

Speech by Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic before the Congress of the United States of America

Washington, November 7, 2007

Madam Speaker,

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen of the United States Congress,

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The state of our friendship and our alliance is strong.

Friendship, first and foremost, means being true to one's friends. Since the United States first appeared on the world scene, the loyalty between the French and American people has never failed. And far from being weakened by the vicissitudes of History, it has never ceased growing stronger.

Friends may have differences; they may have disagreements; they may have disputes.

But in times of difficulty, in times of hardship, friends stand together, side by side; they support each other; and help one another.

In times of difficulty, in times of hardship, America and France have always stood side by side, supported one another, helped one another, fought for each other's freedom.

The United States and France remain true to the memory of their common history, true to the blood spilled by their children in common battles. But they are not true merely to the memory of what they accomplished together in the past. They remain true, first and foremost, to the same ideal, the same principles, the same values that have always united them.

The deliberations of your Congress are conducted under the double gaze of Washington and Lafayette. Lafayette, whose 250th birthday we are celebrating this year and who was the first foreign dignitary, in 1824, to address a joint session of Congress. What was it that brought these two men—so far apart in age and background—together, if not their faith in common values, the heritage of the Enlightenment, the same love for freedom and justice? Upon first meeting Washington, Lafayette told him: "I have come here to learn, not to teach." It was this new spirit and youth of the Old World seeking out the wisdom of the New World that opened a new era for all of humanity.

From the very beginning, the American dream meant putting into practice the dreams of the Old World.

From the very beginning, the American dream meant proving to all mankind that freedom, justice, human rights and democracy were no utopia but were rather the most realistic policy there is and the most likely to improve the fate of each

and every person.

America did not tell the millions of men and women who came from every country in the world and who—with their hands, their intelligence and their heart—built the greatest nation in the world: “Come, and everything will be given to you.” She said: “Come, and the only limits to what you’ll be able to achieve will be your own courage and your own talent.” America embodies this extraordinary ability to grant each and every person a second chance.

Here, both the humblest and most illustrious citizens alike know that nothing is owed to them and that everything has to be earned. That’s what constitutes the moral value of America. America did not teach men the idea of freedom; she taught them how to practice it. And she fought for this freedom whenever she felt it to be threatened somewhere in the world. It was by watching America grow that men and women understood that freedom was possible.

What made America great was her ability to transform her own dream into hope for all mankind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The men and women of my generation heard their grandparents talk about how in 1917, America saved France at a time when it had reached the final limits of its strength, which it had exhausted in the most absurd and bloodiest of wars.

The men and women of my generation heard their parents talk about how in 1944, America returned to free Europe from the horrifying tyranny that threatened to enslave it.

Fathers took their sons to see the vast cemeteries where, under thousands of white crosses so far from home, thousands of young American soldiers lay who had fallen not to defend their own freedom but the freedom of all others, not to defend their own families, their own homeland, but to defend humanity as a whole.

Fathers took their sons to the beaches where the young men of America had so heroically landed. They read them the admirable letters of farewell that those 20-year-old soldiers had written to their families before the battle to tell them: “We don’t consider ourselves heroes. We want this war to be over. But however much dread we may feel, you can count on us.” Before they landed, Eisenhower told them: “The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you.”

And as they listened to their fathers, watched movies, read history books and the letters of soldiers who died on the beaches of Normandy and Provence, as they visited the cemeteries where the star-spangled banner flies, the children of my generation understood that these young Americans, 20 years old, were true heroes to whom they owed the fact that they were free people and not slaves. France will never forget the sacrifice of your children.

To those 20-year-old heroes who gave us everything, to the families of those who never returned, to the children who mourned fathers they barely got a chance to know, I want to express France's eternal gratitude.

