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The White House

Office of the Vice President

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Remarks by the Vice President at the John F. Kennedy Forum

Harvard Kennedy School
Boston, Massachusetts

6:37 P.M. EDT

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, Dean, you did that introduction exactly like my sister wrote it sounds like. (Laughter.) Thank you. That was very, very generous of you.

And as we used to say in the Senate, please excuse the point of personal privilege. There are three reasons why I've won the races I've won and why I sustained winning, and they're right here in this front row. The first one is my sister, but also the guy who got me through the 1972 campaign is one of the best political strategists I have ever known, and a man who is -- as Frank -- is that you, Frank, back there? Frank Fahrenkopf, the former chairman of the Republican Party. We've known each other a long time, back to the days when we really liked one another, Republicans and Democrats. (Laughter.) We still do. It's great to see you, Frank.

But as Frank can tell you and anyone else can tell you that the one thing when you hire a political consultant that you most are concerned about -- and I mean this sincerely -- is will they reflect your values. This guy that I'm about to introduce to you has more integrity in his little finger than most people have their whole body, but is the reason I overcame that deficit -- John Marttila, a native Bostonian here.

And the guy sitting next to him who has fought in Vietnam and came back to fight against the war in Vietnam and has become my friend. And if you ever have to -- that old joke, if you have to be in a foxhole, this is the guy you want with you, Professor Tommy Vallely (ph). Tommy, it's great to see you. I didn't expect to see you.

And it's great to be here. And I have one plea, don't jump. (Laughter.) Don't jump. It's good to be back.

I understand that Senator Markey may be here. I hope for his sake he's not and he's out campaigning because -- but I was told he might be, and Congressman Delahunt, two fine friends. If they're here I want to acknowledge them.

Folks, "all's changed, changed utterly. A terrible beauty has been born." Those are the words written by an Irish poet William Butler Yeats about the Easter Rising in 1916 in Ireland. They were meant to describe the status of the circumstance in Ireland at that time. But I would argue that in recent years, they better describe the world as we see it today because all has changed. The world has changed.

There's been an incredible diffusion of power within states and among states that has led to greater instability. Emerging economies like India and China have grown stronger, and they

seek a great force in the global order and global affairs.

Other powers like Russia are using new asymmetrical forms of coercion to seek advantage like corruption and "little green men," foreign agents, soldiers with a mission but no official uniform. New barriers and practices are challenging the principles of an open, fair, economic competition. And in a globalized world, threats as diverse as terrorism and pandemic disease cross borders at blinding speeds. The sheer rapidity and magnitude, the interconnectedness of the major global challenges demand a response -- a different response, a global response involving more players, more diverse players than ever before.

This has all led to a number of immediate crises that demand our attention from ISIL to Ebola to Ukraine -- just to name a few that are on our front door -- as someone said to me earlier this week, the wolves closest to the door.

Each one in its own way is symptomatic of the fundamental changes that are taking place in the world. These changes have also led to larger challenges. The international order that we painstakingly built after World War II and defended over the past several decades is literally fraying at the seams right now.

The project of this administration, our administration at this moment in the 21st century, the project that President Obama spoke about last week at the United Nations is to update that order, to deal with these new realities, but also accommodate and continue to reflect our enduring interests and our enduring values.

And we're doing this in a number of ways. First, by strengthening our core alliances; second, building relationships with emerging powers; third, defending and extending the international rules of the road that are most vital; and fourthly, confronting the causes of violent extremism. But all of this rests on building a strong, vibrant economy here at home to be able to underpin our ability to do anything abroad.

So tonight I want to talk to you about our efforts and provide, as best I can, an honest accounting of what it's going to take for America to succeed in the beginning of the 21st century.

The first thing we have to do is to further strengthen our alliances. Many of the challenges we face today require a collective response. That's why we start from a foundation of the strong alliance we've had historically in Europe and in Asia, a feature of American strength unmatched by any other nation in history and built on a sacred commitment to defend one another, but also built on shared political and economic values.

One of the cornerstones of our foreign policy is the vision we share with our NATO allies of a Europe whole and free, where every nation can choose the path it wishes with no interference. But that vision has been recently challenged. We've seen aggression on

Europe's frontier. And that's why we've moved to mobilize our NATO allies to step up and provide significant security assistance to Ukraine.

