

Foundation for the Defense of Democracies

Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ) and Senator Joe Lieberman (ID-CT)

Moderator:

Clifford May,

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Foundation for the Defense of Democracies

Speakers:

Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ);

Senator Joe Lieberman (ID-CT)

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LEN LEADER: My name is Len Leader. I'm a long-time FDD board member. And this afternoon, I have the honor of introducing two distinguished American leaders – Senators Joseph Lieberman and Jon Kyl. Though they come from different parties, on the most important issues they have fought on the same side. Indeed, few statesmen have done more to advance the causes of freedom, human rights and democratic governance than they have.

Most recently, they have worked together to prevent Iran's rulers, the world's leading sponsors of terrorism and chronic human rights violators in their home, from acquiring nuclear weapons. They leave impressive legacies and I'm confident that they will have much more to contribute after they retire from Congress at the end of this term. Over the past decade, both have worked very closely and productively with FDD, for which we are very, very grateful.

I'll now turn the microphone over to FDD's president, Cliff May, who will moderate a discussion and Q-and-A session with the senators and present them with a much-deserved award. Please join me in welcoming Senators Joseph Lieberman and Jon Kyl to FDD's Washington Forum. (Applause.)

CLIFFORD MAY: Len, thank you so much. Senators Lieberman and Kyl, I'm going to thank you more formally in a few minutes. But I want to start off with a conversation. Senator Lieberman, when you came into Congress, the United States was engaged in a Cold War against totalitarian regimes, movements and ideologies. As you leave the Senate, the United States is engaged in an asymmetrical war against, I would argue, totalitarian regimes, movements and ideologies. Have we made any progress?

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Well – (laughs) – yeah. We have made progress. And I was about to quote Lenin – (laughter) – sometimes it's two steps forward and one step backward, but the net is positive. Actually, it just strikes me that obviously there was enormous progress when the Berlin Wall went down, when the Soviet Union collapsed. And we've watched a really remarkable expansion of freedom generally throughout Central and Eastern Europe. But sadly, in Russia itself we haven't. We've seen a return to autocracy, not quite as bad as the old Stalinist days but bad.

And I just mention this because the Senate this morning adopted the Magnitsky Act, 92 to 4, I think, which is a great statement. OK, so back to your – (applause) – thank you. All right, and you know, I said to one of my colleagues that there are days – you'll be shocked by this, I'm sure – in recent times when I've left the Senate wondering whether I really had done anything that would matter during that day. Today having voted as part of a large majority for the Magnitsky Act, I think we've done something significant.

So yeah, this is history, you know. The victory over communism and the Soviet Union was remarkable. And yet, somehow the respite from conflict and attack was short. There are lessons to be learned. I mean, ultimately, just to make a few comments, the – both of these were ideological conflicts at their heart. And sometimes people miss that, I think, in the conflict we're in with Islamist extremism and terrorism, but it's an – it is a theology but it's an ideology, it's a set of ideas.

The other hopeful thing to say is that ultimately, as generally happens through history, communism collapses at the weight of its own repression and evil and extremism. And I'm confident that the same will be true of Islamist extremism and terrorism. But the other lessons obviously are that you have to be clear in making the ideological counterargument, which we did for a long time against the communists. And it was – that was critical to the ultimate victory we secured.

The other thing is that we have to remain strong and unrelenting in our willingness to use our strength to protect our security and our values against these ideologies which were – then and now are both quite inhumanely militarized. And we have to have patience. And that's real challenge for us in a democracy because – you know, this – the Cold War didn't end quickly. And it took strong leadership to end it.

This conflict against an extremely unconventional enemy will not end quickly either. And in our democracy, we're going to have to, hopefully without suffering anything like the attack of 9/11, continue to convince the American people that we've got to stay engaged, keep our defenses high and remain on the offense, both ideologically and militarily.

MR. MAY: Senator Kyl, I'd like you to also compare and contrast the Cold War to the current conflict any way that you want to. But this also occurs to me: We talk about communism. And probably among ourselves here we'll talk about "Islamism" and "jihadism" as ideologies. As you well know, there are many people in the U.S. government, in very high positions, not just in one party, who will not use those words. We are fighting, as they say, "violent extremists." A "violent extremist," almost by definition, has no coherent set of beliefs.

It seems to me, and I think it seems to you – I think I know you well enough – that if you don't understand and won't delve into the ideology of those who proclaim themselves to be your enemies, you can't understand them. And if you can't understand them, you're going to have a very tough time defeating them.

SENATOR JON KYL (R-AZ): Exactly so. And first, let me compliment Senator Lieberman. As usual, everything he said was wise, on point, needs to be considered as part of this overall. Your last comment reminds me that Jim Woolsey, who is here, the three of us and several others joined together on the second iteration on the Committee of Present Danger, which then brings us back to your comparison, which is apt.

The Cold War and the war against this Islamist theological, ideological movement are – there are many, many parallels. Obviously, they are different ideologies, but you start with the proposition that the enemy here in both cases was an ideology. You cannot therefore defeat it without engaging the ideology. You cannot engage the ideology unless you understand it and unless you're willing to call it by its name.

