

Speech by Barack Obama, 15 July 2008

New challenges for a new world

Sixty-one years ago, George Marshall announced the plan that would come to bear his name. Much of Europe lay in ruins. The United States faced a powerful and ideological enemy intent on world domination. This menace was magnified by the recently discovered capability to destroy life on an unimaginable scale. The Soviet Union didn't yet have an atomic bomb, but before long it would.

The challenge facing the greatest generation of Americans - the generation that had vanquished fascism on the battlefield - was how to contain this threat while, at the same time, extending freedom's frontiers. Leaders like Truman and Acheson, Kennan and Marshall, knew that there was no single decisive blow that could be struck for freedom. Instead, what we needed was a new overarching strategy to meet the challenges of a new and dangerous world.

Such a strategy would join overwhelming military strength with sound judgment. It would shape events not just through military force, but through the force of our ideas; through economic power, intelligence and diplomacy. It would support strong allies that freely shared our ideals of liberty and democracy; open markets and the rule of law. It would foster new international institutions like the United Nations, NATO, and the World Bank, and focus on every corner of the globe. It was a strategy that saw clearly the world's dangers, while seizing its promise.

As a general, Marshall had spent years helping FDR wage war. But the Marshall Plan - which was just one part of this strategy - helped rebuild not only allies, but also the nation that Marshall had plotted to defeat. In the speech announcing his plan, he concluded not with tough talk or definitive declarations - but rather with questions and a call for perspective. "The whole world-The whole world of the future," Marshall said, "hangs on a proper judgment." To make that judgment, he asked the American people to examine distant events that directly affected their security and prosperity. He closed by asking: "What is needed? What can best be done? What must be done?"

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Today's dangers are different, though no less grave. The power to destroy life on a catastrophic scale now risks falling into the hands of terrorists. The future of our security - and our planet - is held hostage to our dependence on foreign oil and gas. From the cave-spotted mountains of northwest Pakistan, to the centrifuges spinning beneath Iranian soil, we know that the American people cannot be protected by oceans or the sheer might of our military alone.

The attacks of September 11 brought this new reality into a terrible and ominous focus. On that bright and beautiful day, the world of peace and prosperity that appeared to be the legacy of our Cold War victory seemed to suddenly vanish under rubble, and twisted steel, and clouds of smoke.

But, all of you I'm sure will recall, the depth of this tragedy also drew out the decency and determination of our nation. At blood banks and vigils; in schools and in the United States Congress, Americans were united - more united, even, than we were at the dawn of the Cold War. The world, too, was united against the perpetrators of this evil act, as old allies, new friends, and even long-time adversaries stood by our side. It was time - once again - for America's might and moral suasion to be harnessed; it was time to once again shape a new security strategy for an ever-changing world.

Imagine, for a moment, what we could have done in those days, and months, and years after 9/11.

We could have deployed the full force of American power to hunt down and destroy Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda, the Taliban, and all of the terrorists responsible for 9/11, while supporting real security and development in Afghanistan.

We could have secured loose nuclear materials around the world, and updated a 20th century non-proliferation framework to meet the challenges of the 21st.

We could have invested hundreds of billions of dollars in alternative sources of energy and energy efficiency to grow our economy, save our planet, and end the tyranny of oil.

We could have strengthened old alliances, formed new partnerships, and renewed international institutions to advance peace and prosperity.

We could have called on a new generation to step into the strong currents of history, and to serve their country as troops and teachers, Peace Corps volunteers and police officers.

We could have secured our homeland-investing in sophisticated new protection for our ports, our trains and our power plants.

We could have rebuilt our roads and bridges, laid down new rail and broadband and electricity grids, and made college affordable for every American to strengthen our ability to compete. We could've invested in science and technology.

We could have done that.

Instead, we have lost thousands of American lives, spent nearly a trillion dollars, alienated allies and neglected emerging threats - all in the cause of fighting a war for well over five years in a country that had absolutely nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks.