Each of the 28 NATO allies has now committed to providing security assistance to Ukraine, including over \$115 million from the United States. And as we respond to the crisis in Ukraine, we are determined that NATO itself emerge stronger from the crisis thrust on us by Russia. With our allies, we are increasing deployments on land, sea and in the skies over Central and Eastern Europe.

And at the most recent NATO Summit in Wales, the Alliance agreed to create a Rapid Response Force to make sure that NATO is ready and can respond to any contingency. And we're increasing exercises and capacity building with non-NATO nations, countries in European -- on Europe's eastern frontier to ensure that they too can exercise their right to choose their own future, and that NATO's door remains open.

But beyond mutual defense, we're working closely with Europe on everything from trade to counterterrorism to climate change. But we have to be honest about this and look it squarely in the eye, the transatlantic relationship does not sustain itself by itself. It cannot be sustained by America alone. It requires investment and sacrifice on both sides of the Atlantic, and that means ensuring that every NATO country meets its commitment to devote 2 percent of its GDP to defense; establishing once and for all a European energy strategy so that Russia can no longer use its natural resources to hold its neighbors hostage. Reaching a final agreement on the so-called Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, the new mechanism to try to strengthen the economic engines to sustain our mutual efforts in Europe and at home.

To the East, for six decades, America's alliances in Asia have made possible the security and stability that has flowed from -- that has allowed the economic miracle. When I met not long ago and I met many, many hours with President Xi -- I probably had dinner alone with him over 22, 23 hours over two five-day periods, talking about -- I mentioned that America -- I made clear that America is a Pacific power and we will remain a Pacific power. And us in the area is the reason for the existence of a stability in Asia for the past 50 years. That's why it's essential that we modernize our Pacific alliances, updating our posture and expanding our partnerships to meet the new challenges we face.

America today has more peacetime military engagements in the Asia Pacific than ever before. By 2020, 60 percent of our naval assets and 60 percent of our air power will be stationed in the Pacific. We're supporting Japan's efforts to interpret its constitution to allow it to play a larger security role. We've signed enhanced defense cooperation agreements with the Philippines. We're strengthening our missile defense capabilities in the region to deter and defend against North Korea. And three years ago, we had no forces in Australia; today, we have more than a thousand Marines rotationally deployed in Darwin. And we have

a growing partnership with Vietnam, in no small part -- by the way -- to the work of Tommy Vallely and his colleagues actively engaged in regional organizations like ASEAN.

We have an historic opportunity as well to build a new relationship with Burma if we get lucky. But our Asian allies also have tough choices to make. We cannot do this on our own. It will relate to their willingness to work closely and more closely with one another. As the President and I have done in meetings with the leaders of Japan and South Korea, we're going to continue to promote trilateral cooperation among our allies and partners in the Pacific to make the most of those ties that will benefit the entire region if we succeed.

In the Middle East, our alliances are also crucial. We will never waver from our steadfast support for Israel, and we're working alongside a coalition of Arab partners and countries from around the world to confront ISIL.

So even as we strengthen our traditional alliances, we're building wider coalitions to bolster the world's ability to respond to these emerging crises.

Take Ebola. A horrific disease that is now a genuine global health emergency. Our Centers for Disease Control, USAID and our military have taken charge of that world epidemic. We are organizing the international response to this largest epidemic in history. The President rallied the world at the United Nations last week, mobilizing countries from all around the world to act, and to act quickly. We're deploying over 3,000 American soldiers to West Africa to support regional civilian responses and advance the effort in fighting the disease of Ebola.

The second thing we have to do besides strengthening our alliances and cooperation, we have to effectively manage our relationships with emerging powers of the 21st century. And that means putting in the effort to realize the potential of America's friendship with emerging democratic partners like Brazil and President Dilma, President Pena Nieto in Mexico, Prime Minister Modi in India, who just made a historic visit to the United States this week.