On behalf of my generation, which did not experience war but knows how much it owes to their courage and their sacrifice; on behalf of our children, who must never forget; to all the veterans who are here today and, notably the seven I had the honor to decorate yesterday evening, one of whom, Senator Inouye, belongs to your Congress, I want to express the deep, sincere gratitude of the French people. I want to tell you that whenever an American soldier falls somewhere in the world, I think of what the American army did for France. I think of them and I am sad, as one is sad to lose a member of one's family.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The men and women of my generation remember the Marshall Plan that allowed their fathers to rebuild a devastated Europe. They remember the Cold War, during which America again stood as the bulwark of the Free World against the threat of new tyranny.

I remember the Berlin crisis and Kennedy who unhesitatingly risked engaging the United States in the most destructive of wars so that Europe could preserve the freedom for which the American people had already sacrificed so much. No one has the right to forget. Forgetting, for a person of my generation, would be tantamount to self-denial.

But my generation did not love America only because she had defended freedom. We also loved her because for us, she embodied what was most audacious about the human adventure; for us, she embodied the spirit of conquest. We loved America because for us, America was a new frontier that was continuously pushed back—a constantly renewed challenge to the inventiveness of the human spirit.

My generation shared all the American dreams. Our imaginations were fueled by the winning of the West and Hollywood. By Elvis Presley, Duke Ellington, Hemingway. By John Wayne, Charlton Heston, Marilyn Monroe, Rita Hayworth. And by Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins, fulfilling mankind's oldest dream.

What was so extraordinary for us was that through her literature, her cinema and her music, America always seemed to emerge from adversity even greater and stronger; that instead of causing America to doubt herself, such ordeals only strengthened her belief in her values.

What makes America strong is the strength of this ideal that is shared by all Americans and by all those who love her because they love freedom.

America's strength is not only a material strength, it is first and foremost a spiritual and moral strength. No one expressed this better than a black pastor who asked just one thing of America: that she be true to the ideal in whose

name he—the grandson of a slave—felt so deeply American. His name was Martin Luther King. He made America a universal role model.

The world still remembers his words—words of love, dignity and justice. America heard those words and America changed. And the men and women who had doubted America because they no longer recognized her began loving her again.

Fundamentally, what are those who love America asking of her, if not to remain forever true to her founding values?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today as in the past, as we stand at the beginning of the 21st century, it is together that we must fight to defend and promote the values and ideals of freedom and democracy that men such as Washington and Lafayette invented together.

Together we must fight against terrorism. On September 11, 2001, all of France—petrified with horror—rallied to the side of the American people. The front-page headline of one of our major dailies read: “We are all American.” And on that day, when you were mourning for so many dead, never had America appeared to us as so great, so dignified, so strong. The terrorists had thought they would weaken you. They made you greater. The entire world felt admiration for the courage of the American people. And from day one, France decided to participate shoulder to shoulder with you in the war in Afghanistan. Let me tell you solemnly today: France will remain engaged in Afghanistan as long as it takes, because what’s at stake in that country is the future of our values and that of the Atlantic Alliance. For me, failure is not an option. Terrorism will not win because democracies are not weak, because we are not afraid of this barbarism. America can count on France.

Together we must fight against proliferation. Success in Libya and progress under way in North Korea shows that nuclear proliferation is not inevitable. Let me say it here before all of you: The prospect of an Iran armed with nuclear weapons is unacceptable. The Iranian people is a great people. It deserves better than the increased sanctions and growing isolation to which its leaders condemn it. Iran must be convinced to choose cooperation, dialogue and openness. No one must doubt our determination.

Together we must help the people of the Middle East find the path of peace and security. To the Israeli and Palestinian leaders I say this: Don’t hesitate! Risk peace! And do it now! The status quo hides even greater dangers: that of delivering Palestinian society as a whole to the extremists that contest Israel’s existence; that of playing into the hands of radical regimes that are exploiting the deadlock in the conflict to destabilize the region; that of fueling the propaganda of terrorists who want to set Islam against the West. France wants security for Israel and a State for the Palestinians.