So you start with the proposition – you can go all the way back to Sun Tzu. If you don't know your enemy you're not likely to beat him, especially an enemy like this which has a lot of very clever components to its way of fighting. And so point number one is you've got to know

the enemy, you've got to be realistic in by calling it by its name, and then begin to develop the ways of defeating it.

Senator Lieberman is exactly right, the Cold War took a long time to win. And I sometimes think we won it, to some extent, by accident. But think of the things that were done that were not by accident and that could form the basis for at least an analysis of how you win this. Point number one Joe made is you've got to be strong as a nation militarily and in whatever other ways are necessary to confront this particular kind of enemy.

Second point is, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the opponent here? What is the methodology for advancing this Islamist movement and where might its weak points be, and how do you take advantage of those? This requires a different kind of thinking about how to approach this enemy. I don't think we've done that yet. We've, to some extent, been on defense from day one, though we have on occasions employed offensive techniques and, by and large, they're pretty effective.

Intelligence, we understand, is critical component of this battle, maybe even more so than the last, but it was important then too. We've had some reorganization of our government and we've certainly had a couple of wars. We think of Afghanistan right now and I – just maybe that's the last point of the microcosm, OK? So we're going to leave Afghanistan and what – I mean, is there anybody here who believes that in five years Afghanistan is going to look very much differ than it did, say, two weeks before 9/11 when I was on the Khyber Pass as a member of the Intelligence Committee with the chairmen of the House and Senate intel committees? Is it going to look any different? That's a lot of blood and treasure spent maybe not to very good effect. You're not going to win the war that way.

And the final point – the final, final point – (chuckles) – is that we could, because we are an impatient people by nature and because the enemy in this case is extraordinarily patient – well, I'm not going to say we can lose it because at the end of the day we have no choice but to win, but it'll be a lot longer struggle if we don't appreciate the fact that time, the time element here is important because we are a democracy, as Joe pointed out. And as my colleague John McCain, our colleague John McCain, likes to point out, the Afghani who said, well, you've got the watches, but we've got the time. And it's just one illustration of how this is perhaps a little different than the Cold War about how you've got to take all of these elements into account in order to devise a strategy and then the tactics and then decide where that leads you in terms of military expenditures and all those sorts of things.

MR. MAY: And there is a number of things you've all said that I want to trail down on, but before I do I want to ask one more broad brush question. This conference is entitled "Dictators and Dissidents" and asks the question, should we be choosing between that, dictators and dissidents? And I – and we mean it as a serious question because I think there are a lot of people on the left and on the right at this point who see no value in that, who don't think we can have a – have a – have an impact that is useful and helpful.

And there is a difference, I would submit – and this is what I want to – I want you to address – between, on the one hand, exporting democracy; on another hand, supporting

democrats who share our values rather than leaving them on their own; or simply some other options or some other policy. And this is I think very timely right now.

And we'll drill into this in a minute because you have today – Khairi Abaza, one of our senior fellows, is just back from Egypt. I just saw him in the hall a few minutes ago. The palace – Morsi's palace is surrounded by people who do not want to trade one form a despotism for another, do not want to trade autocracy for theocracy. Now the question not only is, do we help them, do we leave it all alone, or do we help Morsi and perhaps empower him to establish a theocratic dictatorship regime of the Muslim Brotherhood which, we will be told, this will be the moderate Muslim Brotherhood?

So I've opened up several doors for you. (Chuckles.) Let me ask you to – in two or three words, yes or no? (Laughter.)

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Well, so let me see, as I look behind me and see that we are guests of the Foundation for Defense of (with emphasis) Democracies –

MR. MAY: Plural.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: – (inaudible) – answer, but it's one that I feel deeply, which is obviously, in the choice between dictatorship, is it dictators or dissidents, we've always got to go with the dissidents, the – because that's who we are. I mean, we're a nation founded on a set of principles that have – never perfectly but much more often than not and much more than most other nations – have guided our behavior. And those principles are, you know, most eloquently and compellingly in the Declaration of Independence. We have a mission, which is the same reason that the founders created – formed a government, was to secure the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That should always be our guidepost in foreign relations. It's a – because it's a complicated world and because we're not perfect, we will make compromises on that ideal. But we're always better off internationally when our foreign policy reflects our founding values, which are freedom. And it's not only that we feel better about it and it's more consistent with our national ideals, in the long run, it usually works out better. So I hope I – that's the beginning of a general answer to your question.

And, you know, at every point – well, I'll talk briefly about the Arab Spring. So the Arab Spring is presented to somebody like me and probably a lot of others, with – incidentally, I'll come back to one other point. This is about the parties, political parties in our country and how the – how this value of freedom sometimes gets a bad name, you know. I got motivated, like a lot of people in my generation, into public service by President Kennedy, and you know, we were inspired by the words of his inaugural not just “Ask” – “don't ask what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country,” but this is a nation that will be prepared to pay any price and bear any burden for the survival and sustenance – really, the expansion of liberty –

MR. MAY: Very neo-con idea.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: – very neo-con – (chuckling) – that's exactly the point I wanted to make.

