooperation while strengthening our ability to compete.

In addition, we need effective collaboration on pressing global issues among all the major powers -- including such newly emerging ones as Brazil, India, Nigeria, and South Africa. We need to give all of them a stake in upholding the international order. To that end, the United Nations requires far-reaching reform. The UN Secretariat's management practices remain weak. Peacekeeping operations are overextended. The new UN Human Rights Council has passed eight resolutions condemning Israel -- but not a single resolution condemning the genocide in Darfur or human rights abuses in Zimbabwe. Yet none of these problems will be solved unless America rededicates itself to the organization and its mission.

Strengthened institutions and invigorated alliances and partnerships are especially crucial if we are to defeat the epochal, man-made threat to the planet: climate change. Without dramatic changes, rising sea levels will flood coastal regions around the world, including much of the eastern seaboard. Warmer temperatures and declining rainfall will reduce crop yields, increasing conflict, famine, disease, and poverty. By 2050, famine could displace more than 250 million people worldwide. That means increased instability in some of the most volatile parts of the world.

As the world's largest producer of greenhouse gases, America has the responsibility to lead. While many of our industrial partners are working hard to reduce their emissions, we are increasing ours at a steady clip -- by more than ten percent per decade. As president, I intend to enact a cap-and-trade system that will dramatically reduce our carbon emissions. And I will work to finally free America of its dependence on foreign oil -- by using energy more efficiently in our cars, factories, and homes, relying more on renewable sources of electricity, and harnessing the potential of biofuels.

Getting our own house in order is only a first step. China will soon replace America as the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases. Clean energy development must be a central focus in our relationships with major countries in Europe and Asia. I will invest in efficient and clean technologies at home while using our assistance policies and export promotions to help developing countries leapfrog the carbon-energy-intensive stage of development. We need a global response to climate change that includes binding and enforceable commitments to reducing emissions, especially for those that pollute the most: the United States, China, India, the European Union, and Russia. This challenge is massive, but rising to it will also bring new benefits to America. By 2050, global demand for low-carbon energy could create an annual market worth \$500 billion. Meeting that demand would open new frontiers for American entrepreneurs and workers.

BUILDING JUST, SECURE, DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES

Finally, to renew American leadership in the world, I will strengthen our common security by investing in our common humanity. Our global engagement cannot be defined by what we are against; it must be guided by a clear sense of what

we stand for. We have a significant stake in ensuring that those who live in fear and want today can live with dignity and opportunity tomorrow.

People around the world have heard a great deal of late about freedom on the march. Tragically, many have come to associate this with war, torture, and forcibly imposed regime change. To build a better, freer world, we must first behave in ways that reflect the decency and aspirations of the American people. This means ending the practices of shipping away prisoners in the dead of night to be tortured in far-off countries, of detaining thousands without charge or trial, of maintaining a network of secret prisons to jail people beyond the reach of the law.

Citizens everywhere should be able to choose their leaders in climates free of fear. America must commit to strengthening the pillars of a just society. We can help build accountable institutions that deliver services and opportunity: strong legislatures, independent judiciaries, honest police forces, free presses, vibrant civil societies. In countries wracked by poverty and conflict, citizens long to enjoy freedom from want. And since extremely poor societies and weak states provide optimal breeding grounds for disease, terrorism, and conflict, the United States has a direct national security interest in dramatically reducing global poverty and joining with our allies in sharing more of our riches to help those most in need. We need to invest in building capable, democratic states that can establish healthy and educated communities, develop markets, and generate wealth. Such states would also have greater institutional capacities to fight terrorism, halt the spread of deadly weapons, and build health-care infrastructures to prevent, detect, and treat deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and avian flu.

As president, I will double our annual investment in meeting these challenges to \$50 billion by 2012 and ensure that those new resources are directed toward worthwhile goals. For the last 20 years, U.S. foreign assistance funding has done little more than keep pace with inflation. It is in our national security interest to do better. But if America is going to help others build more just and secure societies, our trade deals, debt relief, and foreign aid must not come as blank checks. I will couple our support with an insistent call for reform, to combat the corruption that rots societies and governments from within. I will do so not in the spirit of a patron but in the spirit of a partner -- a partner mindful of his own imperfections.

Our rapidly growing international AIDS programs have demonstrated that increased foreign assistance can make a real difference. As part of this new funding, I will capitalize a \$2 billion Global Education Fund that will bring the world together in eliminating the global education deficit, much as the 9/11 Commission proposed. We cannot hope to shape a world where opportunity outweighs danger unless we ensure that every child everywhere is taught to build and not to destroy.

There are compelling moral reasons and compelling security reasons for renewed American leadership that recognizes the inherent equality and worth of all people. As President Kennedy said in his 1961 inaugural address, "To those people in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required -- not because the communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich." I will show the world that America remains true to its founding values. We lead not only for ourselves but also for the common good.

RESTORING AMERICA'S TRUST

Confronted by Hitler, Roosevelt said that our power would be "directed toward ultimate good as well as against immediate evil. We Americans are not destroyers; we are builders." It is time for a president who can build consensus here at home for an equally ambitious course.

Ultimately, no foreign policy can succeed unless the American people understand it and feel they have a stake in its success -- unless they trust that their government hears their concerns as well. We will not be able to increase foreign aid if we fail to invest in security and opportunity for our own people. We cannot negotiate trade agreements to help spur development in poor countries so long as we provide no meaningful help to working Americans burdened by the dislocations of a global economy. We cannot reduce our dependence on foreign oil or defeat global warming unless Americans are willing to innovate and conserve. We cannot expect Americans to support placing our men and women in harm's way if we cannot show that we will use force wisely and judiciously. But if the next president can restore the American people's trust -- if they know that he or she is acting with their best interests at heart, with prudence and wisdom and some measure of humility -- then I believe the American people will be eager to see America lead again.

I believe they will also agree that it is time for a new generation to tell the next great American story. If we act with boldness and foresight, we will be able to tell our grandchildren that this was the time when we helped forge peace in the Middle East. This was the time we confronted climate change and secured the weapons that could destroy the human race. This was the time we defeated global terrorists and brought opportunity to forgotten corners of the world. And this

was the time when we renewed the America that has led generations of weary travelers from all over the world to find opportunity and liberty and hope on our doorstep.

It was not all that long ago that farmers in Venezuela and Indonesia welcomed American doctors to their villages and hung pictures of JFK on their living room walls, when millions, like my father, waited every day for a letter in the mail that would grant them the privilege to come to America to study, work, live, or just be free.

We can be this America again. This is our moment to renew the trust and faith of our people -- and all people -- in an America that battles immediate evils, promotes an ultimate good, and leads the world once more.

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