

(as prepared for delivery)

**Statement of Madeleine K. Albright
Committee on Armed Services
United States House of Representatives
September 16, 2008**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, good morning to you all.

I am pleased to be here, and anxious to discuss the tasks that will confront our next president.

Let's begin with some facts.

First, America remains by far the world's mightiest economic and military power, but this does not mean that we are unlimited in what we can accomplish.

Alliances still matter, as do friendships, which means that our strategy for national security must encompass the security of others.

Second, the world remains dangerous but the nature of those dangers is fluid; we must therefore make wise use of every foreign policy option, from quiet diplomacy to military force.

Third, our armed forces have been put through a wringer these past few years; they need time and resources to recover and to adapt more fully to modern demands.

Fourth, in recent times, we have seen a shifting of global influence from the West to the East, from industrialized to emerging economies, and from energy consuming to energy producing countries.

These trends have been accompanied by a vacuum in world leadership as America has focused on the Persian Gulf, Europe has looked inward, global institutions have lost authority, regional powers have pursued narrow agendas, and a new edition of an old rivalry has developed between democratic and autocratic governments.

Leaders such as those in China, Russia, Iran and Venezuela increasingly challenge our belief in political openness and our emphasis on civil and human rights.

Such objections have appeal to other leaders who may have won power through elections, but who are determined to retain power through whatever means are necessary.

Our new president will therefore inherit a world that is, compared to a couple of decades ago, less open to American leadership, more endangered by nuclear weapons, more affected by global warming, more at risk to shortages of energy and food, and more divided between rich and poor.

It is little wonder that leaders in both political parties have embraced the mantra of change.

But my message to you this morning is that the road back for America begins with what must not change.

We cannot recover the ground we have lost by abandoning our ideals.

The foundation of American leadership must remain what it has been for generations – a commitment to liberty and law, support for justice and peace, and advocacy of human rights and economic opportunity for all.

At the same time, we must change how we approach specific challenges, beginning with the hot wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and our global confrontation with Al Qaeda.

No matter who is elected, the next president must begin withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq.

If he does not do so voluntarily, he will be forced by an evolving consensus within Iraq to do so nonetheless.

By initiating the process and controlling the timing, the White House can steer credit to responsible Iraqi leaders instead of allowing radicals to claim that they have driven us out.

As the redeployment proceeds, remaining troops must be used wisely – to further prepare Iraqi forces to assume command and to extend the reach and potency of the central government.

Despite recent gains, Iraq is still threatened by internal rivalries, but these can only be resolved by the country's own decision-makers.

American muscle cannot substitute for Iraqi spine.

One can argue whether our withdrawal should take two years or three, but the time for transition is at hand.

In Afghanistan, years of war have created a stalemate.

People want jobs, safety, a government worthy of the name, and the right to control their own lives.

To succeed, our approach must correspond to their aspirations.

Militarily, we should focus on training Afghan forces to defend Afghan villages.

Politically, we should push to improve the quality of governance in Kabul.

And diplomatically, we should enlist every ounce of leverage we have to encourage security cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Such trouble spots as Baghdad and Kabul are sure to occupy the next president but they should not consume all his attention.

Just as an effective foreign policy cannot be exclusively unilateral, neither can it be unidimensional.

A leader in the global era must view the world through a global lens.

That is why I hope our 44th commander-in-chief will establish a new and forward-looking mission for our country.

That mission should be to harness the latest advances in science and technology to improve the quality of life for people everywhere.

This aspect of our security strategy should extend to the growing of food, the distribution of medicine, the conservation of water, the production of energy, and the preservation of the atmosphere.

It should include a challenge to the American public to serve as a laboratory for best environmental practices, gradually replacing mass consumption with sustainability as the emblem of the American way.

Mr. Chairman, we cannot expect to recover all the ground we have lost in the first one hundred or even the first one thousand days of a new administration.

It will take time to establish the right identity for America in a world that has grown reluctant to follow the lead of any one country.

It will take time, but the opportunity is there.

People across the globe may not be clamoring for our leadership, but there is no doubt that a guiding hand is needed.

That guidance is unlikely to come from those who are now challenging our values – from radical populists, aggressive nationalists, autocratic modernizers, or the apostles of holy war.

America can make no claim to perfection and we have no interest in domination.

But we do have a conviction to offer the world.

And that is a belief in the fundamental dignity and importance of every human being.

This is the principle that is at the heart of every democracy.

It provides the basis for the kind of leadership that could restore international respect for America.

It creates the foundation for unity across the barriers of geography, race, gender and creed.

And it can serve as a useful starting point for discussing America's grand strategy under a new president of the United States.

Thank you very much – and now I would be pleased to respond to your questions.

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