WASHINGTON, DC – House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer (MD) delivered remarks this morning on Democrats' record on national security and a comprehensive security strategy that uses all of our tools to keep Americans safe at an event hosted by the Center for Strategic & International Studies. Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery:

"Experience shows that the values of free societies can break down the strongest walls of oppression. And American foreign policy has, at its best and most creative, taken advantage of that fact to keep our nation more secure.

"As Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, I watched first-hand as free speech, free association, and free markets became the rallying cry for the brave dissident movements of the Eastern Bloc. From Solidarity in Poland, to Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, to heroes like Andrei Sakharov and Natan Sharansky in Russia, they found courage in the universal principles of free men and women. They helped usher in an era of glasnost, or new openness behind the Iron Curtain. And, ultimately, they helped bring down an empire.

"I have never forgotten the lesson: America's military is a powerful weapon, but it is not the only one we have. Today we are engaged in a new struggle—one unlike any in our history. Our enemy is not defined by borders or governments; the struggle's end will not be defined by a surrender ceremony. We are confronting not an evil empire, but a network of hate and violence, and the trends of state failure and nuclear proliferation that amplify its danger. But now, as then, our success will be measured not only by our determination, but by our creativity. Now, as then, we cannot afford to turn our backs on any weapon in our arsenal.

"The challenge is great—but no greater than other challenges that our Nation has faced and overcome. In fact, America has often overcome those challenges under Democratic leadership. Through two World Wars, through the containment that checked the spread of communism, through the specter of missiles in Cuba or genocide in Bosnia, Democratic leadership has answered the threats that endangered America's security, and the world's.

"Today I want to discuss how we can build on that tradition and continue to keep our Nation and its people safe. It is a strategy that rests on the use of four crucial tools: strength, development, democracy, and fiscal discipline.

"First, Democrats have aggressively stepped up the fight against terrorists. We've strengthened America's military by funding its re-equipment after years of war, and we have put new and better weapons into the battlefield, including the body armor and mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles our troops need, as well as more aerial drones. Under President Obama, the United States has killed or captured hundreds of terrorist leaders, including much of the top leadership of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, disrupting their ability to plot attacks on our Country.

“The attempted Christmas Day bombing, and the attempted bombing of Times Square, reminded us all—if we needed any reminder—that our enemies still intend to do us grave harm. Those plots were foiled not by chance, but by the vigilance of law enforcement and intelligence, first responders and ordinary citizens. But even a foiled plot is a lesson in our vulnerabilities and the ways in which terrorists attempt to exploit them; that’s why President Obama demanded that our intelligence community closely study and apply the lessons of those plots.

“President Obama also demonstrated that he learned the lessons of the Bush Administration’s conduct in Afghanistan, where years of neglect allowed for the Taliban’s resurgence. President Obama listened closely to opposing views on the way forward in Afghanistan. For the first time in years, we have a clear counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan, drawing on important cooperation from the Pakistani government, and based on the premise that a terrorist-dominated state there will once again, as it did in 2001, pose a direct danger to Americans; but we also have a clear timeframe to measure the effectiveness of our efforts. And in Iraq, we are preparing for a responsible redeployment that will allow the Iraqi government to stand on its own two feet.

“But protecting ourselves against terrorism does not just mean force of arms. That’s why Democrats, often in the face of Republican opposition, have increased funding for human intelligence collection, cybersecurity, and security for our skies, our ports, and our borders. For instance, both the Fiscal Year 2010 Homeland Security Appropriations bill and the Fiscal Year 2011 Intelligence Authorization bill passed over strong Republican opposition.

“President Obama is also strongly committed to nuclear nonproliferation—because the more nuclear weapons in the world, the greater the chance that one will someday fall into the wrong hands. As the president said at the nuclear summit he convened in April, if terrorists ever acquired and used nuclear weapons, ‘it would be a catastrophe for the world—causing extraordinary loss of life, and striking a major blow to global peace and stability. In short, it is increasingly clear that the danger of nuclear terrorism is one of the greatest threats to global security—to our collective security.’ That summit successfully focused the world’s attention on the danger of nuclear terrorism, strengthened cooperation toward the goal of controlling all of the world’s vulnerable nuclear material in four years, and convinced several nations—including Chile, Kazakhstan, Mexico, and Ukraine—to make commitments such as giving up highly-enriched uranium and weapons-grade plutonium. The START treaty recently signed with Russia serves the same goal: reducing the world’s supply of nuclear material and keeping us all safer.

