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The Transatlantic Partnership in an Age of Global Challenges

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Senator John Edwards

Brussels Forum: Transatlantic Challenges in a Global Era, Brussels



Speech

Thank you, Mark, very much. Let me say before I even begin that I have no expectation that this speech will compare with the last panel.

I'm very proud to be with all of you. It's an honor to be with you and to be a part of this very important conference. And truthfully, there's no better organization than the German Marshall Fund to organize the Brussels Forum and I want to thank Craig Kennedy and Ron Asmus from GMF and their partners, all those who are sponsoring the event: DaimlerChrysler, Bertelsmann, Monitor Group, the Belgium government, for bringing us together.

This conference actually comes at a very important moment for the world. For the past few years it's been hard to focus on our common challenges and how we have to work together to meet them. Instead, we spend an awful lot of energy looking backward and looking at the differences that we have.

Debate among friends is natural, sometimes important and sometimes necessary, especially when the issues are so important. But sometimes our disagreements overshadow the things that bind us, the things that we actually share and the new problems and the new challenges that we all face together.

I think that leadership always plays an important role. And I know John McCain was here to open this conference and it won't come as a shock to any of you that I believe that the current administration of the United States can do much better and should be doing much better than they are doing. Our leaders have a responsibility, a responsibility to understand global challenges and to prepare for them, and so do all of us.

How do we strengthen our partnership in a way that deals with the challenges like the global environment, prevention of infectious disease, or the spread of Islamic extremism? How do we begin to narrow the extraordinarily growing divide between the haves and the have-nots, both in America and around the world?

And in my — Craig mentioned this just a few minutes ago, but in my own country I've been working to do something about 37 million Americans who live in poverty every day to try to shine a light on it, try to get the American people and the American leadership to address the issue. I think it's the great moral issue facing America today.

But I also think that America has a responsibility to lead and to lead on the issue of extreme poverty around the world, not just addressing the millions of Americans who live in poverty everyday. As everyone here knows, almost half of the world's population — three billion people — lives on \$2 or less a day. How do we, collectively, address this kind of human suffering? How do we win the hearts and minds of young people, especially the millions who are struggling in the Middle East and in Africa who feel that the modern world offers them absolutely nothing? How do we reach them and give them an opportunity to climb out of hopelessness and into a better life just as we did here with the Marshall Plan after World War II?

These challenges don't face a single country or a single region, they face all of us. We have to ask ourselves are we doing enough together to meet these challenges. I think the

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answer is clearly no.

And today, especially with this ongoing war and conflict in Iraq, some ask whether America and Europe should and can work together to ensure the spread of freedom and opportunity. The answer to that question should be yes.

The current administration in Washington speaks, and I'm quoting now, of "spreading freedom and democracy" and they speak of it so casually that you'd think it was a mundane or very easy thing to do. I want to be absolutely clear about something, the idea that America stands for freedom is not new. Freedom and democracy are not commodities that belong to one political party and they don't belong to one country, nor are they easy to come by.

Spreading democracy is not about knocking regimes down; it's about building, building democratic institutions and communities that will protect basis freedom. Just as poverty and disillusionment isolate and drain hope from our people in our own cities it does exactly the same thing for every person around the world who feel like they have no chance. Ordinary men and women from Egypt to Morocco to Indonesia need to be convinced that democracy and liberty are the pathways to hope for them. So together we have to achieve these goals.

The question is how, how can we be working together to make the world more secure? How can we strengthen our existing institutions or create new ones to meet these new challenges? How should we be responding to the changes under waiting key countries like China, India, Russia?

The Brussels Forum has been focused on these issues and addressing them. It's an effort that we ought to continue. This afternoon I want to focus on three strategic challenges that we face. First, what should we be doing together to address the threat of weapons of mass destruction? Second, how do we continue to transform our core alliance, NATO, and strengthen America's partnership with the EU? And third, how should we adapt to a transforming Russia, a country that's going to be absolutely critical in addressing every global challenge that we face from energy security and regional stability to non-proliferation, to the environment, HIV/AIDS and the future of democracy.

Let me begin by talking about the issue of the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Nearly everyone agrees about this threat. We know that many of these weapons and bomb-making materials are not secure, especially in Russia and the other states of the former Soviet Union. We know that those who wish us harm want access to them yet we are still, knowing that, not doing enough to stop it.

