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Introduction of Senator John McCain
“Why Freedom Still Matters -- Human Rights and Foreign Policy”
November 9, 2009

Thank you, Jessica. I am delighted to be here today, and to have the honor of introducing our guest speaker.

I am delighted to be here – and for that, I want to offer a special thanks to you, Dean Einhorn, and to the Executive Director of the Center on Transatlantic Relations, Dan Hamilton. The Center on Transatlantic Relations is Washington’s premier academic think tank focused solely on analysis and policy recommendations spanning the full spectrum of U.S.-European global partnership.

Senator John McCain is our first speaker in an initiative we are launching at the Center called the “Transatlantic Leaders Forum.”

And I am also delighted to introduce our guest speaker, because it is someone for whom I have enormous respect, and indeed someone I worked for in his Senate office back in 1997-1998.

Before I do, however, let me offer a special word of thanks to some of the students here at SAIS – Nikolas Foster, Julia Frohneberg, Daniel Bloemers, Johanna von der Weppen, Karoline Raeder, Tracy Meyer, Elmer Sulk.

It was these students who had the idea of building a make-shift “Berlin Wall” outside in the courtyard – and using it as a symbol to focus on “Walls Still to Fall.”

They invited some notable speakers – including Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, Markus Meckel, who served as East Germany’s Foreign Minister as it negotiated the union with West Germany. People offered messages about the need to tear down walls of injustice today, and the symbolic wall is being torn down today, the 20th anniversary of the fall of the real Berlin Wall.

Now, it is a cliché to be asked to introduce someone, and say that they need no introduction. But here I am asked to introduce someone for whom over 59 million Americans, and for that matter 22 states, cast their votes just one year ago. Talk about needing no introduction.

So rather inevitably, I will tell you a few things about John McCain you already know. But I'll try to throw in a few things that perhaps you don't know as well.

The most important thing to know about John McCain is that time and again, when he could have done far less – when he could have made the easy choice – John McCain has instead risen to do extraordinary things that have had a lasting, positive impact on our nation.

He jokes about them – such as his crashing one of his A-4 aircraft, getting another one blown up, and finally getting shot down in another one. But that only underscores his courage and leadership, as his comrades saw his determination.

You know the story of his torture as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, and his refusal to accept an early release because of his famous father, the Pacific Commander. And with that selfless act, he inspired those who were in captivity with him, and eventually, all those who were not.

He is honest about our failings as human beings. We see so many politicians these days – people who share all our human weaknesses, but by seeking to portray themselves as perfect only come across as hypocrites. John McCain inspires us because he is imperfect like the rest of us, yet is uncompromising on moral values. That's honest leadership.

The word "Maverick" has been over-used. But it was again dragged into our political lexicon because John McCain always put principle over partisanship.

Whether it was campaign finance reform, or a comprehensive tobacco settlement, or fighting off Congressionally imposed troop ceilings on foreign deployments, or – when the time came – pressing for a surge in Iraq, what mattered was that he stood for what he truly believed was the best for our country, regardless of where his party stood, or what was in his own personal interest.

This clarity about politics and moral values led him to propose legislation a few years ago to guarantee that when America held detainees, they would be treated humanely.

I remember the day the Detainee Treatment Act of 2005 was introduced. I had just finished working at the National Security Council and taken up new duties at the Department of State.

And I was deeply frustrated at how the United States was perceived around the world as a torturer, and how the moral goals behind our foreign policy were discounted as a result.

I was in a taxi and heard on the radio that Senator McCain had introduced this legislation, and immediately called a friend of mine on his Senate staff to congratulate him and to thank him, recognizing how important this step was to righting the image of our country abroad. Imagine my embarrassment when I was told that the Senator was in intense, shall we say, “discussions” with the Administration about the legislation.

Yet John McCain stood his ground on values and helped bring our country forward. And it is that clarity that gives him a unique position to discuss human rights in foreign policy today.