Each of these relationships has a significant potential to genuinely, genuinely promote shared interest and shared ideals. But each one has to overcome domestic politics, bureaucratic inertia, and a significant legacy of mistrust over the last century. But there is great potential here, but there is no guarantees. There is no substitute for direct engagement and an unstinting effort to bridge the gap between where we are today and where we can and should be tomorrow.

The world in which emerging powers and responsible stakeholders promoting common security and prosperity has yet to arrive, but it's within our grasp to see that happen. That's why we've embraced the G20 as a model for economic cooperation. That's why it's also important that we fully support international institutions like the IMF, fund them and reform and modernize them to better serve all nations.

But managing our relationship with China is the single most essential part of the strategy at which we must succeed. Even as we acknowledge that we will often be in competition, we seek deeper cooperation with China, not conflict.

Nowhere is it written that there must be conflict between the United States and China. There are no obvious, obvious impediments to building that relationship. And we're committed to building up that partnership where we can, but to push back where we must. The President plans to visit China this fall as part of his second trip to Asia this year. This is the kind of engagement that is necessary for us to come together and do consequential things.

At Sunnylands, when he met with President Xi last, they reached an historic agreement on the super pollutant known as HFCs, hydrofluorocarbons. And our hope is that this year we can continue to expand our cooperation with China on climate and environment, but also be very direct about our differences. That's why in a five-hour meeting I had with President Xi this past December -- after they had several days earlier announced unilaterally an air defense identification zone, contrary to international law -- I sat with President Xi and I told him bluntly, Mr. President, understand one thing. We do not recognize it, we do not honor it, and we're flying a B-52 through it. Understand. (Laughter.) No, I'm serious. I'm not asking you to do anything. I'm not asking you to renege. Just understand -- we will pay no attention whatsoever to it. It's important. It's important that in emerging relationships there be absolute, frank, direct discussions.

That's why we've made clear as well that freedom of navigation must be maintained in the South China Sea. But that's also why President Obama has been direct in public and private with China's leaders on cyber theft. And as the world watches Hong Kong's young people take to the streets peacefully to demand respect for their own rights, we'll also never stop standing up for the principles we believe in that are universal -- democratic freedoms and human rights.

President Xi asked me, why do we focus on human rights so much? I'm serious. And I gave him a direct answer -- which is almost unique to the United States; it doesn't make us better or worse, but unique to the United States. I said, Mr. President, even if a President of the United States did not want to raise human rights abuses with you to have a better relationship on the surface, it would be impossible for him or her to do that -- for the vast majority of the American people came here to seek human rights and freedom. It is stamped into our DNA. It is impossible for us to remain silent. Again, he took it on board -- and it's important to understand why we do it. It is not a political tool. It is who we are.

To build these robust relationships with emerging powers, we also have to demonstrate staying power -- which is hard and costly -- in places that will do the most to shape the

world that our grandchildren are going to inherit. That's why our rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region depends in no small part on completing a trade initiative known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And that's the whole Pacific -- from Peru all the way to Japan.

It's a partnership that will stitch together the economies of 12 Pacific nations, stretching from South America to Asia, united behind rising standards regarding labor, the environment, and fair completion. Once completed, these trade agreements we are negotiating across the Atlantic and the Pacific will encompass nearly two-thirds of the global trade in the world, and can shape the character of the entire economic global economy.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership also has a profound strategic -- not just economic -- strategic element to it. Because deeper economic ties cement our partnerships but, most of all, help small nations resist the blackmail and coercion of larger powers using new asymmetric weapons to try to achieve their ends in other countries.

And this brings me to the Western Hemisphere, a vital part of the Pacific equation, but where there's another great opportunity. The President asked me to oversee our hemispheric relations. And for the first time in history, you can truly envision a Western Hemisphere that is secure, democratic and middle class, from northern Canada to southern Chile, and everywhere in between. But we have to overcome centuries of distrust. We can no longer look at the region in terms of what we can do for it. The question is what can we do together in this hemisphere. And the possibilities are endless.

On energy, North America is literally -- not figuratively -- the epicenter of energy in the world today. There are more rigs, gas and oil rigs in the United States pumping today than every other nation in the world combined. Combined. North America will account -- meaning Mexico, China and Canada -- for two-thirds of the growth of global energy supply over the next 20 years. By 2018, the United States will be a net exporter of natural gas, and most projections show North America will be totally energy independent by 2020, and the United States shortly thereafter.

