

U.S. GLOBAL LEADERSHIP COALITION

TRIBUTE DINNER FEBRUARY 2, 2011

REMARKS OF FORMER SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY TOM RIDGE

THOMAS J. RIDGE: Thanks, Robin, very much. (Inaudible) – thank you, thank you. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much for that overly generous introduction. Thank you very much for your very warm welcome. Robin, thank you, Helene, Cokie, it's a great pleasure to be in your company. Distinguished guests, all, is Ambassador Green here? There's my friend, Ambassador Green. I want to shout out to another strong supporter of the global coalition and a wishful-thinking Packers fan. (Laughter, applause.) It'll only hurt for a little while. (Laughter.)

There are a lot of distinguished guests here this evening and people ask me how I felt about the award and I said I'm honored but I must tell you, it is particularly – in a very personal way, an honor for me to be associated with Secretary Albright. I think that – (applause). This is an individual whose commitment to her country, the experiences that have shaped her, helped shape foreign policy.

She's a public servant who's built intellectual and humanitarian and diplomatic bridges to our friends and allies. It's her wit and her wisdom and all those experiences that she countlessly takes, has used time and time again to advance America's interest. So Madame Secretary, it's a special honor – it's a great honor because – working the evening with you to try to get everybody fired up. Raise that decibel level. (Applause.)

Since we're – since we're telling Christmas stories, I do – I'm grateful for the kind words that President Bush said. After 9/11, everyone wanted to do something for their country and the president – I was one of the fortunate ones. The president actually gave me a job to help out and I'm grateful for his words.

But I remember in the course of that tenure, there was one Christmas season when we decided to cancel some flights and instead of going through, I hope you don't mind, Madame Secretary, we did not go through the State Department, we went right to the countries directly – time was of the essence, time was of the essence. (Laughter.)

And I remember the counterpart on the other said, you know, this is – we've been – this is a matter of sovereignty. A bit rough around the edges, a matter of sovereignty and you can't tell us we can't take off. And we said, you know, you're absolutely right. But we can tell you, you can't land. (Laughter.) So they cancelled the flights. That's just the way it worked. (Laughter.)

So the secretary and I have worked together for the past couple of years. We worked together doing Global Engagement's Impact '08 effort. Her candidate won; mine came in second. But I think he enjoys keeping President Obama on his toes. I truly believe there's mutual respect between President Obama and Senator McCain.

I believe it is a respect that demonstrates that Americans, we do not have to agree on every matter of policy, on every agenda, on every talking point because in America, unity does not require unanimity. We do not have to agree – (applause).

No, we do not have to agree on all things to uphold the important things, the kind of things in which we in fact do agree such as the teaching tenets of founders. So as a nation, despite our differences, as citizens, we all cling to the sameness, the beauty of our country and the opportunity to enjoy the blessings of liberty and freedom.

Someone asked me earlier, what prompted me join the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition. Very simple: I believe in your mission. I believe in your message, the message that we must enhance the ability of our country, to advance the ideals of freedom and democracy around the globe, that the military is but one option available to influence geopolitical events and to bring about a better and a safer world.

We have failed to recognize the long-term positive impact of addressing humanitarian and social concerns before political crises occur, before Mother Nature strikes, that our product, America, and the need to embrace our brand – I think as we promote America, I often look at it as a product.

We have something real special to sell. But the brand of that product is our values system. And I think we can achieve promotion of that product through the wise – through the use of the wise arsenal of liberty, the smart power of diplomacy, foreign assistance and economic development.

Nearly 40 years ago, when I served in I Corps in Vietnam, I didn't spend a lot of time thinking about these things, I must admit. I was a soldier, a young infantry staff sergeant, trucking through the wet flatlands, primarily covered in rice paddies and – beyond which were the waves of the South China Sea.

But I do think back. And I do recall that during that time as I every day saw villagers emerge from small, thatched huts, dirt floors, men, women and children who headed out to those rice paddies at dawn and came back at dusk not five days a week, seven days a week, I could not help but wonder, what if there were more Peace Corps volunteers around?

What if there were some doctors here to help? What if somehow the government was connected to a land-grant school or agricultural university? How about if they had some modern farming equipment? What all or any of that could have done to help them not just to survive but to flourish?