Finally, let me just remind all of us today about one of the great acts in our democracy in modern times. On the night of November 4, 2008, John McCain gave what I believe is the most significant concession speech at the end of any Presidential race in memory. With a country deeply divided, facing a financial crisis, a growing recession, and two wars abroad, John McCain again put country first. He said,

“These are difficult times for our country. And I pledge to [Senator Obama] tonight to do all in my power to help him lead us through the many challenges we face.

I urge all Americans ... I urge all Americans who supported me to join me in not just congratulating him, but offering our next president our goodwill and earnest effort to find ways to come together to find the necessary compromises to bridge our differences and help restore our prosperity, defend our security in a dangerous world, and leave our children and grandchildren a stronger, better country than we inherited.”

We still face those same challenges today, but with a country again polarized on political lines. Those words of political maturity uttered one year ago echo loudly today.

I was in Brussels as U.S. Ambassador to NATO as those words were stated, and they had an amazing impact on my European colleagues. Many of them, rather undiplomatically, favored Senator Obama, and saw the campaign as a good, old-fashioned political fight – up or down, win or lose, victory and defeat – nothing more.

But when they heard John McCain in defeat call for the best for our country, it suddenly hit them that this was about something more – and it showed them again the best face of a great nation.

And for that, I think we are all grateful, and again, inspired to be what we should become, rather than merely what we are.

It is now my distinct honor to introduce to you Senator John McCain.



U.S. SENATOR • ARIZONA

JOHN McCAIN

<http://mccain.senate.gov>

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**ADDRESS BY SENATOR JOHN McCAIN TO THE JOHN'S HOPKINS
UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senator John McCain (R-AZ) will commemorate the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and speak about the continuing need for the United States to support human rights in its foreign policy at an address to the Johns Hopkins University Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) today, Monday, November 9, 2009. Remarks are prepared for delivery and embargoed until 1:00 pm ET:

“Thank you, Kurt, for that very kind introduction. And thank you for your many years of service to our country. You are a model of what a Foreign Service Officer should be, and the State Department’s loss is very much Johns Hopkins’ gain.

“Thank you as well to Dean Einhorn, and to all of the leadership of this great university, for inviting me here today. The Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies is one of the world’s finest places of higher learning. And it is a privilege to speak to such a distinguished group of present and future leaders.

“Reaching out to young people like you was a key part of my presidential campaign last year – and look what that got me. All I have to show for it is an unhealthy obsession with Twitter. Actually, I wrote the following item there this morning: ‘Twenty years ago today, the Berlin Wall fell, Germany was united, Europe was transformed, and history was made.’ This was a genuine turning point in human events. And I am honored to be here with you today to commemorate it.

“I imagine the fall of the Berlin Wall was a moment when some of you first began to grow aware of the wider world, and its capacity for change. At the time, you may not have fully grasped the enormity of that day 20 years ago. But you’re now learning about the forces that led to the events of November 9, 1989 – when Germans poured into the streets of Berlin by the millions, tore down one of authoritarianism’s most offensive monuments, and in so doing, not only reunited their nation, but brought forth the promise of a Europe whole, free and at peace.

“The shockwaves of that day reverberated for years to come – realigning the tectonic plates of geopolitics, and expanding the very boundaries of what people at the time thought possible. The fall of the Berlin Wall led directly to peaceful revolutions that liberated central and eastern Europe ... to the collapse of an evil empire that threatened the peace of the world for decades ... to the transformation of the world’s greatest alliance, NATO, into an institution for unifying

Europe ... and to the single largest expansion of freedom in history, which has stretched across Asia, deep into Africa, and throughout our own hemisphere. This is the world you have grown up knowing, and the world that you now inherit. And to think: All of it began 20 years ago today. It's a truly remarkable thing.

“For an old guy like me, today also brings back many other memories – memories of ‘the long twilight struggle’ that preceded the fall of the Wall. I remember moments when the fate of the world seemed to hang in the balance, but wise and brave decisions by Americans of both parties, and by our allies, helped to keep the peace. I remember the enormous sacrifice that this peace entailed – the many brave souls, some of them my friends, who gave their lives to win the Cold War.