Look at the hemisphere in terms of trade. Forty percent of all our exports stay in this hemisphere -- 40 percent. We have \$1.3 trillion in trade in a yearly basis just in North America, including \$1.3 billion per day with Mexico alone.

On security, we partnered with Colombia and Mexico and others to combat the scourge of drug trafficking. We're helping Central American countries address the root causes of poverty and violence and migration.

But to realize the potential of our partnerships in the region, we have to be present, we have to build that trust -- which is why I've made five trips to Latin America just in the last -- and to South America as well -- just in the last 18 months.

It's why we have to pass immigration reform here in the United States. It's one thing to say we respect the rest of the Americas, the majority of which are Hispanic. But it's another thing to say I respect them and yet not respect the immigrant population that's the Hispanic community of the United States. It does not connect.

The single most significant thing we can do to fundamentally change the relationship in terms of trust and commitment is to pass immigration reform. Those of you who travel to or are from Central and South America know of what I speak. Because respecting immigrants from the Americas is part of how we show that we really have changed our view, that South and Central America is no longer our back yard; it is our front yard. It is our partner. The relationship is changing. And when it changes fully the benefits for us are astounding.

The third thing we need to do -- and are doing -- is to defend and extend the international rules of the road and deal with asymmetrical threats that are emerging. The international system today is under strain from actors pushing and sometimes pushing past the limits of longstanding important international norms like nonproliferation and territorial integrity. That's why we insisted that Syria remove its chemical weapons stockpile and the means to manufacture them. So we assembled under great criticism a coalition with Russia and others to remove Syria's chemical stockpile. That's why we have made it clear to Iran that we will not allow them to acquire a nuclear weapon. So we've put together the single most effective, international sanctions in history to isolate Iran, and to push them back to the negotiating table.

Elsewhere, actors are subverting the fundamental principle of territorial integrity through the use of new asymmetric tactics, the use of proxies to quietly test the limits and probe the weaknesses across boundaries and borders on land and sea; the use of corruption as a foreign policy tool, unlike any time in modern history, to manipulate outcomes in other countries in order to undermine the integrity of their governmental institutions. That's exactly what's happening in Ukraine today.

Putin -- President Putin was determined to deny Ukraine and the Ukrainian people the power to make their choices about the future -- whether to look east or west or both. Under the pretext of protecting Russian-speaking populations, he not only encouraged and supported separatists in Ukraine, but he armed them. He sent in Russian personnel out of uniform to take on the Ukrainian military, those little, green men.

And when that wasn't enough, he had the audacity to send Russian troops and tanks and sophisticated, air-defense systems across the border. But we rallied the world to check his ambitions and defend Ukrainian sovereignty. We didn't put boots on the ground.

Putin sought to prevent a free and open election. We rallied the world to help Ukraine hold quite possibly the freest election in its history. Putin sought to destabilize Ukraine's

economy. We provided a billion dollars directly from the United States and worked with the IMF on a \$27 billion international rescue package to keep them from going under.

Putin sought to keep Ukraine weak through corruption. We're helping those leaders fight back corruption, which by the way is an issue that demands our leadership around the world, by helping them write new laws, set up a new judiciary and much more. Putin sought to hollow out Ukraine's military the last 10 years, and he was very successful. But we rallied NATO and NATO countries to begin to build that military capability back up. Putin sought to keep secret Russian support for separatists who shot down a civilian airliner. We exposed it to the world, and in turn rallied the world. And remember this all began because Putin sought to block Ukraine's accession agreement with the European Union. Well, guess what: That agreement was signed and ratified several weeks ago.

Throughout we've given Putin a simple choice: Respect Ukraine's sovereignty or face increasing consequences. That has allowed us to rally the world's major developed countries to impose real cost on Russia.

It is true they did not want to do that. But again, it was America's leadership and the President of the United States insisting, oft times almost having to embarrass Europe to stand up and take economic hits to impose costs. And the results have been massive capital flight from Russia, a virtual freeze on foreign direct investment, a ruble at an all-time low against the dollar, and the Russian economy teetering on the brink of recession.