Our men and women in uniform have accomplished every mission we have given them. They have performed brilliantly. So what's missing in our debate about Iraq - what has been missing since before the war began - is a discussion of the strategic consequences of Iraq and its dominance of our foreign policy. This war distracts us from every threat that we face and so many opportunities we could seize. This war diminishes our security, our standing in the world, our military, our economy, and the resources that we need to confront the challenges of the 21st century. By any measure, our single-minded and open-ended focus on Iraq is not a sound strategy for keeping America safe.

I am running for President of the United States to lead this country in a new direction - to seize this moment's promise. Instead of being distracted from the most pressing threats that we face, I want to overcome them. Instead of pushing the entire burden of our foreign policy on to the brave men and women of our military, I want to use all elements of American power to keep us safe, and prosperous, and free. Instead of alienating ourselves from the world, I want America - once again - to lead.

As President, I intend to pursue a tough, smart and principled national security strategy - one that recognizes that we have interests beyond Baghdad, but in Kandahar and Karachi, in Tokyo and London, in Beijing and Berlin. I will focus this strategy on five goals essential to making America safer: ending the war in Iraq responsibly; finishing the fight against al Qaeda and the Taliban; securing all nuclear weapons and materials from terrorists and rogue states; achieving true energy security; and rebuilding our alliances to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

My opponent in this campaign has served this country with honor, and we all respect his sacrifice. We both want to do what we think is best to defend the American people. But we have made different judgments, and would lead in very different directions. That starts with our difference on Iraq.

I opposed going to war in Iraq; Senator McCain was one of Washington's biggest supporters for war. I warned that the invasion of a country posing no imminent threat would fan the flames of extremism, and distract us from the fight against al Qaeda and the Taliban; Senator McCain claimed that we would be greeted as liberators, and that democracy would spread across the Middle East. Those were the judgments we made on the most important strategic question since the end of the Cold War.

Now, all of us recognize that we must do more than look back - we must make a judgment about how to move forward. In the words of General Marshall, "What is needed? What can best be done? What must be done?" Senator McCain wants to talk of our tactics in Iraq; I want to focus on a new strategy for Iraq and the wider world.

It has been 18 months since President Bush announced the surge. As I have said many times, our troops have performed brilliantly in lowering the level of violence. General Petraeus has used new tactics to protect the Iraqi population. We have talked directly to Sunni tribes that used to be hostile to America, and supported their fight against al Qaeda. Shiite militias have generally respected a cease-fire. Those are the facts, and all Americans welcome them.

For weeks, now, Senator McCain has argued that the gains of the surge mean that I should change my commitment to end the war. But this argument misconstrues what is necessary to succeed in Iraq, and stubbornly ignores the facts of the broader strategic picture that we face.

In the 18 months since the surge began, the strain on our military has increased, our troops and their families have borne an enormous burden, and American taxpayers have spent another \$200 billion in Iraq. That's over \$10 billion each month. That is a consequence of our current strategy.

In the 18 months since the surge began, the situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated. June was our highest casualty month of the war. The Taliban has been on the offensive, even launching a brazen attack on one of our own bases. Al Qaeda has a growing sanctuary in Pakistan. Those consequence of our strategy in Iraq.

In the 18 months since the surge began, as I warned at the outset - Iraq's leaders have not made the political progress that was the purpose of the surge. They have not invested tens of billions of dollars in oil revenues to rebuild their country. They have not resolved their differences or shaped a new political compact.

That is why I strongly stand by my plan to end this war. Now, Prime Minister Maliki's call for a timetable for the removal of U.S. forces presents a genuine opportunity. It comes at a time when the American general in charge of training Iraq's Security Forces has testified that Iraq's Army and Police will be ready to assume responsibility for Iraq's security in 2009. Now is the time for a responsible redeployment of our combat troops that pushes Iraq's leaders toward a political solution, rebuilds our military, and refocuses on Afghanistan and our broader security interests.