So then, suddenly, you're reading – and I just saw a column somewhere where somebody was talking about we've got to get over this neocon nonsense of a freedom agenda, this neocon/Bush nonsense of a freedom agenda. Well, to me, that was the Kennedy agenda – (chuckling) – it was the Truman agenda, it's an American agenda. Maybe I should stop at that and let Jon go on. (Chuckles.)

(Applause.)

MR. MAY: Well, but let me just follow – let me just put you on the spot a little bit with one specific question about that.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MAY: If you were at this point telling our ambassador in Cairo what to be telling Morsi, what would you say?

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right. I would say that we should be telling Morsi, look – there's already a lot of skepticism about you in America because, you know, we've read the Muslim Brotherhood documents historically, and they're not consistent with our values. But OK, you won the election, so – and it's very important for us to have good relations between Egypt and the United States. You're a great nation. You're a center of the Arab world. But you know, we're going to judge you not by your title with the Muslim Brotherhood, but by your actions.

And to be more specific – as grateful as we were two weeks ago that you, Mr. President Morsi, helped us end the conflict in Gaza, if the next day or two days after, you suspend the right of judicial review, et cetera, et cetera, we're not going to be able to have normal relations with you.

And probably, if I was in the White House, I'd say, Mr. President Morsi, no matter what we in the White House wanted to do, those lunatics on Capitol Hill – (laughter) – would force us not to have normal relations with you.

MR. MAY: It's always good to have lunatics from Capitol Hill and no – (laughter) – and no danger that will change, right? (Laughter.) You want to –

SEN. KYL: I see no danger of that, with Joe's departure in mind. (Laughter.) I'll see if Joe agrees with this. I – so would you put us in the realism branch of the Natan Sharansky school of – (laughter) –

SEN. LIEBERMAN: How could I say no?

SEN. KYL: It's sort of like we have to be on the side of the dissidents but don't have to be stupid about it. I guess that's the way it is. Life is full of compromises. Marriages are full of compromises – families, governments. And there cannot – I mean, it would be very odd indeed if everything were clear-cut and black-and-white in dealing with situations like all of the

complications from the Arab Spring that set up the tensions between the dissidents and the dictators, as you put it. So we don't have to be cowed by the fact that there are some very difficult questions presented here. And sometimes the compromises are not apparent; they're difficult. So how do you – so how do you make the decisions? Well, you have to handle them – you have to try to influence the setting of the stage rather than just always reacting to what is presented to you, and you best do that by having some foresight and good intelligence.

I go back to good intelligence, and always, by having a coherent philosophy that – maybe not day in and day out, maybe not even week in and week out, but year in and year out, you're going to try to stay as close on that line as you can be, knowing you're going to vary a little bit to the left and the right, as circumstances require it. But we'll not only have a lot better chance of winning but be much more credible with everybody else in the world if they know what our North Star is. It's where we want to go. And sometimes we're going to have to tack – you're in sailing; you know what this is all about. So you'll have to do that sometimes, but always with the – with the end goal in mind.

And if people understand that, then they'll be a little bit more forgiving of some of the tacking, and we won't be as subject to criticism for being hypocritical about this or that or the other thing. But you – but people have to understand what your ultimate goal is here, and it – I kidded about it, but I think a realistic school of Sharansky is kind of a good way to describe it.

MR. MAY: Let me start with you on the next question, and that is Syria, which we talked about quite a bit this morning. Are we on the right track in terms of influencing the situation in Syria? Can we influence the situation still? Could we have, if we had gotten in earlier?

SEN. KYL: Well, here's where I'm going to punt just a little bit. I don't know nearly enough about everything to be able to answer that question really intelligently, and one of my approaches to problem-solving is – first of all, I don't Twitter. (Laughter.) I try to think carefully about what I'm going to say before I say it. Frequently it comes in handy, and you don't have as much to explain later, but don't express an opinion unless you really understand the facts on the ground. And I don't well enough to express to an opinion. I do think that we might have somewhat better choices had we had a more coherent policy going in, because I don't think it has been very coherent, and as a result, some of the choices we have are far less benign than – or at least potentially productive than they otherwise might have been. So I'm going to punt that question just a little bit.

MR. MAY: Sure.

SEN. KYL: I have ideas. I think – by the way, after watching him for 26 years in the United States Congress, our colleague John McCain has some of the best quick instincts – all of his instincts are quick – (laughter) – but he sizes up situations involving national security and foreign matters very, very well. And I subscribe generally to the kinds of approaches that he's advocated throughout this conflict, but beyond that, I'm – further – (inaudible) – have not. But –

MR. MAY: Syria?

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah. I mean to me, this is the classic case of a dictator versus dissidents, and I've been increasingly frustrated, disappointed, angry that the U.S. hasn't been much more proactive in support of the dissidents in Syria, both because they were on the side of freedom – when they started out peacefully, then Assad started to fire at them, and increasingly, it really became a humanitarian disaster, and also – I mean, I don't know that in my 24 years in the Senate – I probably should think about it before I say something that – but like comparing – but this is a case where there's an awful lot of values and strategic interests of our country coming together as they usually don't in foreign policy.