We don't want Russia to collapse. We want Russia to succeed. But Putin has to make a choice. These asymmetrical advances on another country cannot be tolerated. The international system will collapse if they are.

And to state the obvious, it's not over yet. And there are no guarantees of success. But unlike -- the Ukrainian people have stood up. And we are helping them, leading and acting strategically.

The fourth element of our strategy is countering violent extremism. As you know, we've engaged in a relentless campaign against terrorists in Afghanistan, in the so-called FATA, in Pakistan, Somalia and elsewhere. This campaign against violent extremism predates our administration, and it will outlive our administration. But we've made real progress against al Qaeda's core and its affiliates since 9/11. But this threat of violent extremism is something we're going to have to contend with for a long time.

Today, we're confronting the latest iteration of that danger, so-called ISIL; a group that combines al Qaeda's ideology with territorial ambitions in Iraq and Syria and beyond, and the most blatant use of terrorist tactics the world has seen in a long, long time. But we know how to deal with them.

Our comprehensive strategy to degrade and eventually defeat ISIL reflects the lessons we have learned post-9/11 about how to use our power wisely. And degrading them does not depend upon an unsustainable deployment of hundreds of thousands of boots on the ground. It's focused on building a coalition with concrete contributions from the countries in the region. It recognizes outside military intervention alone will not be enough. Ultimately, societies have to solve their own problems, which is why we're pouring so much time and effort into supporting a Syrian opposition and Iraqi efforts to re-establish their democracy and defend their territory. But this is going to require a lot of time and patience.

The truth is we will likely be dealing with these challenges of social upheaval not just in Iraq and Syria, but across the Middle East in the wake of the Arab Spring, which will take a generation or more to work itself out.

We can't solve each of these problems alone. We can't solve them ourselves. But ultimately -- and we can't ultimately solve them with force, nor should we try. But we can work to resolve these conflicts. We can seek to empower the forces of moderation and pluralism and inclusive economic growth. We can work with our partners to delegitimize ISIL in the Islamic world, and their perverse ideology.

We can cut off the flow of terrorist finance and foreign fighters, as the President chaired the hearing in the United Nations Security Council on that issue just last week. We can build the capacity of our partners from the Arab world to Afghanistan to solve their security problems in their own countries with our help and guidance. The threat posed by violent extremists is real. And I want to say here on the campus of Harvard University: Our response must be deadly serious, but we should keep this in perspective. The United States today faces threats that require attention. But we face no existential threat to our way of life or our security. Let me say it again: We face no existential threat -- none -- to our way of life or our ultimate security.

You are twice as likely to be struck by lightning as you are to be affected by a terrorist event in the United States.

And while we face an adaptive, resilient enemy, let's never forget that they're no match for an even more resilient and adaptive group of people, the American people, who are so much tougher, smarter, realistic and gutsy than their political leadership gives them credit for.

We didn't crumble after 9/11. We didn't falter after the Boston Marathon. But we're America. Americans will never, ever stand down. We endure. We overcome. We own the finish line. So do not take out of proportion this threat to us. None of you are being taught to dive under your desks in drills dealing with the possibility of a nuclear attack. And I argue with all of my colleagues, including in the administration, the American people have already factored in the possibility that there will be another Boston Marathon someday. But it will

not, cannot -- has no possibility of breaking our will, our resolve, and/or our ultimate security.

Which brings me to the fifth and final point, the strength of America's economy. Without a strong economic foundation, none of which I have spoken to is possible -- none of it. It all rests on America remaining the most vibrant and vital economy in the world.

And America is back. America remains the world's leading economy. I got elected when I was 29 years old, as was pointed out, and I was referred to in those days as a young idealist. And I'm today -- if you read about me among the many things that are often said, good and bad, I'm always referred to as the White House Optimist, as if somehow, as my grandpop would say, I fell off the turnip truck yesterday. (Laughter.)

I'm optimistic because I know the history of the journey of this country. And I have never been more optimistic about America's future than I am today, and that is not hyperbole. We are better positioned than any other nation in the world to remain the leading economy in the world in the 21st century.