“Finally, economic pressure is part of the wise use of strength. We all understand the danger posed by a nuclear Iran—to our ally Israel, to our own Nation, and to world security. President Obama’s work to engage Iran was not met in good faith—but it did further isolate Iran in the eyes of the world, and I believe that it helped secure Russian and Chinese agreement with the strong sanctions passed this month by the Security Council. Congress is sending its own set of sanctions to the president’s desk. They will hit the Iranian regime where it hurts—and, I hope, demonstrate that the costs of their nuclear pursuit are too high to bear.

“In all, this is a record of keeping America safe, and it’s one we can be proud of. It is the record of Democrats—but it embodies goals that deserve the support of both parties, and indeed enjoyed bipartisan support during the decades of the Cold War. During the Cold War, a secret of success was the unity with which both parties pursued a consensus strategy to contain and bring down communism. There was fierce disagreement—but there was also remarkable continuity, and a reluctance to exploit threats to America for political gain.

“That could and should be the spirit of this new struggle. But, months after 9/11, some chose to politically exploit Americans’ legitimate fear for their safety in an unprecedented way. We see the lasting effects today, in a national security debate that too often dissolves into an endless series of divisive, politically-charged ‘wedge issues,’ while the larger strategic challenges confronting us go neglected.

“And we see the effects in the recurring partisan effort to paint many of President Obama’s moves as somehow apologetic or weak. Whenever that caricature rears its head, I look at the president’s strong record and think, ‘What president are they talking about?’ Our Founders spoke deliberately of the ‘common defense,’ because the threats we face make no partisan distinctions. They are common to us all.

“Second, though force is, at times, clearly necessary, we learned from the Cold War that force alone does not win ideological struggles. Then, it was the promise of a better life that led so many to abandon communism and its false promise of progress. Today, chronic lack of opportunity drives the appeal of the jihadism of Islamic extremists and its hatred of a modern world that seems to have left too many behind. Chronic oppression of women and girls condemns nations to poverty and abandons young men to extremist ideologies. And the failure of institutions in distant states, as we see from Somalia to Afghanistan, is a direct threat to our own people. So a strong development policy must be a pillar of our national security.

“International development reflects our moral values and serves our economic interests. Poor and unstable countries make unreliable trading partners and weak markets for American goods and services. And we cannot exert global leadership while neglecting hunger, disease and human misery. So Democrats have made internationally-agreed development goals a prime focus of our foreign policy. President Obama has announced major new initiatives on food security and global health, and his administration is working to strengthen them through partnerships with other donors and the private sector, data-driven analysis, and strong standards for accountability from aid recipients. We are working with world bodies to strengthen international norms against corruption, so that foreign aid reaches the people it was intended for, and is not squandered by unaccountable regimes. And we are acting on the well-founded conviction that ending the marginalization of women and girls is the key to economic development. As Larry Summers once put it, ‘Investment in girls’ education may well be the highest-return investment available in the developing world.’

“Third, the Cold War taught us that democracy, human rights, and economic freedom are the most powerful weapons in an ideological struggle. Today’s autocrats understand that, as well, as they carefully channel their own people’s frustration into rage against America. The eight

years of the Bush Administration showed what we knew already: that democracy cannot be imposed by force; that elections alone do not equal democracy; that democratization and economic growth do not always go hand-in-hand; and that failing to lead by example weakens democracy around the world. But the trials of those years taught us that there are wiser ways to build democracy and respect for human rights in the world—not that that objective is out of keeping with our character as a nation. Indeed, it is an integral part of that character.

“Today we meet that objective when we understand that world’s democratic movements, in nations from Egypt to Iran, have a legitimacy that ought to be recognized, not restrained, by their governments. We meet that objective when we support those movements publically. We meet that objective when we recognize that our strongest alliances are those built not merely on our interests, but on a foundation of common values. Such is our friendship with the democratic State of Israel: a bond of generations that no momentary disagreement can undo.