And the obvious strategic interest – well, two, but the one big one is that, you know, Assad is the number one friend of our number one enemy, Iran, and his collapse would be probably as significant a body blow to the regime at the top in Tehran as anything we could do, and that would, in some ways, increase our – I think, increase our leverage over Iran when it comes to their nuclear program, maybe even as much as the sanctions do, because the fall of Assad would affect the top of the regime, including the IRGC.

So, you know, I – the other strategic reason is that – I think that the longer we've waited to get involved, the more natural vengeance comes up because of all the killing that's gone on, the more jihadist fighters have come in. It started out – I've spent a fair amount of time on this – and – with John McCain, and we've gone to – three times to Turkey to meet with the opposition and the Free Syrian Army that came out to meet us. I went once to Lebanon to do that. I think this started out, really, as a patriotic, anti-dictator movement, and it's still more than anything else, but it's clear that al-Qaida type or related people have come into it.

So the danger here is that – now there's a lot of dangers, but one is that Assad retreats, essentially to create an Alawite province with the chemical and biological weapons and the rest of the country goes into civil war, the Sunni nationalists, the Sunni extremists, the Kurds and the Arabs fighting, and it actually expands what I think will be, in some ways, the most consequential threat to stability in the Middle East in the next chapter. And it's not going to be the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is – has – is significant, but it's going to be the Sunni-Shia conflict in the Muslim world, expressed in all the ways it does.

So I think we've waited too long. I hope that we will immediately – the administration will recognize this new coalition/opposition that they helped to put together, that we'll give them weapons, and that with both the neighbors of Syria and our allies in Europe – some of which have now been ahead of us like, France and Britain – that we will focus in on this immediate, really potentially disastrous threat that Assad will use chemical and biological weapons.

MR. MAY: You said a moment ago that Iran is our most dangerous enemy.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right.

MR. MAY: If so, how far should we be willing to go to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons?

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Well, you know, I just echo what everybody has said, right up to President Obama, that it's unacceptable to – for us to allow Iran to become a nuclear state, that containment is not an acceptable alternative for all the reasons we know. I think that's absolutely right. It changes the whole balance of power in the Middle East. It emboldens the terrorists that – like Hamas and Hezbollah that are agents of the Iranian government. It probably, unless we're strong, leads some of our allies in the Arab world to begin to accommodate to Iran. And it's a threat to most of the rest of the world, including us.

So, you know, the sanctions have been unprecedented. They're having an effect on the Iranian economy, so far not an – not an observable effect on the Iranian regime at all. And so I think, you know, we have to – we have to make sure that our threat of military action if they don't take down their nuclear weapons program is credible to them. I'm still not sure it is. But they've got to believe that the U.S. will use our immense power to disable their nuclear program if they don't do it themselves.

MR. MAY: Senator Kyl –

SEN. KYL: May I just interrupt and make one comment directly pertaining to the overall theme here? Starting a long time ago, years ago, I think our sanctions regime should not only have been stronger, but it should have been oriented in a slightly different direction. We should have been saying to the people of Iran in very clear and firm way: Our quarrel is not with the Iranian regime creating nuclear weapons alone; it is the Iranian regime acting in all ways that it does, including to repress your freedoms.

And recognize the fact that the average Iranian on the street is probably pretty proud of the capability of generating nuclear weapons, nuclear capability to begin with, and they're probably nationalistic enough to be proud of the weaponry that would be created, so that if the sanctions are really going to work by impacting the will of the people and therefore the action of the people, people have to believe we're not doing it just in our own self-interest, but we're also doing it – and maybe primarily doing it – for their self-interest, to give them the ability to reassert control over their future, over their country, over their government. If they have a stake in it too, then the fact that they are impacted so negatively in personal ways is much more bearable by them.

And it's – I guess this is a microcosm of a point I'd make in a larger way. We should be – there should be a whole lot more Radio Free Europe. And all of the other voices of the American ideal telling people what we're for, why we're for it, why we share their aspirations – and whatever actions we're taking hopefully are consistent with those things.

MR. MAY: That is an important point. I think it's a hugely important point. If there's any people in the Muslim world, so-called, who understand what Islamist rule is like, it is the Iranians after 33 years, and they know it doesn't work.

Senator Lieberman said a moment ago that our threat – our military threat to the Iranian regime, not to the people of Iran, must be credible. Is it credible to you? Can you imagine this president, President Obama, using military force to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons?

SEN. KYL: Well, you have to – let's get into some definitions. You've got a United States attack; you've got an Israeli attack; you have a combination attack; you have an Israeli attack backed by some elements of U.S. force – footnote: or, after the fact, backed by some elements of U.S. force. I mean, there are all kinds of iterations here. I think the Iranians are probably nervous but not nervous enough, obviously, so the rather apparent answer is the threat probably isn't credible enough.

MR. MAY: Gaza is ruled by Hamas, which has used the territory since the Israelis withdrew in 2005 as a basis for terrorism and missile launches. The West Bank is more or less ruled by the PLO, which recently, after four years of not negotiating with the Israelis, went to the U.N. and asked for upgraded status.