The international community needs new tools to fight proliferation. Instead of accepting the weaknesses of the global non-proliferation regime we ought to work to fix it. For example, I believe that we should create a new global nuclear compact to reinforce the NPT. This compact would be a new international agreement to close the loophole that allows civilian nuclear programs to go military. The new nuclear deal with India, in fact, is an opportunity to embark on a wider international effort.

The United States should work with Europe to take the lead. We need a global ban on the production of material for nuclear weapons and we have to establish global standards to safeguard this material.

America and Europe also must ensure that the know-how to build nuclear weapons never reaches the hands of terrorists. We should strengthen existing plans that ensure that nuclear scientists are employed for peaceful purposes. And we can provide safety and security to those scientists who are working on weapons programs in rogue nations.

There's some things that we can do to stem future threats but we also must look together to meet specific non-proliferation challenges. And it is Iran's nuclear ambitions that pose the single greatest security threat to the United States and Europe.

Now for years I've argued that my government has not been doing enough to deal with the Iranian threat. While they talk that talk of the dangers of nuclear terrorism, they largely stood on the sidelines as Iran marched forward and this problem got worse. The EU3 deserve credit for its work and its leadership in this area. But American disengagement is not the right way to deal with such an extraordinary threat.

Iran's recent actions, beginning with the reprocessing and enrichment of uranium and its refusal to cooperate with international inspections in open defiance of the UN Security Council make clear that it intends to secure nuclear weapons. And the Iranian president's statements such as his despicable description of the holocaust as a myth or his ugly pledge to wipe Israel off the map, illustrates the seriousness of the threat.

When he says things like this we should take him at his word. The international community must confront Iran with a clear choice, give up your nuclear ambitions or suffer the consequences. Right now this means UN Security Council actions to impose sanctions.

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But we have more options than doing nothing or using force. That's a false choice. We have many more diplomatic tools to use and we already use every single one of them. For the United States, this means more active and creative diplomacy, including a willingness to engage the Iranian leadership directly. For the Europeans, it means standing strong to confront Iran in the Security Council with meaningful sanctions, and a willingness to implement those sanctions. A common effort to stop the proliferation, to stop proliferation is important. But, cooperation cannot end there. Also need to be finding new ways to help end conflicts and create stability. A key place to start would be to continue to reform critical organizations like NATO.

Nearly 60 years ago leaders on both sides of the Atlantic showed tremendous foresight by creating the alliance that stood secure during the Cold War. Then a decade ago, Trans-Atlantic leaders again made the right decision to enlarge and transform the alliance to take on new members and missions. Looking back on the successes, it's hard to remember how controversial they were at the time. Now NATO is entering a third phase, to take on a more global role. It is the world's greatest democratic security alliance. It now has a mission far beyond the borders of Europe, such as the important work it is doing in Afghanistan. I believe that NATO needs to embrace this kind of mission leap. While it can't be the solution for all the world's problems, it is the foundation for our common action. This November summit in Riga is an opportunity for the alliance to embrace this new global role.

But, NATO's new outlook must go beyond summit statement and words. I believe that we ought to be acting right now to end some of the world's most dire emergencies. For example, NATO should step in today to end the genocide in Sudan. It's good that NATO has helped the African Union troops with logistic support and training, but this has not stopped the killing. The fact that we have called what's happening in Darfur a genocide but we're standing by and watching it unfold, all of us. We have the — we — when we all of us do collectively have the power to stop it makes an absolute mockery of our institutions and our ideals and our values.

In the 1990's the blood shed in the Balkans threatened to make NATO irrelevant. And, by finally acting in Bosnia and Kosovo, the alliance proved its enduring value. The same is true in Darfur, both in terms of the risk and the opportunities. We must act, and we must act now. My country must show stronger leadership as well. The world knows that America is willing to use its muscle. Here's what they want to know from us, is America actually willing to lead on the great moral issues that face the world, because it is not just the American people who are hungry for something big and important to be inspired about. Something that they believe represents the true character of the American people. The world wants to know what America is made of, what our real character is. Along with working to end crises, we should also accelerate efforts to broaden NATO's reach to seek new partners. This means strengthening ties to countries like Ukraine, and Georgia.