George Bush and John McCain don't have a strategy for success in Iraq - they have a strategy for staying in Iraq. They said we couldn't leave when violence was up, and they now say we can't leave when violence is down. They refuse to press the Iraqis to make tough choices, and they label any timetable to redeploy our troops "surrender," even though we would be turning Iraq over to a sovereign Iraqi government - not to a terrorist enemy. Theirs is an endless focus on tactics inside Iraq, with no consideration of our strategy to face threats beyond Iraq's borders.

At some point, a judgment must be made. Iraq is not going to be a perfect place, and we do not have unlimited resources to try to make it one. We are not going to kill every al Qaeda sympathizer, eliminate every trace of Iranian influence, or stand up a flawless democracy before we leave - General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker acknowledged this to me when they testified last April. That's why the accusation of surrender is false rhetoric used to justify a failed policy. In fact, true success in Iraq - victory in Iraq - will not take place in a surrender ceremony where an enemy lays down their arms.

True success will take place when we leave Iraq to a government that is taking responsibility for its future - a government that prevents sectarian conflict, and ensures that the al Qaeda threat which has been beaten back by our troops does not reemerge. That is an achievable goal if we pursue a comprehensive plan to press the Iraqis to stand up.

To achieve that success, I will give our military a new mission on my first day in office: ending this war. Let me be clear: we must be as careful getting out of Iraq as we were careless getting in. We can safely redeploy our combat brigades at a pace that would remove them in 16 months. That would be the summer of 2010 - one year after Iraqi Security Forces will be prepared to stand up; two years from now, and more than seven years after the war began. After this redeployment, we will keep a residual force to perform specific missions in Iraq: targeting any remnants of al Qaeda; protecting our service members and diplomats; and training and supporting Iraq's Security Forces, so long as the Iraqis make political progress.

And yes, we will make tactical adjustments as we implement this strategy - that is what any responsible Commander-in-Chief must do. As I have consistently said, I will consult with commanders on the ground and the Iraqi government. We will redeploy from secure areas first and volatile areas later. We will commit \$2 billion to a meaningful international effort to support the more than 4 million displaced Iraqis. We will forge a new coalition to support Iraq's future - one that includes all of Iraq's neighbors, and also the United Nations, the World Bank, and the European Union - because we all have a stake in stability. And we will make it clear that the United States seeks no permanent bases in Iraq.

That is the future that Iraqis want. This is the future that the American people want. And that is what our common interests demand. Both America and Iraq will be more secure when the terrorist in Anbar is taken out, being taken out, by the Iraqi Army, and the criminal in Baghdad fears Iraqi Police, not just coalition forces. Both America and Iraq will succeed when every Arab government has an embassy open in Baghdad, and the child in Basra benefits from services provided by Iraqi dinars, not American tax dollars.

This is the future we need for our military. We cannot tolerate this strain on our forces to fight a war that has not made us safer. I will restore our strength by ending this war, completing the increase of our ground forces by 65,000 soldiers and 27,000 marines, and investing in the capabilities we need to defeat conventional foes and meet the unconventional challenges of our time.

So let's be clear. Senator McCain would have our troops continue to fight tour after tour of duty, and our taxpayers keep spending \$10 billion a month indefinitely; I want Iraqis to take responsibility for their own future, and to reach the political accommodation necessary for long-term stability. That is victory. That is success. That's what's best for Iraq, that's what's best for America, and that's why I will end this war as President.

In fact - as should have been apparent to President Bush and Senator McCain - the central front in the war on terror is not Iraq, and it never was. That's why the second goal of my new strategy will be taking the fight to al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

It is unacceptable that almost seven years after nearly 3,000 Americans were killed on our soil, the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11 are still at large. Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri are recording messages to their followers and plotting more terror. The Taliban controls parts of Afghanistan. Al Qaeda has an expanding base in Pakistan that is probably no farther from their old Afghan sanctuary than a train ride from Washington to Philadelphia. If another attack on our homeland comes, it will likely come from the same region where 9/11 was planned. And yet today, we have five times more troops in Iraq than Afghanistan.

