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Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: National Security Avail

Richmond, VA | October 22, 2008

Good morning. We just finished a meeting with Senator Biden and members of my senior working group on national security. We had a wide-ranging discussion on the challenges facing our nation.

I've been pleased to draw on the support of these distinguished Americans during this campaign. I was also honored to receive the support of Colin Powell on Sunday, who is a friend and former colleague to many of those here with me. General Powell is one of the finest soldiers and statesmen of our time. He has been a source of advice, and I look forward to drawing on his counsel - and the counsel of all of those standing with me today - if I am President.

The next President will take office at a time of great uncertainty for America. We are in the midst of the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. And as challenging as our current economic crisis is, the next President will have to focus on national security challenges on many fronts. The terrorists who attacked us on 9/11 are still at large and plotting, and we must be vigilant in preventing future attacks. We are fighting two wars abroad. We are facing a range of 21st century threats - from terrorism to nuclear proliferation to our dependence on foreign oil - which have grown more daunting because of the failed policies of the last eight years.

To succeed, we need leadership that understands the connection between our economy and our strength in the world. We often hear about two debates - one on national security and one on the economy - but that is a false distinction. We can't afford another President who ignores the fundamentals of our economy while running up record deficits to fight a war without end in Iraq.

We must be strong at home to be strong abroad - that is the lesson of our history. Our economy supports our military power, it increases our diplomatic leverage, and it is a foundation of America's leadership and in the world. Through World War II, American workers built an Arsenal of Democracy that helped our heroic troops face down fascism. Through the Cold War, the engine of the American economy helped power our triumph over Communism.

Now, we must renew American competitiveness to support our security and global leadership. That means creating millions of jobs in a new American energy sector, so that we're not borrowing billions from China to buy oil from Saudi Arabia - for the sake of our economy and our security, we must end our dependence on foreign oil. Keeping America ahead also calls for investments in American education, innovation and infrastructure, so that our kids can compete, our homeland is secure, and our country remains on the cutting edge.

It also means leading an international response to the financial crisis. On September 19th, I called for a globally coordinated effort with our partners in the G-20 to stabilize the credit markets. I'm happy that today, the White House announced a summit of the G-20 countries that provides an opportunity to advance the kind of cooperation that I called for last month. America must lead, and other nations must be part of the solution too.

We must recognize that from global economic turmoil to global terrorism, the challenges we face demand American leadership of strong alliances. When America is isolated, we shoulder these burdens alone, and the security and prosperity of the American people is put at risk. Yet for eight years, we have seen our alliances weakened and our standing in the world set back.

We cannot afford four more years of policies that have failed to adjust to our new century. We're not going to defeat a terrorist network that operates in eighty countries through an occupation of Iraq. We're not going to deny the nuclear ambitions of Iran by refusing to pursue direct diplomacy alongside our allies.

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We're not going to secure the American people and promote American values with empty bluster. It's time for a fundamental change, and that's why I'm running for President.

This change must start with a responsible end to the war in Iraq. We shouldn't keep spending \$10 billion a month in Iraq while the Iraqis sit on a huge surplus. Today, we discussed how to succeed in Iraq by transitioning to Iraqi responsibility. For the sake of our economy, our military, and the long-term stability of Iraq, it's time for the Iraqis to step up.

Ending the war will help us deal with Afghanistan, which we talked about at length this morning. In 2002, I said we should focus on finishing the fight against Osama bin Laden. Throughout this campaign, I have argued that we need more troops and more resources to win the war in Afghanistan, and to confront the growing threat from al Qaeda along the Pakistani border.

Over seven years after 9/11, the situation in Afghanistan is grave. This is the most violent year of the war, with the highest number of American casualties. The Taliban is on the offensive, al Qaeda has a sanctuary across the border in Pakistan, and some experts believe that 50 percent of the Afghan economy comes from the heroin trade. As the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff recently said, "The trends across the board are not going in the right direction."

Make no mistake: we are confronting an urgent crisis in Afghanistan, and we have to act. It's time to heed the call from General McKiernan and others for more troops. That's why I'd send at least two or three additional combat brigades to Afghanistan. We also need more training for Afghan Security forces, more non-military assistance to help Afghans develop alternatives to poppy farming, more safeguards to prevent corruption, and a new effort to crack down on cross-border terrorism. Only a comprehensive strategy that prioritizes Afghanistan and the fight against al Qaeda will succeed, and that's the change I'll bring to the White House.

There is a clear choice in this election. On issue after issue, Senator McCain has supported the key decisions and core approach of President Bush. As President, he would continue the policies that have put our economy into crisis and endangered our national security. And as he's shown over the last few weeks, he would also continue the divisive politics that undercuts the bipartisan cooperation and national unity that is so badly needed in challenging times.

We need to change course. At home, we must invest in the competitiveness of the American economy. Abroad, we need a new direction that ends the war in Iraq, focuses on the fight against al Qaeda and the Taliban, and restores strong alliances and tough American diplomacy. To keep our country safe and prosperous, we need leadership that brings the American people together. That is the lesson of our history. Together, we cannot fail; together, we can rise to meet any challenge.

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