Do the Israelis have anyone to negotiate a peace process with at this point? And if they did negotiation – and let's suppose that Abbas came tomorrow to negotiate the peace process after four years of refusing to do so without concessions in advance – could he sign a paper that would be at all meaningful? Would he be able to bring Hamas into it, which is dedicated to the extermination of Israel? Is there really any reason – any way to believe that Israel could have a separate peace in the midst of a global conflict with Islamism or have peace before the rest of the world settles its battles with Islamism?

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Well, it's possible, but it's very hard at this point to imagine. It would not come easily, for all the questions – for all the reasons that your questions embody. I mean, in the first place, right now Israel faces a Palestinian people that are divided between two governments, so making peace with one wouldn't give them the security or the confidence to take the risks that they will have to take as part of any peace process.

I've been – I was encouraged by one of the stories that was in the news a couple of days ago that – which I was wondering about happening – which was that people in Gaza are beginning to take a second look at Hamas because of how much they suffered in the last conflict. Because Hamas was doing something that wasn't for the people of Gaza; they were firing rockets into Israel because Iran was asking them to do that. And hopefully that will lead at some point to more unpopularity for Hamas.

So what I'm saying is that the idea would be that there really were elections that were genuine in both – in – both in the West Bank and in Gaza. That's a big desire. And it produced a government that had some credibility in all parts of the Palestinian community, that could negotiate with the Israelis. To imagine a settlement of all of the final status questions really takes an optimist – (chuckles) – beyond the – my capacity for optimism. And I'm an optimistic person by nature. (Laughter.)

So the question is whether they could – you know, could negotiate sort of tentative agreements on some of the issues involved here. But you know, this is a – this is a case where people in Israel really yearn for peace and a two-state – the majority – two-state solution. And yet, as you know – and I've seen this in recent polling from Israel – that most of them have just

given up on it in the foreseeable future because they don't see a partner who's prepared to negotiate. And I don't blame them.

MR. MAY: I don't think Abbas is prepared to negotiate. But let's suppose just for the sake of argument that he is and does, and let's suppose on Friday he sits down with Netanyahu, shakes hands and comes to a deal by Friday dinner. Will he survive through Sunday breakfast? (Laughter.)

SEN. KYL: Under current circumstances, probably his days would be numbered. I'm not talking about his life, but his power. Joe analyzed it exactly correctly: First of all, they're totally divided; secondly, they have no leadership capable of making a deal. And part of it is of their own making. You cannot start with the education of little kids, teaching them to hate Israel and everything that it stands for, and hope to have support from the people when you make a deal like that. So there are a lot of conditions for this to work, and it can't happen overnight. So as I said, part of the problem is they've created their own problem for acceptance of any kind of a reasonable deal.

MR. MAY: You expressed some pessimism – well, or realism – about what's likely to happen in Afghanistan after the departure of substantial numbers of U.S. troops – that it will be back essentially to where it was before 9/11. What happens to Pakistan after that, which is Islamist, which is semi-democratic – but the emphasis on the “semi” – and which of course is nuclear-armed?

SEN. KYL: Yeah. This just adds to the conundrum of the entire area and how we deal with it. And I go back to where I started: If you have some first principles that you try to apply in any controversy, and recognize that as you apply them there will be circumstances where some nuance and potential compromise is required, then you approach all of these problems that way.

If you have very good intelligence, you can understand better what's going on within the Pakistani society and Pakistani government. If you have a strong military, you have the ability to control events more than be controlled by them. If you have strong allies, you have the ability to sway opinion, say, with India, just by way of example, and so on and so on and so on, which goes back again to Joe's first point and mine.

If you look at all of these problems as they exist today, you can easily become very pessimistic about our ability to deal with them and maybe make the wrong kind of conclusions or compromises based on that. If you go back to the question, how would we go about winning the war against this Islamist ideology?

Political Islam is the – is the moniker that some wise people, I think, have given to it, and I think that's the best description of it. You go back to – OK, how did we approach the Cold War? What worked, what didn't work? When did it change? Why did it change? What did we need to make those changes?

Now, let's apply lessons learned to this conflict, also an ideological conflict. What are the strengths? What are the weaknesses? How – what assets are you going to need? What kind of vulnerabilities could we take advantage of? What will we need to do that? And you work all of that out, you can begin to see some opportunities.

But at a minimum, you know that they involve trying to have strong allies and alliances, starting to – trying to be strong militarily, trying to be credible and consistent philosophically, being clear-eyed about the nature of the conflict and being – here's something we forgot, both Joe – to talk about, how can you win a war without ever talking about it to the people that you lead? You know, where's Churchill today?

I love George Bush, but one of the – in fact, the only big argument I think I ever had with him is, why don't you explain your decisions? There's some good basis for them. You have to – part of leading is bringing people along with you. Why is what you did the right thing to do, and why do we have to stay the course? His explanation was always a little bit like Lincoln's: You know, well, if I'm right I'm right, if I'm wrong it won't make – matter and all that.

But – and Barack Obama, he doesn't want to explain anything because, first of all, he doesn't really even believe in the goals, with all due respect. And as a result, he's not about to talk about it. He wants to talk about other things. Well, is it no wonder that the American people are despondent over this, have no will to fight it when all they see is the downside – guys coming back with a – with an arm blown off, if they come back, and a lot of cost without any explanation whatsoever about why this is important?

