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Contact: Will Bohlen Elizabeth Boswell Rega
Tel: +1 202 294 4704 +32 (0)473 280 950
Email: wbohlen@gmfus.org eboswellrega@gmfus.org

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McCain knocks “minimalist” approach to the war in Afghanistan

~ Former Republican presidential candidate urges European nations to pledge additional troops and financial support at upcoming NATO summit ~

BRUSSELS (March 21, 2009) — At Brussels Forum today, U.S. Senator John McCain (R-AZ) strongly encouraged Europeans to join the United States in ending the war in Afghanistan, not only to deliver long-promised peace to the Afghan people, but to ensure that terrorist factions do not wreck more havoc on the Western World.

The former U.S. presidential candidate made it clear that Europe must deliver troops or other aid to Afghanistan if the Western campaign there is to succeed. A “minimalist” approach — one he said is being advocated on both sides of the Atlantic — could prove disastrous, he said in an evening address at Brussels Forum.

“Make no mistake, we can and must win the war in Afghanistan, but we will fail without a new strategy and increased resources necessary to carry it out,” McCain said. “The situation on the ground has reached stalemate at most. We must seize the chance. If we do not, we risk reversion of that country to a terrorist safehaven.”

McCain’s speech capped the second day of the fourth-annual Brussels Forum, a high-level meeting of influential worldwide leaders to discuss pressing transatlantic issues. Brussels Forum is organized by the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) with the Federal Authorities of Belgium & the Egmont Institute, Daimler, and the government of the Czech Republic. The forum will wrap up Sunday with discussions on NATO and fiscal policy in the aftermath of the global financial crisis.

McCain made it clear that he doesn’t approve of the so-called “minimalist” approach. He said that although the approach promises a quick end to the war in Afghanistan, one that would perhaps result in the deaths of a few more terrorists and appease war-weary citizens, it is “dangerously wrong.” “Leaders on both sides of the Atlantic should reject it,” he said.



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McCain encouraged political leaders to speak frankly with their constituents to make sure they know the war is far from over and that it will take “years, not months” to root out terrorist factions and to establish a strong Afghan government and military. He said he applauds U.S. President Barack Obama’s decision to send an additional 17,000 troops to the region, but warned that it will take many more to succeed. “The going will be exceedingly hard” and the “violence will get worse before it gets better,” he said.

Earlier in the evening, at a session that commemorated the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, leaders from former Soviet bloc nations and Western nations reminisced that at the time, no one could say for sure what would come next — peace or chaos. “There could have been troops, there could have been war,” said Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt.

But in moving forward, German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schauble said that it is imperative that Western and Central European nations improve their relationships with Russia. “Only if we cooperate will we solve some problems,” he said.

Schauble also suggested that Russia should be allowed to join NATO, an idea that was addressed later by McCain, who argued that Russia might not qualify for membership to the security council because it is not a true democracy.

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Brussels Forum is an annual high-level meeting of the most influential political, corporate, and intellectual leaders worldwide to address pressing challenges facing both sides of the Atlantic. Participants include heads of state, senior officials from the European Union institutions and member states, U.S. officials, Congressional representatives, Parliamentarians, think tank leaders, academics, corporate executives, and media.

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