I also believe we should be exploring ways to upgrade Israel's relationship with NATO. This could mean a closer strategic and operational relationship; it could mean more exchanges and planning cooperation. It could even someday mean membership. But, we need to do more than reform NATO; the United States must embrace a stronger role for the European Union. Even a new and improved NATO will prove too narrow to deal with a full range of global challenges. That's why America needs the EU as a strong partner and welcomes the efforts to build and strengthen its capabilities in foreign and defense policy. This is not something we, America, should be ambivalent about. A more united Europe, and a more effective EU is good for the United States; in fact, it's good for the world.

For too long many feared that a closer U.S.-EU relationship would undercut NATO or Europe's own project, but given the new challenges we face we have to cast this kind of old thinking aside. We need an EU-U.S. relationship that is as close and durable as NATO was during the Cold War. It should focus on a different set of issues and be a compliment to the alliance.

It should take the lead to coordinate our homeland security strategies just as we coordinated on a common defense against the Soviet threat. That includes joint efforts to deal with everything from terrorists using WMD to the outbreak of diseases like avian flu. We ought to deepen our cooperation on counter-terrorism, too, and we should do more to develop a common U.S.-EU approach from a range of issues from fighting poverty to supporting democracy.

Along with transforming our institutions to meet 21st century realities, we also need to adjust our approach to the changes that are underway in key countries, and this brings me to Russia. For the past year I had the privilege of co-chairing along with Jack Kemp a bipartisan task force for the Council on Foreign Relations on U.S.'s, the U.S. relationship with Russia. We issued our report just a few months ago, earlier this spring.

I started and ended that work with the same conviction that Russia's future is critically important to both the United States and to Europe and it is in our interest to have a strong relationship with Russia. Just as the U.S. and Europe need each other we need Russia to

stand with us to help address the global challenges we all face.

But we concluded after a lot of work that Russia's headed in the wrong direction and so is the U.S.-Russia relationship. Our report, endorsed by our taskforce, which is made up of both Democrats and Republicans, concluded that American policy needs to adapt. America's approach of the past 15 years has been one of strategic partnership with Russia. This is still the right long-term goal but in the short run we need to see Russia for what it is and make the necessary changes in our policy.

The truth is there are many positive things, positive trends in Russia, especially in its economy and its society. It is undergoing tremendous economic growth, an increase of about 65 percent in the GDP since 1999. It has a growing middle class, which is critical over the long term to having a strong democracy.

Russia is a profoundly different place than it was as the Soviet Union. It's not going back there and we're not going back to the Cold War, but during the past few years we've seen negative trends to overtake many of these positive developments. There's been an erosion of democratic freedoms, increasing centralization of power, corruption, and organized crime penetrating the government. My concern is not with the pace of democracy in Russia it is with the direction.

Internationally Russia faces a fundamental choice, will it be a partner in the international system or will it be a spoiler. Too often recently it's been tempted to take the role of spoiler. On many important questions Russian policy is hurting not helping, it's isolating itself. Russia is bullying its neighbors, as we've seen with its response to the color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia and its support for the rigged election in Belarus.

Russia now poses American troops in Central Asia when after 9/11 it saw us working on a common cause. And the jury is still out on whether Russia will stand with us on Iran, we want them to, we need them to. But the signals from Moscow are mixed at best. It's hard to see how our relationship with Russia can get better if they choose to work against us on such a vital issue as Iran.

There is no question that a more democratic, open, transparent Russia would be behaving differently. A more democratic Russia would not be on the fence regarding Iran. It would not be cracking down on dissent and free press. It would not play host to a Hamas. It would not work to keep the U.S. out of bases in Central Asia. It would not be using energy as a foreign policy weapon. It would not be supporting autocrats in Belarus or undermining democrats in Georgia or Ukraine. Solving the world's problems will be harder without Russia. And, many of these problems will in fact become worse if this downward trajectory continues. And, there's a larger trend that while it's distant at this point, it's not tomorrow deserves mention.

The souring of Russia's relations with the U.S. and Europe raises the prospect of weakening the unity among the great powers and perhaps a newer line of division between democrats and authoritarians. So what do we do, what do we do now? Most important, we need to start by recognizing reality. Strategic partnership with Russia should still be our goal, but we can't pretend that everything is OK. We can't wish away serious disagreements with handshakes or happy talk at a summit meeting. We must be clear about our hopes for the relationship, but no less clear about the problems and the limitations.