Senator McCain said - just months ago - that "Afghanistan is not in trouble because of our diversion to Iraq." I could not disagree more. Our troops and our NATO allies are performing heroically in Afghanistan, but I have argued for years that we lack the resources to finish the job because of our commitment to Iraq. That's what the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said earlier this month. And that's why, as President, I will make the fight against al Qaeda and the Taliban the top priority that it should be. This is a war that we have to win.

I will send at least two additional combat brigades to Afghanistan, and use this commitment to seek greater contributions - with fewer restrictions - from NATO allies. I will focus on training Afghan security forces and supporting an Afghan judiciary, with more resources and incentives for American officers who perform these missions. Just as we succeeded in the Cold War by supporting allies who could sustain their own security, we must realize that the 21st century's frontlines are not only on the field of battle - they are found in the training exercises near Kabul, in the police station in Kandahar, and in the rule of law in Herat.

Moreover, lasting security will only come if we heed Marshall's lesson, and help Afghans grow their economy from the bottom up. That's why I've proposed an additional \$1 billion in non-military assistance each year, with meaningful safeguards to prevent corruption and to make sure investments are made - not just in Kabul - but out in Afghanistan's provinces. As a part of this program, we'll invest in alternative livelihoods to poppy-growing for Afghan farmers, just as we crack down on heroin trafficking. We cannot lose Afghanistan to a future of narco-terrorism. The Afghan people must know that our commitment to their future is enduring, because the security of Afghanistan and the United States is shared.

The greatest threat to that security lies in the tribal regions of Pakistan, where terrorists train and insurgents strike in Afghanistan. We cannot tolerate a terrorist sanctuary, and as President, I will not. We need a stronger and sustained partnership between Afghanistan, Pakistan and NATO to secure the border, to take out terrorist camps, and to crack down on cross-border insurgents. We need more troops, more helicopters, more satellites, more Predator drones in the Afghan border region. And we must make it clear that if Pakistan cannot or will not act, we will take out high-level terrorist targets like bin Laden if we have them in our sights.

Make no mistake: we can't succeed in Afghanistan or secure our homeland unless we change our Pakistan policy. We must expect more of the Pakistani government, but we must offer more than a blank check to a General who has lost the confidence of his people. It's time to strengthen stability by standing up for the aspirations of the Pakistani people. That's why I'm cosponsoring a bill with Joe Biden and Dick Lugar to triple non-military aid to the Pakistani people and to sustain it for a decade, while ensuring that the military assistance we do provide is used to take the fight to the Taliban and al Qaeda. We must move beyond a purely military alliance built on convenience, or face mounting popular opposition in a nuclear-armed nation at the nexus of terror and radical Islam.

Only a strong Pakistani democracy can help us move toward my third goal - and that is securing all nuclear weapons and materials from terrorists and rogue states. One of the terrible ironies of the Iraq War is that President Bush used the threat of nuclear terrorism to invade a country that had no active nuclear program. But the fact that the President misled us into a misguided war doesn't diminish the threat of a terrorist with a weapon of mass destruction - in fact, it has only increased it.

In those years after World War II, we worried about the deadly atom falling into the hands of the Kremlin. Now, we worry about 50 tons of highly enriched uranium - some of it poorly secured - at civilian nuclear facilities in over forty countries. Now, we worry about the breakdown of a non-proliferation framework that was designed for the bipolar world of the Cold War. Now, we worry - most of all - about a rogue state or nuclear scientist transferring the world's deadliest weapons to the world's most dangerous people: terrorists who won't think twice about killing themselves and hundreds of thousands in Tel Aviv or Moscow, or London or New York.