“Most of all, I remember five long decades when, for all our many differences, Americans nonetheless maintained a bipartisan commitment to the freedom and security of our allies. And together, we in the West kept faith with those on the other side of the walls of that world struggle, confident that they wanted the same things we did – liberty equal justice, an opportunity to prosper by their own talents, and a chance to live under the rule of law, not under the thumbs of tyrants.

“This, my friends, is what today's anniversary is all about. The Berlin Wall fell for many reasons – it's true. Economic power had a lot to do with it – for without the combined wealth of the West, we would never have overcome our darkest hours of need. Military power also had a lot to do with it – for without the strength to defend ourselves, our dreams of peace would have remained just that. But beyond all of this, what truly toppled the Berlin Wall and ended the Cold War was a deeper power, a moral power – the universal appeal of human rights, and the support of the West for all who struggled for these values behind the Iron Curtain.

“That support for human rights came from European allies like Konrad Adenauer, Helmut Kohl, and Margaret Thatcher. It came from Democrats like Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, and Scoop Jackson. And it came from Republicans like Ronald Reagan – whose message of solidarity with the oppressed carried into the coldest gulags of the Soviet empire, and who stood before the bleakest symbol of the Cold War, and told Mr. Gorbachev to tear the awful thing down.

“In retrospect, this all seems unobjectionable. But I can assure you, my friends, it was anything but. Some objected because they thought America had no right to preach moral values when we failed to live up to them ourselves at times. Others objected because they felt the most America could do for human rights was to lead by example, but not take sides on the internal matters of other countries. Still others objected because they saw issues of morality and human rights as secondary to the real business of foreign policy – to the trade-offs, and deal-making, and interest-seeking of the world as it is, not as we would wish it to be.

“We heard all of these arguments back then, and we hear them again now – for this great debate over human rights and foreign policy is as old as America itself, and it continues to this day. I know the Bush Administration spoke a lot about freedom, and democracy, and human rights. But that does not make them dirty words, and it does not make them ideas unworthy of our support today. Quite the contrary. The good thing is, America's long-running debate over whether, and how, to support human rights offers a lot of lessons to guide us at present. I'm just old enough to remember some of them, so I'd like to suggest a few of these lessons to you today.

“Most important is this: The United States has a special responsibility to champion human rights – in all places, for all peoples, and at all times. Why us? The answer, I think, is simple: It’s who we are. Human rights – the right to life and liberty, to the protection of property, and to rule by the consent of the governed – these values are the core of our national creed. And it is fidelity to these values – not ethnicity or religion, culture or class – that makes one an American.

“And yet, human rights are not just American values; they are universal values. We embody them, but we do not own them. We think it should not be just the purpose of our government, but of all governments, to protect human rights. And when we see rulers who violate the basic rights of their citizens, it offends a sense of justice in us that we believe is shared by all people, regardless of their differences. It leads us to demand better of governments, for the simple reason that it is the right thing to do. Since America’s earliest days, human rights have shaped not only who we are, but how we conduct ourselves abroad. And this should never change.

“Our experience suggests another reason, a more self-interested reason, why human rights matter. I know that, in your studies here at Johns Hopkins, you are reading thinkers who suggest that what matters most in international relations is not how governments treat their people, but how they behave toward other governments. At the risk of angering your professors, I will save you some work: That theory is false. The character of states cannot be separated from their conduct in the world. Governments that protect the basic rights of their citizens are more apt to play a peaceful role in world affairs. At the same time, if governments cheat, and lie, and use violence against their own people, how do you think they will deal with us?

“Look at Russia. Is it a coincidence that as Russia has reverted to authoritarianism at home, it has also become more aggressive abroad? Is it a coincidence that a Russia in which peaceful critics of the government are murdered invaded its neighbor, Georgia, and occupies parts of it to this day? Is it coincidence that a leader who has described the peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union as ‘the worst geopolitical catastrophe’ of the 20th century now wants to dominate the nations of the old Soviet ‘near abroad’? I wish this were coincidental. But sadly, it is not.