The G8 meeting this summer in St. Petersburg is a huge test for Russia, for the United States, and for Europe. There's a lot of controversy about whether Russia should be the chair of the G8, and whether there should even be a meeting at all. John McCain and I agree that this summit threatens to undermine the G8. We disagree about other things to do with Russia and their membership in the G8, but this summit is 11 weeks away and is going to happen. We can't paper over the differences we have with President Putin. Leaders should not lead without raising concerns about Russia's de-democratization, its behavior toward its neighbors, its cooperation in the war on terror, or its use of energy as a weapon.

If our leaders don't stand up for what we believe, then we need to consider seriously whether we should continue to even have a G8. I don't think that'd be good for us, but a future of meaningless G8 summits would be even worse. Russia's entering a critical political phase. The parliament, parliamentary elections next year and presidential election in 2008. America and the EU should be working now to make clear what the criteria are for legitimate position. We should communicate this publicly and privately. If today's reality of Russian politics continues with opposition candidates kept off the ballot arbitrarily, unable to access the media or to raise funds, with opposition parties unable to form because of technicalities, or with independent domestic monitoring organizations kept out.

Then, there's the real risk that Russian leadership will be seeing externally and internally is illegitimate. It is not up to any of us to decide whether Russia heads toward democracy, that's for the Russian people to decide. But, we can make clear that their decisions matter and this will only work if U.S., the U.S. and Europe send the same message. One lesson

we've learned is that Moscow pays attention when it sees the united western front. So we have to speak together. And, in dealing with a changing Russia, just as an ending weapons proliferation in transforming institutions like NATO. Trans-Atlantic cooperation is essential, that requires thoughtful leadership on both sides of the Atlantic. Let me close with a few words about the country that I know best, America and what these challenges mean for us. As an American I believe we have an extraordinary responsibility to show the world what my, that my country is doing all it can to fulfill its promise. Not just with our words, but actually with our actions. And, not just at home, but in the world. Americans live in a place built on the ideals of freedom and opportunity and the equal treatment of all.

We also believe that America should be engaged and work with others to help solve the world's problems. I work everyday to ensure that my country lives up to those values. I'm proud of the United States, it's blessed me and my family in ways that I could never have imagined. It's often said that America is much, is as much an idea as it is a country. And, I want to live in a world that sees that promise too. But now, that promise is being tested at home and abroad, and especially in Iraq. Yet the outcome in Iraq matters greatly to the Trans-Atlantic partnership.

America's role there is very much in question, as it should be. We cannot stay forever; I've argued since the last year that we need to begin reducing our troop presence dramatically. I've also long argued that we need a brighter international effort in Iraq with a greater European role. The global partnership that we've been talking about should not ignore Iraq. Some think that this is unrealistic and we can understand that, but I believe with the right kind of leadership it is still possible. There is no question that this harder, America's credibility has been tarnished during the past five years and that in many places here in Europe and elsewhere.

The very idea of American leadership seems like a contradiction. Reversing this is one of the most important challenges that America faces. It's not about getting other people to like us; we all understand that with leadership comes responsibility. And that at time tough decisions can be difficult to make and implement. But, because it is hard, doesn't mean we shouldn't try. The truth is, when America acts as if our friends don't matter, it's easier for some of our friends to avoid the hard choices too. A stronger partnership requires both sides to take more responsibility.

For America's part, I want the world to see a country that works everyday to live up to our founders' aspirations. That all people are created equal and that we're all endowed with certain inalienable rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This is what we started more than two centuries ago; a great experiment in the history of mankind. Ordinary citizens gathered in their churches, in their stores, in their homes to pursue a greater good. Both civic in its promise and human in its hope, it gave the farmer the same rights as the President. It gave the blacksmith the same chance as the ship merchant. And, it gave the men and women who said we had not honored our ideals the right to speak out in the great cause of change. America's a place that believes in ascension and the dignity of hard work.

We also believe in a world where nations can come together to meet the great challenges and do great things to give the next generation the same opportunities that we've had, and the chance to do better. The foundation for this is the Trans-Atlantic relationship, this is what we believe. And, everyday we give a person the chance the lift themselves up, whether they live in Boston, Brussels, or Bangkok, we increase the changes of a just world, a world where our greatest security challenges are met. This is what we must never forget as we move forward together. Thank you.

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