We cannot wait any longer to protect the American people. I've made this a priority in the Senate, where I worked with Republican Senator Dick Lugar to pass a law accelerating our pursuit of loose nuclear materials. I will lead a global nuclear, uh global effort to secure all loose nuclear materials around the world during my first term as President. And I'll develop new defenses to protect against the 21st century threat of biological weapons and cyber-terrorism - threats that I'll discuss in more detail tomorrow.

Beyond taking these immediate, urgent steps, it's time to send a clear message: America seeks a world with no nuclear weapons. As long as nuclear weapons exist, we must retain a strong deterrent. And I will never waver from that commitment. But instead of threatening to kick them out of the G-8, we need to work with Russia to take U.S. and Russian ballistic missiles off hair-trigger alert; to dramatically reduce the stockpiles of our nuclear weapons and material; to seek a global ban on the production of fissile material for weapons; and to expand the U.S.-Russian ban on intermediate-range missiles so that the agreement is global. By keeping our commitment under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, we'll be in a better position to press nations like North Korea and Iran to keep theirs. In particular, it will give us more credibility and leverage in dealing with Iran.

We cannot tolerate nuclear weapons in the hands of nations that support terror. Preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons is a vital national security interest of the United States. No tool of statecraft should be taken off the table, but Senator McCain would continue a failed policy that has seen Iran strengthen its position, advance its nuclear program, and stockpile 150 kilos of low enriched uranium. I will use all elements of American power to pressure the Iranian regime, starting with aggressive, principled and direct diplomacy - diplomacy backed with strong sanctions and without preconditions.

There will be careful preparation. I commend the work of our European allies on this important matter, and we should be full partners in that effort. Ultimately the measure of any effort is whether it leads to a change behavior in Iranian. That's why we must pursue these tough negotiations in full coordination with our allies, bringing to bear our full influence - including, if it will advance our interests, my meeting with the appropriate Iranian leader at a time and place of my choosing.

We will pursue this diplomacy with no illusions about the Iranian regime. Instead, we will present a clear choice. If you abandon your nuclear program, support for terror, and your threats to Israel, there will be meaningful incentives. If you refuse, then we will ratchet up the pressure, with stronger unilateral sanctions; stronger multilateral sanctions in the Security Council, and sustained action outside the UN to isolate the Iranian regime. That's the diplomacy we need. And the Iranians should negotiate now; by waiting, they will only face mounting pressure.

The surest way to increase our leverage against Iran in the long-run is to stop bankrolling its ambitions. That will depend on achieving my fourth goal: ending the tyranny of oil in our time.

One of the most dangerous weapons in the world today is the price of oil. We ship nearly \$700 million a day to unstable or hostile nations for their oil. It pays for terrorist bombs going off from Baghdad to Beirut. It funds petro-diplomacy in Caracas and radical madrasas from Karachi to Khartoum. It takes leverage away from America and shifts it to dictators.

This immediate danger is eclipsed only by the long-term threat from climate change, which will lead to devastating weather patterns, terrible storms, drought, and famine. That means people competing for food and water in the next fifty years in the very places that have known horrific violence in the last fifty years : Africa, the Middle East, South Asia. Most disastrously, that could mean destructive storms on our shores, and the disappearance of our coastline.

This is not just an economic issue or an environmental concern - this is a national security crisis. For the sake of our security - and for every American family that is paying the price at the pump right now - we must end this dependence on foreign oil. And as President, that's exactly what I'll do. Small steps and political gimmickry just won't do. I'll invest \$150 billion over the next ten years-15 billion dollars a year- to put America on the path to true energy security. This fund will fast track investments in a new green energy business sector that will end our addiction to oil and create up to 5 million jobs over the next two decades, and help secure the future of our planet and our country. We'll invest in research and development of every form of alternative energy - solar, wind, and biofuels, as well as technologies that can make coal clean and nuclear power safe. And from the moment I take office, I will let it be known that the United States of America is ready to lead again.