“If we do not accept that the nature of regimes shapes their conduct, we misread international politics in a profound and detrimental way. We risk expecting better behavior from despotic rulers than we have reason to. And we risk missing what is often the most transformational force for good in our world: the anger of oppressed people, and the hope they nurture for change. That internal spark is what brought Germans into the streets of Berlin 20 years ago, and made us all a whole lot safer.

“A world where the human rights of more people in more places are respected is not only a more just world. It is a more stable, more secure world. U.S. foreign policy is a complex mix of pressing concerns. We know the benefits of defending and promoting our values can often be long in coming, and our support for human rights will never be our only priority. But we must always make it a high priority.

“It matters what we say – or don’t say. The United States remains the world’s leading power, and when our leaders speak, governments and people take notice. President Reagan always spoke up for the captives of communism. Some of those prisoners acknowledge their jailers might have kicked them a little harder because of it – but also how little it mattered, compared to the encouragement of knowing they were not forgotten. For tyranny’s victims, even the smallest

gestures from the outside world sustain their strength to endure. I speak from personal experience.

“Of course, we should recognize that some nations are more skeptical of American influence. And when dissidents there ask for our silence, we should respect their wishes. But when these courageous people – many your own age – call on us by name, when they plea for our solidarity in peaceful demonstrations against their government, and when they write their banners of protest in English, this is a good indication that we can do more to support their just cause, and we should do more.

“When brave men and women peacefully appeal for their rights, we should echo them and encourage them to endure. When they are seized and thrown in prison, we should call and work for their release. And when they face violence and intimidation, we should condemn it – privately for sure, but also in public when necessary. This applies not only to our enemies, but also to our friends whose human rights records should improve – be they long-standing partners like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, or emerging partners like Vietnam and Pakistan. Our friends will not enjoy these conversations, no matter how respectful we are. But if we really value these relationships, we owe it to our friends to urge them to protect the rights of all their citizens – for this is the truest path to lasting stability and success.

“Beyond what we say about human rights, it also matters what we do. And yes, at times, America will fall short of our own high standards. This does not mean that our values are imperfect, only that we are. When that happens, as it did during the Cold War, as it did during the last administration, and as it inevitably will again, our true friends will demand better of us, and we must work to be better. But we should never believe that our own fallibility disqualifies us from supporting the rights of others. That is not humility; it is an abdication of moral responsibility.

“Indeed, it is often the very act of supporting human rights abroad that compels us to make our ‘shining city upon a hill’ shine even brighter. There’s a story about Richard Nixon, who as vice president in 1957 visited Ghana to mark that nation’s birth as a free nation. Nixon was overtaken by the celebrations of independence in Ghana, and he asked person after person, ‘How does it feel to be free?’ One young man responded, ‘I wouldn’t know, sir. I’m from Alabama.’ The fact is, America’s support for the rights of others, during the Cold War and today, forces us to face our own failings more honestly, and to better live up to our own values – as we did with the Voting Rights Act in 1965, or more recently, the Detainee Treatment Act.

“None of this is to say we should refuse to deal with governments we do not like. The world does not work that way. The United States is not an NGO, and at times, we will need to deal with some pretty unsavory characters, and make some pretty difficult compromises, for the sake of our interests, and those of our allies. But at these times, our statements and actions in support of human rights are even more essential. They inform our sense of realism, reminding us who we are dealing with and what to expect. And they send a much-needed signal to captive peoples, that even as we negotiate with their oppressors, we know whose side we are really on.

“The United States should engage with any government if it serves our interests to do so. But we should not pay for that pleasure by muzzling our criticisms of their abusive behavior, or silencing our support for the just aspirations of their people. Repressive regimes will ask us to make that choice, but it is a false choice, and ultimately unnecessary. Realists believe, as I do, that

governments act in their own interest. But by that logic, if abusive governments like Iran or North Korea believe that negotiating with the United States is in their interest, then they will do it no matter what we say about their internal affairs. And after all, most human rights abusers are more than happy to unburden themselves of their opinions of us.