We have the world's greatest research university. We have the greatest energy resources in the world. We have the most flexible venture-capitalist system, the most productive workers in the world. That's an objective assertion. We have a legal system that adjudicates claims fairly, protects intellectual property. Don't take my word for it. AT Kearney has been doing a survey for over the last I believe 30-some years. They survey the 500 largest industrial outfits in the world. They ask the same question: Where is the best place in the world to invest? This year, America not only remains the best place in the world to invest by a margin larger than any time in the record of the survey, but Boston Consulting Group right here, a first-rate outfit, surveys every year American corporations with manufacturing facilities in China and asks them what are they planning for next year. This year, the response was 54 percent of those invested in China said they planned on coming home.

I don't know how long I've been hearing about how China -- and I want China to succeed, it's in our interest they succeed economically -- about how China is eating America's lunch. Folks, China has overwhelming problems. China not only has an energy problem, they have no water. No, no, not a joke -- like California. They have no water. (Laughter.) It is a gigantic and multi-trillion-dollar problem for them. We should help them solve the problem.

Ladies and gentlemen, raise your hand if you think our main competition is going to come from the EU in the next decade. Put your hands up. (Laughter.) I'm not being facetious here now, I'm being deadly earnest. We want -- it is overwhelmingly our interest that the EU grow, and that China grows, because when they don't grow, we don't grow as fast. But, ladies and gentlemen, relative terms, we are so well-positioned if we act rationally, if we invest in our people.

A recent study points out that American workers are three times as productive as workers in China. It matters in terms of where people will invest their money, where jobs will be created. And one of my -- I was in and out of Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina over twenty-some times. As Maggie will remember, I was the voice that kept hectoring President Clinton to lift the arms embargo and take on Milosevic, which he did, to his great credit.

And one of my trips to Kosovo, I had a Kosovar driver, meaning he was Muslim, a Kosovar driver and who spoke a little English. And I was going up to Fort Bondsteel, which is right outside of Pristina, a fort that was being built on a plateau. And it was a rutted, muddy road, and we were -- the tires were spinning to get up there, but there were all these cranes and bulldozers and all these incredible movement. And my driver very proudly sort of looked down like this and looked out the window and he pointed at me and he said, Senator, America, America. And we were literally at a gate -- and, Tommy, you know, the old pike that came down across this rutted road in red and white striped. And standing to the right of the gate, stopping us, were five American soldiers. An African American woman, who was a master sergeant; a Chinese American -- I forget the rank; an African American man; a woman colonel, and a Hispanic commanding officer. And I tapped him on the soldier and I said, no, no, and I meant it so seriously -- there's America. There's America. Until you figure out how to live together like we do, you will never, never, never make it.

America's strength ultimately lies in its people. There's nothing special about being American -- none of you can define for me what an American is. Can't define it based on religion, ethnicity, race, culture. The uniqueness of America is that we are a group of people who agreed on -- whether we say it, whether we're well-educated or not, whether we say it in terms of basic agreements but we really do believe without saying it, "We the People." "All men are created equal, endowed by their Creator." Sounds corny. But that's who we are. That's the essential strength and vibrancy of this country.

And that's why it's our obligation to lead. It's costly. It takes sacrifice. And sometimes it's dangerous. But we must lead -- but lead in a more rational way, as I hope I've outlined for you, because we can. We can deal with the present crisis, and it is within our power to make a better world.

You're a lucky group of students. I'm not being solicitous. You're lucky because you are about to take control at a time where one of those rare inflection points in the history of the world, in this country. Remember from your physics class in high school, if you didn't have to take it in college. I remember my physics professor saying an inflection point is when you're riding down the highway at 60 miles an hour and your hands are on the steering wheel, and you turn it abruptly 2, 5, 10 degrees one way or the other, and you can never get back on the path you were on.

We are at an inflection point. The world is changing whether we like it or not, but we have

our hands on the wheel. The only time you get a chance to bend history a little bit are these moments of great change. And if we're wise, if we have courage and resolve, and with a little bit of luck we can all make the world a better place -- for real.

God bless you all and may God protect our troops. Thank you. (Applause.)

END

7:20 P.M. EDT



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