Never again will we sit on the sidelines, or stand in the way of global action to tackle this global challenge. I will reach out to the leaders of the biggest carbon emitting nations and ask them to join a new Global Energy Forum that will lay the foundation for the next generation of climate protocols. We will also build an alliance of oil-importing nations and work together to reduce our demand, and to break the grip of OPEC on the global economy. We'll set a goal of an 80% reduction in global emissions by 2050. And as we develop new forms of clean energy here at home, we will share our technology and our innovations with all the nations of the world.

That is the tradition of American leadership on behalf of the global good. And that will be my fifth goal - rebuilding our alliances to meet the common challenges of the 21st century.

For all of our power, America is strongest when we act alongside strong partners. We faced down fascism with the greatest war-time alliance the world has ever known. We stood shoulder to shoulder with our NATO allies against the Soviet threat, and paid a far smaller price for the first Gulf War because we acted together with a broad coalition. We helped create the United Nations - not to constrain America's influence, but to amplify it by advancing our values.

Now is the time for a new era of international cooperation. It's time for America and Europe to renew our common commitment to face down the threats of the 21st century just as we did the challenges of the 20th. It's time to strengthen our partnerships with Japan, South Korea, Australia and the world's largest democracy - India - to create a stable and prosperous Asia. It's time to engage China on common interests like climate change, even as we continue to encourage their shift to a more open and market-based society. It's time to strengthen NATO by asking more of our allies, while always approaching them with the respect owed a full partner. It's time to reform the United Nations, so that this imperfect institution can become more perfect. A more perfect forum to share burdens, strengthen our leverage, and promote our values. It's time to deepen our engagement to help resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, so that we help our ally Israel achieve true and lasting security, while helping Palestinians achieve their legitimate aspirations for statehood.

And just as we renew longstanding efforts, so must we shape new ones to meet new challenges. That's why I'll create a Shared Security Partnership Program - a new alliance of nations to strengthen cooperative efforts to take down global terrorist networks, while standing up against torture and brutality. That's why we'll work with the African Union to enhance its ability to keep the peace in its neighborhood. That's why we'll build a new partnership to roll back the trafficking of drugs, and guns, and gangs in the Americas. That's what we can do if we are ready to engage the world.

We will have to provide meaningful resources to meet critical priorities. And I know development assistance is not the most popular program, but as President, I will make the case to the American people that it can be our best investment in increasing the common security of the entire world and increasing our own security. That was true with the Marshall Plan, and that must be true today. That's why I'll double our foreign assistance to \$50 billion by 2012, and use it to support a stable future in failing states, and sustainable growth in Africa; to halve global poverty and to roll back disease. To send once more a message to those yearning faces beyond our shores that says, "You matter to us. Your future is our future. And our moment is now." Our moment is now.

This must be the moment when we answer the call of history. For eight years, we have paid the price for a foreign policy that lectures without listening; that divides us from one another - and from the world - instead of calling us to a common purpose; politics that focuses on our tactics in fighting a war without end in Iraq instead of forging a new strategy to face down the true threats that we face. We cannot afford four more years of a strategy that is so out of balance and out of step with this defining moment.

I recognize none of this will be easy, but I also recall we have faced great odds before. When General Marshall first spoke about the plan that would bear his name, the rubble of Berlin had not yet been built into a wall.

But Marshall knew that even the fiercest of adversaries could forge bonds of friendship founded in freedom. He had the confidence to know that the purpose and pragmatism of the American people could outlast any foe. Today, the dangers and divisions that came with the dawn of the Cold War have receded. Now, the defeat of the threats of the past has been replaced by the transnational threats of today. We know what is needed. We know what can best be done. We know what must be done. Now it falls on us to act with the same sense of purpose and pragmatism as an earlier generation, to join with friends and partners to lead the world anew.

Thank you very much everybody.