Together we must help the Lebanese people affirm their independence, their sovereignty, their freedom, their democracy. What Lebanon needs today is a broad-based president elected according to the established schedule and in strict respect of the Constitution. France stands engaged alongside all the Lebanese. It will not accept attempts to subjugate the Lebanese people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

America feels it has the vocation to inspire the world. Because she is the most powerful country in the world. Because, for more than two centuries, she has striven to uphold the ideals of democracy and freedom. But this stated responsibility comes with duties, the first of which is setting an example.

Those who love this nation which, more than any other, has demonstrated the virtues of free enterprise expect America to be the first to denounce the abuses and excesses of a financial capitalism that sets too great a store on speculation. They expect her to commit fully to the establishment of the necessary rules and safeguards. The America I love is the one that encourages entrepreneurs, not speculators.

Those who admire the nation that has built the world's greatest economy and has never ceased trying to persuade the world of the advantages of free trade expect her to be the first to promote fair exchange rates. The yuan is already everyone's problem. The dollar cannot remain solely the problem of others. If we're not careful, monetary disarray could morph into economic war. We would all be its victims.

Those who love the country of wide open spaces, national parks and nature reserves expect America to stand alongside Europe in leading the fight against global warming that threatens the destruction of our planet. I know that each day, in their cities and states, the American people are more aware of the stakes and determined to act. This essential fight for the future of humanity must be all of America's fight.

Those who have not forgotten that it was the United States that, at the end of the Second World War, raised hopes for a new world order are asking America to take the lead in the necessary reforms of the UN, the IMF, the World Bank and the G8. Our globalized world must be organized for the 21st century, not for the last century. The emerging countries we need for global equilibrium must be given their rightful place.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to express one last conviction: Trust Europe.

In this unstable, dangerous world, the United States of America needs a strong, determined Europe. With the simplified treaty I proposed to our partners, the European Union is about to emerge from 10 years of discussions on its institutions and 10 years of paralysis. Soon it will have a stable president and a

more powerful High Representative for foreign and security policy, and it must now reactivate the construction of its military capacities.

The ambition I am proposing to our partners is based on a simple observation: There are more crises than there are capacities to face them. NATO cannot be everywhere. The EU must be able to act, as it did in the Balkans and in the Congo, and as it will tomorrow on the border of Sudan and Chad. For that the Europeans must step up their efforts.

My approach is purely pragmatic. Having learned from history, I want the Europeans, in the years to come, to have the means to shoulder a growing share of their defense. Who could blame the United States for ensuring its own security? No one. Who could blame me for wanting Europe to ensure more of its own security? No one. All of our Allies, beginning with the United States, with whom we most often share the same interests and the same adversaries, have a strategic interest in a Europe that can assert itself as a strong, credible security partner.

At the same time, I want to affirm my attachment to NATO. I say it here before this Congress: The more successful we are in the establishment of a European Defense, the more France will be resolved to resume its full role in NATO.

I would like France, a founding member of our Alliance and already one of its largest contributors, to assume its full role in the effort to renew NATO's instruments and means of action and, in this context, to allow its relations with the Alliance to evolve.

This is no time for theological quarrels but for pragmatic responses to make our security tools more effective and operational in the face of crises. The EU and NATO must march hand in hand.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to be your friend, your ally and your partner. But a friend who stands on his own two feet. An independent ally. A free partner.

France must be stronger. I am determined to carry through with the reforms that my country has put off for all too long. I will not turn back, because France has turned back for all too long. My country has enormous assets. While respecting its unique identity, I want to put it into a position to win all the battles of globalization. I passionately love France. I am lucid about the work that remains to be accomplished.

It is this ambitious France that I have come to present to you today. A France that comes out to meet America to renew the pact of friendship and the alliance that Washington and Lafayette sealed in Yorktown.

Together let us be worthy of their example, let us be equal to their ambition, let us be true to their memories!

Long live the United States of America!

Vive la France!

Long live French-American friendship!

Embassy of France in the United States - November 7, 2007