“There is nothing wrong with engaging oppressive regimes to further our interests, but let’s use this engagement to further all of our interests – not just our security or economic interests, but our moral interests, our interest in human rights. Reagan negotiated and made deals with the Soviet Union that benefited America and our allies. But Reagan also told the Soviets that their evil empire would end up on the ash heap of history. He told Mr. Gorbachev what to do with his wall. He used engagement as one more opportunity to demand better treatment for the captives of communism. And when Reagan did temper his public criticisms of the Soviets, it was in response to real progress on their part, not in return for engagement itself.

“Of course, we will only get so far by urging abusive regimes, whether in private or public or both, to treat their people better. We also need to support those people directly ourselves – to empower them to promote their own aspirations and prepare for the day that they will govern themselves. This means providing access to true information, both by broadcasting it ourselves and helping closed societies to get it on their own. It means strengthening civil society to balance state power. It means support for political parties, the middle class, labor unions, student organizations, religious groups, and other associations. And it means helping to strengthen the institutions of democracy and a free society – an independent media, legislatures, courts of justice, uncorrupt bureaucracies, elections commissions and monitors.

“What form these organizations take is not up to us. America’s institutions of governance are the result of 220 years of experimentation, trial and error, and our own unique experience. Other societies will develop in their own ways, consistent with their own cultures and traditions. It is their choice. But in countries like Iran and North Korea, Zimbabwe and Burma, it is not America that is denying people this choice. It is their own governments. They are the real obstacles to the sovereignty and independence of their nations. Our goal should be to help people, however best we can, gain the right to make their own choices – to choose their own leaders, develop their own talents, and live under laws of their own making.

“Now, some of you might suggest, when we add all of these lessons together, it does not amount to a strategy for simply changing the behavior of abusive regimes, but for peacefully changing the regimes themselves. I won’t disagree with you.

“This does not mean war or occupation. But let’s be honest with ourselves: Could we ever suggest that it is a policy worthy of America to condemn Cubans, Iranians, Sudanese, or others like them to suffer forever under their current regimes? Our goal can never be to coexist eternally with governments that are hostile to our most basic principles of justice. We deal with states like these because we have to, not because we like to. And while we deal with them today, tomorrow, and the next day too, we should never forget that our real goal is to one day see the victims of oppressive regimes change them peacefully into something better for themselves.

“That was how America at its best approached the Soviet Union. And this, my friends, is what we should remember: Supporting human rights can be a long-term endeavor. But if we believe in the power and appeal of our values, they can supply us all at once with the strength to push for what we believe is right, the patience to endure in what are often generational struggles, and the

confidence to know that we are on the right side of history – that it is the oppressed, not their oppressors, who will inherit the earth. Governments that deny the rights of their citizens may look stable and imposing to us now, but they are actually rotting inside – for they have only fear and force to sustain them, and people will not be afraid forever.

“I have seen a lot of things in my life – a lot of things, like the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Cold War that I doubted I would ever witness in my lifetime. Though I see a lot of gathering storms on our horizon, I’ll tell you this, my friends: I have never been more optimistic about the promise of our world than I am today. And much of that optimism is based on my faith in your generation’s character.

“You understand that assaults on the dignity of others are assaults on the dignity of all humanity. You do not look upon tyranny and injustice in the darker corners of our world as the inevitable tragedy of mankind’s fallen nature. You see them as a call to action – a summons to devote your time and talents to a just cause that is greater than yourself, the cause of human rights and dignity. Make this your legacy, and 20 years from now, maybe longer, you will be able to know that you, too, made history, and made our country and world better. Not perfect, but better.

“Twenty years, ago, I watched on television as the Wall came down, and it called to mind a quote from President Obama’s fellow Nobel Laureate, William Faulkner. “I decline to accept the end of man,” Faulkner said in his Nobel lecture. ‘I believe that man will not merely endure; he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.’ That faith has cost many lives, but liberated many more. It is the faith that tears down walls and builds bridges between peoples. It is the faith that made our nation the hope of mankind. And it is the faith we now entrust to you. Take good care with it.

“Thank you.”

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