Without the president standing up there leading the people as to why we have to pull together and support this, and sacrifice – remember, Henry Kissinger said something a long time ago, and – really rung true at the moment; he said, part of the reason that Europe doesn't help us and doesn't really want to get involved in anything is that their leaders have lost the capacity to get their people to follow them in any sacrifice. There's nothing to be for, so why would you ever want to sacrifice?

People have to have a reason to be for something. And it has to be deeply – now, it can be nationalistic. That's not really all that good. But – so part of winning this is to be able to talk about it with principles in mind that motivate the American people to be supportive of good policies. (Applause.)

MR. MAY: (Inaudible) – I was going to ask you more about Pakistan, which strikes me as one of our most important allies but our least reliable ally. But you're welcome to pick up on this idea, because I think it's an important one, that if we don't have self – we're not going to – if we don't believe in the value of freedom, and on a lot of our campuses we don't – we're actually negotiating with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, now named, to prohibit internationally the defamation of Islam, which would be it seems to me a blatant violation of the First Amendment of the Constitution. But if we don't really believe in free speech, if we don't really believe in the value of freedom, if we believe that other values are equally good, well then what is there to fight for, really?

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah – no, I – this – I think Jon stated it very eloquently. I mean, this is the whole question of relativism, really. And I'm – reluctance of some people to judge, but you know, there are rights and wrongs, and there's better and worse. And we – if you believe that, you have to – you have to say it, that's the responsibility of leaders in a democracy, or else the mob will influence foreign policy to a greater degree than any of us would want it to. So I don't really – I think Jon stated it very, very well.

MR. MAY: I'm going to ask –

SEN. KYL: Can I just give you, by the way, just one quick example? I told you, I was on the Khyber Pass just before 9/11. We met with Musharraf on that Intelligence Committee trip. And one of the things he pleaded with us to do is to restore military-to-military contacts. He said that, my generals are very loyal to me. They all were educated at Sandhurst or West Point, dealing with the Brits and Americans from day one in their military careers. But he said, the colonels and below I'm really worried about because you cut off all contacts with us, because of the Pressler Amendment because – and I guess that was because they built nuclear weapon, as I – I'm not that old, so I don't remember all this. (Laughter.)

But there's an example where we wanted a – we had a goal. We had a principle. We had a policy. And by golly, if they didn't adhere to it, we were going to punish them. And talk about cutting off your nose to spite your face. And that was Musharraf's point: You have now created a real problem for yourselves and for me; you need to go back. And by the way – (chuckles) – within about two weeks we had begun the process of restoring military-to-military contacts with Pakistan, which was a very good thing. But it just shows you how things are not perfect in this situation, and you got to be careful about the action and reaction and think about the long term. I'm sorry to interrupt.

MR. MAY: No, no, not at all.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: No, I'll just say briefly that our relations with Pakistan are probably at the – one at the same time, the most complicated and consequential of – it's hard to think of another country that's both so complicated and so consequential because, obviously, they're a nuclear power; they're in a very strategically important part of the world. And you know, they've gotten away with really being on both sides, or different parts of even their government being on both sides.

So, you know, I can tell you that in many ways over recent years they've given us very substantial counterterrorism assistance, and yet on the other hand, we know that parts of their intelligence community are actually supporting terrorist groups. I can't think of any other nation quite like that. And of course, we rant and rave. We come to crises. And now we're in a better place. For right now, we're – we seem to be in a – in a – in a cooperative, calm period.

I've always felt – I'll just end with this about Afghanistan – that how we end this is important and that – that's why I think it's so important that we're negotiating a longer-term strategic relationship and that we successfully conclude it, that we do better than we did in Iraq. I think Iraq would be in a lot better shape if we had 10,000 or 15,000 American troops there,

backup, trainers, et cetera, not leaving the ground open totally to Iran to come in and put more pressure on the Iraqi government than the Iraqi government really wants.

So I hope that, one, the drawdown from Afghanistan is not precipitous – of our troops, because it’s clearly not what our military wants, and secondly, that we leave some group of – some deployment of our troops there. And one of the most important reasons to do that is the message it sends to Pakistan, because, you know, the conventional wisdom that you say it so much, you wonder whether it’s really true – well, of course they – some elements in their intelligence service support the Taliban and other terrorist groups, because they’re positioning themselves for the day, which they know will come, when we again leave. And they see – leave Afghanistan, leave the region. And they see Iran coming in more to Afghanistan, but really India. So we have to convince them that – by our only – not by words but by our decisions that we’re going to stay in there. And of course –

SEN. KYL: They have to buy the insurance policy from us, not the other guys.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: You got it. And you know, beyond Pakistan – beyond Afghanistan, this whole area, just looking around the neighborhood – Iran, the stans – (chuckles) – et cetera – this is a very strategically significant part of the world now, also with growing economic importance. So not just for Afghanistan, but really for ourselves, it would be good to have – we don’t use the word “bases” anymore. It would be good to have some joint operating facilities in Afghanistan. (Laughter.)