“And most importantly, we promote democracy when we live our democratic values here at home. Torture is not a democratic value. Extraordinary rendition is not a democratic value. Overriding the rule of law—when our criminal justice system, under Presidents Bush and Obama, has convicted and incarcerated 300 terrorists since 9/11, without incident—is not a democratic value. In fact, many conservatives recognize that, when American citizens attempt attacks on our nation, as we saw in Times Square, our civilian courts are more than equipped to carry out justice. There may well be times, however, when military commissions are appropriate and should be used. We also honor our democratic values when we honor the tradition of civilian control of the military, as President Obama made clear last week.

“In sum, when we abandon our heritage, whether for expedience, or fear, or partisan advantage, we make our principles hollow in the eyes of the world, and we throw away one of the best weapons we have. All of our presidents have understood the value of pragmatism; but they have also understood that it must be balanced with America’s historic role as the advocate of democratic values and democratic movements around the world.

“Fourth and finally, every one of these policies comes with a cost; every choice rules out other choices. The deeper our Nation sinks into debt, the more our choices will be constrained—and the more our leadership will be challenged by nations, especially China, that hold our debt. As a matter of fact, on the path we’re on, the day will come, I fear, when our strength will be sapped by our debt. So it’s time to stop talking about fiscal discipline and national security threats as if they’re separate topics: debt is a national security threat. Unsustainable debt has a long history of toppling world powers. As financial historian Niall Ferguson writes, ‘This is how empires decline: it begins with a debt explosion.’

“That’s why the work of the president’s bipartisan fiscal commission is so important to our future—and why I am urging my colleagues to see the necessity of a budget compromise that is a real, politically viable way to restore our fiscal balance and health. Budget agreements like that paved the way for historic prosperity—and for America’s ability to act as the sole superpower—under the first President Bush and President Clinton. And an agreement like that, to be implemented after the economy has fully recovered, is a necessity today.

“With our publicly-held debt reaching $9 trillion, defense spending can no longer be exempt from the hard choices pressing on every part of our budget. Democrats took important steps to trim unnecessary spending with an important acquisition reform bill that President Obama signed last year, and with a contracting reform bill that passed the House this spring and is waiting for Senate action. But those bills are just the beginning. In an important speech last month, Secretary Gates drew from the legacy of President Eisenhower, who held that ‘the United States—indeed, any nation—could only be as militarily strong as it was economically dynamic and fiscally sound.’ It’s advice we must take seriously.

“Last week, I spoke on the danger of debt to our prosperity and security. And I made clear that eliminating unnecessary defense spending has to be part of the deficit equation. I did so with confidence, because I know that many of our Nation’s military leaders see it the same way. Secretary Gates is one of them: he has urged Congress to stop funding additional C-17 cargo planes and an extra engine for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, to fight the rapid cost inflation in military health care, to cut unnecessary weapons systems, and to trim the overhead that makes up more than 40% of the defense budget. Chairman Ike Skelton has told the House Armed Services Committee to scrutinize the defense budget for savings. And some Congressional Republicans share these concerns: on the same day I spoke on the deficit, Congressman Paul Ryan said, ‘there are billions of dollars of waste you can get out of the Pentagon…We’re buying some weapons systems I would argue you don’t need anymore.’ I understand that whatever savings are put on the table will prove controversial and politically painful. But as with all budget crunches, the fundamental decision we face is this: hard choices today, or even more painful and draconian ones forced on us down the road.

“After years of grinding war, we still have the strongest military on earth—and thousands of men and women who have given us examples of courage and sacrifice to which the only proper response is gratitude and awe. But our history reminds us that arms alone do not win wars—particularly against an enemy that we will rarely, if ever, meet on a battlefield. Nations win wars. The skill of our intelligence officers, the vigilance of our first responders, the creativity of our development policy, the force of our universal values, the discipline of our policymakers, the will and consensus of the American people—they are all part of this struggle, as well. They are all integral to our national security strategy—and we must use every part of that strategy wisely.”

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