The images of war in its many forms have stayed with me. But watching those villagers bring dignity to a threadbare existence amid the very vulnerable landscape of war is an image that all these years later does make me think of America's place in the world, our leadership and our global engagement.

We know the world is becoming more interdependent, more opportunities and more risks. We know that the security and prosperity of the global community is forever inextricably linked, which means we are more and more vulnerable to pandemics, to terrorism, to just about everything we used to think we were immune from or isolated from in the 19th or the 20th centuries.

In my mind, all the more reason for us to be more engaged in bringing stability to broken regions of the world and in addressing human needs. And in America, we really wouldn't have it any other way, would we? For this democracy, we take up our charge with enthusiasm.

I believe that we know that we are all called to serve as long as we call ourselves free. And we know that there's no place for neutrality in times of moral crisis. You know, when the tsunami in Indonesia roared, the earthquake in Haiti devastated, we reached out with a hand of compassion, funds and resources. We were the first in. And no matter where disaster strikes, we usually are.

We do so by manifesting the tools of smart power to try to help those affected by those natural disasters to save lives. We do so because of our national and individual charitable and philanthropic impulses, no better represented than by the man that joins us tonight, Bill Gates. (Applause.)

So despite our differences, we will cling together in our sameness and protect and nurture the most vulnerable among us in our global family. There's a poignant moment, some of you may recall, from "Charlie Wilson's War." I served with Charlie; spent absolutely no time in the hot tub, but I did go – (laughter). You can figure out whether I'm distressed, sad or whatever.

After Charlie convinces – remember in the movie – the intelligence committee and the president and others for hundreds of millions of dollars to support the mujahedeen – the scene as the Russians vacate – you see the tanks going across the bridge. In the next scene, you see him talking to the same group that had spent hundreds of millions on military aid. And Charlie says, now I need a few million dollars to start building roads and schools. And they look at him and say, what are you now? A congressman from Kabul?

Of course, the easiest way to undermine that sentiment publicly and rhetorically and politically is to say, oh, we have so many problems in America. How can we afford to be spending this much money overseas? It is real money; that is true.

But at the end of the day, ladies and gentlemen, and here we ought to look to our military leaders, several of whom commented to me tonight, we shouldn't use diplomacy and developmental assistance and foreign aid in a default position. We've got to be very progressive in pushing it out because it has as much and great an impact as potential military aid. And by the

way – (applause) – and I think as we all know, it's far less expensive than sending our greatest treasure – and that's the men and women in uniform. (Applause.)

So I think the challenge for all of us in this room particularly during these tough economic times when the deficits are real and tough decisions have to be made, we have to convince the men and women up on the Hill that if we're going to advance our interest around the globe, well, we certainly need a strong military but we can't rely simply on a military strategy. We need smart power.

It makes us mindful that if you bring in a clean-water system, a sanitation system, vaccinations, schools, technology – if you reach out to address real human needs, you certainly in parts of the world will make the ideology of extremism far less attractive to those bent on the subversion and perversion of land and people.

That doesn't mean we should expect that their democratic institutions are necessarily going to end up looking like others – pretty good chance is they won't. But we need to build friendship and allies in many different forms and accept it in those forms.

But I do believe in everyone's heart around the world, if you have an opportunity to live your own heart, choose your own leaders and be self-determining versus repressed and oppressed, and despite cultural, political and religious differences, you end up having a belief similar to ours, a belief that will enable all of us to cling together in our sameness, a belief that deserving of all human beings – that the freedom to be free, to determine one's own future and one's own faith.

We saw that notion play out in the unfolding of the Cold War, the unfolding of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new Eastern European democracies. We saw it play out as the Iranian people took their protest and pleas to the Western world. And we see it playing out, as the secretary mentioned, as Egypt tries to reconcile its history with a stormy present and transition to a very different and presently unknown future.

None of the above is fully resolved yet. But as Abraham Lincoln once told us, revolutions do not go backwards. And so, just as I did in Vietnam, I do the same with you in the audience tonight. I can't help but wonder what a difference the tools of empowerment can make, what a difference the wise arsenal of liberty can make, what a difference we can make – we, who despite our differences, still cherish our sameness.

So my hope is that we will continue to uphold this shared mission through the context of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, through every effort we have to advance a safer and better world. Thank you for this honor, ladies and gentlemen. And thank you for the honor you bring to America through the good and the important work that you do every single day. Thank you very much. (Applause.)