MR. MAY: I’m going to ask another question. While I – they’re answering, if you want to ask a question, signal me, and I’ll try to come to you. Before I do, I do want to get – there are certain things I do want to make sure I got on the table. We have reset our relations with Russia. I think that’s fair to say. I’m not sure Russia reset its relations with us. (Scattered laughter.) Is that also fair to say?

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yes.

SEN. KYL: To the election, my friend. (Laughter.) Will you pass that – pass that on to Vladimir? (Laughter, scattered applause.) Flexibility. Flexibility.

MR. MAY: Yeah, I know.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: So the strange thing about Jon Kyl and me is that after the election, when we’re going to be out of office, we’re going to be more inflexible. (Laughter.)

SEN. KYL: Some might wonder if that could be, but – (laughter) – in my case – only my case. (Laughter.)

You know, this is – this a great frustration, obviously. You can understand the new President Obama with a different point of view than many of us, hoping that the – through the dint of his intelligence and personality and different point of view – that maybe the Russians would be receptive to a new approach which is sort of the anti-Bush approach.

You can understand why he might he could succeed at that and therefore try this out. So I'm not criticizing him for trying. You can question whether he should reasonably have come to that conclusion, but nonetheless, he tried it. I hope that he is shrewd enough to appreciate that it has failed, it is not likely to succeed because of a variety of reasons, and that you can't keep going down the path chasing after somebody that doesn't want anything to do with you right now without doing some damage to yourself.

And you can see a lot of different places where that's occurred. Just to cite one example, the very difficult situation that has been created with the Czech Republic, with Poland, with our missile defense system, which I would argue is now pretty well shredded, and – just to mention one example.

MR. MAY: Missile defense – I don't think people know that – and this is something you've been a champion on – missile defense is nowhere near where it should be to protect the homeland, and nuclear modernization, despite promises, is going nowhere. Am I right?

SEN. KYL: Well, nuclear modernization may be going backward, which is not good, and in terms of the homeland, remember there are sort of two elements of missile defense. There is the protection of the homeland, which people generally associate with what we call the GBI system, the ground-based interceptor. The Obama administration has cut way back on the numbers of those, on the deployment and on the development of the new generation. The generation of kill vehicles is about 20 years old. We'd like to put the new generation of kill vehicle on it, to be much more robust. Now they've cut the funding for that.

The other part of it is the system that can be both, depending on how it's deployed, an effective American defense system and protect regional interests such as Europe, for example, from a threat from, for example, a country like Iran. The great announcement that the administration made and ballyhooed, I would say, to provide the rationale for cutting way back on the GBI was we're going to have something even better, this new four-stage developed AEGIS system. Now – and, of course, everybody said, wait a minute, the fourth stage of that can be very effective, including potentially against an errant Russian missile, a missile launched by mistake or perhaps by a – by a rouge commander or –

In any event, the Russians are now saying under no circumstances should you develop that, so not only do they object to a missile defense system that might potentially be effective against them, let alone other countries, they also have been putting enough pressure on that I wonder if the administration is really going to go forward with what they characterized as the substitute for GBI, namely, the fourth phase of the – of the phased approach of AEGIS.

MR. MAY: Ken, you wanted to ask a question right there?

Q: Ken Olson, from Westport, Connecticut – my favorite senator. (Laughter.)

MR. MAY: That's why I called on you.

Q: I think that a couple of lessons have been learned over the last 10 years, and maybe even the last five years and – not the least of which is elections don't mean democracy. And I think – I wonder if there are people in this world who just don't want democracy. And is that necessarily a bad thing in particular parts of the world? And how do we in the U.S. respond to that if that – if I – what I posture is possible?

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Well, it's great to see you, Ken. Thanks. So generally speaking, I would say, from what I've observed, people do want democracy. They may settle in with dictatorship for a while, but ultimately, there's a natural human yearning for freedom and opportunity – economic opportunity. I went in with John McCain to Egypt and Tunisia within a month after the Arab Spring uprisings, and I was really quite fascinated to talk to the people who led both of those revolutions.

And one point that struck me was that they were motivated as much by a feeling of economic outrage as they were by their desire for political freedom. In other words, that they had a – had a feeling that the countries were – the leadership clique, the dictatorial clique at the top was consuming most of the wealth of the country. And here they were – as somebody I was with at a program a while ago said – that these were the middle class poor, educated, on the Internet, knowing all the opportunities out in the world, and yet couldn't find a job in Egypt or Tunisia.

So, I don't know, I'd say that maybe people develop a sort of comfort for a while with dictatorship but ultimately it doesn't work. And that – and we know that from our own – from our own history and from – again, from our founding ideals. So I think we're always at peril when we accommodate ourselves to dictatorships. Clearly, we have over our history, and we continue to, in some cases. But it's not a good bet in the long run.

MR. MAY: We could go on for a very long time, and I would like to, but there's something else I want to do here, and that is to present an award. Senator Lieberman, Senator Kyl, again, I want to thank you both for honoring us with your presence and talking so candidly and interestingly with us. I do now have the privilege of presenting each of you with an award named for one of our country's finest diplomats.

Ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick was instrumental in establishing the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in the wake of the September 11th, 2001 attacks and much of FDD's work today is based on her deep commitment to advancing democratic values and institutions. Ambassador Kirkpatrick spent her life studying totalitarianism and fighting totalitarianism. She understood early on also that the collapse of the Soviet Union would not mark the end of the struggle between freedom and tyranny. Instead, the totalitarian threat and challenge would take new forms and, indeed, it has, as we've discussed today.

Ambassador Kirkpatrick's story – if you don't know it, I'm going to tell it to you very briefly – it's quintessentially American. She was born in rural Oklahoma. She was raised a dollar-a-day roughneck during the Great Depression. She became, by dint of brains and hard work, what she called an action intellectual, which I think is a great model for FDD and for the

work – kind of work we try do, with the help of people like Senator Lieberman and Senator Kyl – and she became a maker of history, not just a student of history.

Ambassador Kirkpatrick was the first woman appointed to serve as the permanent representative of the United States to the United Nations, and I think she was one of the great U.N. ambassadors. She served as a member of Ronald Reagan's Cabinet. For this and for her career in service, Ambassador Kirkpatrick was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

And we at FDD are honored to have known Jeane Kirkpatrick, to have worked with her, to have learned from her, and we continue to honor her legacy and example. And to that end, it is particularly gratifying for me to present the first award named in her memory and her honor to Senators Lieberman and Kyl. Senator Lieberman – let's give a round of applause for them right now. (Applause.)

And also, just briefly, Senator Lieberman, I've had the privilege of knowing you since you were first elected to the U.S. Senate about a quarter of a century ago. I was a reporter for the New York Times back then, and I had the great privilege of covering, in particular, Senator Lieberman, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Senator Bill Bradley. And I've got to tell you, I had a lot of fun. (Laughter.) That was a great job to have. And over the years, you have fought consistently to expand freedom's reach at home and abroad.

My staff and I were honored when, in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, you became a distinguished advisor to this organization and a member of our leadership council. And a great credit to you also is the talented and dedicated staff you have assembled and that has worked for you so loyally over the years. It is a treat and a privilege that we get to work with them. We have – I just needed to say that.

Senator Kyl, working with you and your staff – also immensely talented people, smart, dedicated on a range of issues – has been an honor but it's also been an education. I've learned so much from you about missile defense. See, I know what you – I know when he uses those acronyms, I know what he means.

You have been singularly committed to policies that promote peace through strength. You have steadfastly opposed any efforts to compromise the United States' national defense. Your expertise on a range of issues is unmatched in the U.S. Senate and will be gravely missed. And you have fought a good fight that must continue to protect the American homeland, to protect America's allies. You've earned a reputation for strategic thinking on matters of great complexity.

Senators, in light of your many accomplishments in defense of national security, in defense of freedom, I'm proud to present to you the Foundation for Defense of Democracies' inaugural Ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick Award. It's sitting right next to you. It's a little bit heavy, but you guys are strong young guys. So pick it up.

Please join me in congratulating Senators Kyl and Lieberman. (Applause.)

SEN. KYL: Thank you all.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Can I say a word?

MR. MAY: Yes, you may. Yes, you may.

SEN. KYL (?): Thank you.

MR. MAY: Thank you. Thank you. You're both welcome to say a couple of words here. And we'll get some pictures too.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Cliff – Cliff, thanks very much. When I think about it, Cliff's movement from The New York Times to FDD is a little like my movement from the Democratic Party to being an independent. (Laughter.) I am – I'm really honored by this. I'm honored because of my great admiration for the FDD. It's a unique organization here in Washington and throughout the country. Really, I like the phrase of action intellectual. You produce some really thoughtful work that informs policy, and you've also been very effective advocates.

Secondly, I'm really honored to be – receive this award in the name of Jeane Kirkpatrick – (chuckles) – another independent Democrat. She might have been so independent, she became a Republican, I don't know. (Laughter.) She was an inspiration to watch – both to read her stuff and watch at the U.N. – and a real honor to accept this award with my colleague and really dear friend, Jon Kyl, who is, you know, the model of what a public servant should be. He's – he works very hard. He was gifted with some brains to start out with, but he really uses them and is thoughtful. And in this extremely, almost reflexively combative political climate, he happens to be a gentleman. And that matters. It's been my honor, really, to work with him on many issues of common interest over the years. I look forward to continuing it in what one of our Senate colleagues called the – calls the afterlife. (Laughter.) But for today I'll just say that I am therefore triply honored to receive this award from the FDD, in the name of Jeane Kirkpatrick, with Jon Kyl.

Thank you. (Applause.)

SEN. KYL: Thank you, Joe.

Joe put it right. It is a triple honor, first of all, to be honored by FDD, with the great leadership of Cliff May. (Applause.) The Jeane Kirkpatrick Award, with my colleague Joe Lieberman – I mean, it doesn't get much better than that, and I am just deeply honored. And as Joe said, I think we both view this as sort of the end of the first half of the ballgame, and pretty soon we're going to start the second half. And you ain't seen nothing yet, I'll say. (Laughter, applause.)

(END)