

Foreign Policy Dinner

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First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
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Thank you very much. Thank you. I am very honored and delighted to be with all of you this evening. I want to thank Bill for that kind introduction. Being called a public entrepreneur is one of the nicest names I have ever been given and I will cherish that. I am delighted to be with Bill. It is sort of a small-world story. He is married, as some of you know. His wife Jane is the sister of a man I went to high school with and, if you won't let it out of this room, had a great crush on for a long time. So it is a special pleasure to be introduced by him and to sit between him and Cy Vance.

I want to thank Paul Ford and Noel Petite and the FDA staff. I also want to thank the West Point Band which I enjoyed hearing this evening. I know we are joined by a great many public-spirited citizens and dignitaries. But I would like to mention that among us this evening are Sir Jeremy Greenstock, President of the Security Council, and Louise Frechette, the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations, and I am delighted both of them are here as well.

This is a special occasion for me personally, but also for the Foreign Policy Association as it celebrates 80 years of service to the people of our country. It has stood for engagement in the world for all of those 80 years. When I was listening to the video and watching Tom Brokaw talk about the beginnings of the Association, I recalled reading, in preparation for coming here, that the 19 brave individuals who decided to form it back in 1918 first called themselves the "Committee On Nothing At All," because they weren't exactly sure how to proceed.

The United States, up until then, had not been known for its engagement around the world and they were not sure how to go about supporting the League of Nations. They then named themselves the League of Pre-Nations Association to build public support for the League. While they may not have won at that first battle, they did begin to understand the importance of citizens being part of the foreign policy decision-making apparatus in our country.

They renamed themselves then the Foreign Policy Association in 1923, and I must say that one of the incorporators was Eleanor Roosevelt. So today we celebrate those 80 years and we remember all of the people, starting in 1918, who understood what all of you here tonight understand: that in a democracy, all of us need to be aware of our role in the world and, particularly as citizens of the United States as we end this 20th century, we need to know more about what is happening around the world and we need to lend our voices to the discussions and debates that are occurring.

I want to thank you for inviting me to this gathering and I want to thank you in advance for the honor that you will bestow upon me later in the evening. I looked at the list of people who have

come before and I am greatly honored to join their ranks.

I want to speak tonight about what you have done, why it has always been important, and why I would argue it is even more important today. I don't need to tell this group that we are living in a complicated and confusing time in international relations. The fact that we call this period in which we are living the Post Cold War Era is only one indication that while we know where we no longer are, we don't yet know where we are or where we are heading.

The world has changed so rapidly in less than a decade that we have had little time to catch our breath, let alone change our strategies and institutions to meet the new challenges ahead. As Albert Einstein, quoted in the most recent edition of the Foreign Policy Forum, once said, "The world we have created today has problems which can not be solved by thinking the way we thought when we created them."

As often happens in a time of rapid change, there is a natural inclination to draw inward a bit and pull back from the obligations around us while we take stock -- to think that maybe there isn't much we can accomplish and we should just attend to business at home. Yet every day we see how profoundly interconnected -- even interdependent -- we are in this new era of globalization. We only have to think of the current international economic crisis, the extraordinary boom in worldwide communications, to realize how intertwined our destinies have become.

Whether we are pessimistic or optimistic about the forces of globalization, those forces are here to stay. They are a fact. We cannot stop the clock. We can't do away with computers, or cut off the Internet, or prevent jet travel from occurring, or stop the mass media from bringing messages of different cultural ideas to remote parts of the world. But what we can do, and what this Association has been doing for so long, is to help ourselves and help our fellow citizens understand the stakes we have in building the stable, prosperous, democratic world that we all want and that the United States must take a lead in creating.

I have been privileged in the last several years to travel, both with my husband and on my own, around the world. I have been in many parts of the world where I have seen first-hand the newly emerging democracies begin to take hold, find their footing, stumble, regain their footing, and try to go forward. I have been exposed to so many different people who look to the United States for leadership and are bewildered by what they sometimes see as the mixed messages coming from our government and our media and our society.

And yet I have also been heartened by how resilient the forces of democracy seem to be. I recently returned, just last week, from a trip to Bulgaria and the Czech Republic. In both of those countries, whether I was meeting with university students or political leaders, talking with women entrepreneurs in a local bakery or just walking the streets and talking to citizens, I saw first-hand how both of those societies are responding to the tremendous challenges they face.

In Bulgaria I met with the new political leadership that has taken hold and is attempting to reverse the stumbles of the first years of freedom. In the Czech Republic I met both with the President and the Prime Minister as they are attempting to continue the forward progress that

they have made and consolidated further.

I saw in the eyes of many people the optimism and determination that comes with freedom and responsibility. And yet I know how important it is that the United States has been engaged in those two countries.

I could pick many countries for these examples. But in Bulgaria, for example, the fact that we have, through a USAID program, worked with entrepreneurs, teaching them basic business techniques, helping them start businesses, helping to provide loans and credit that would enable them to get businesses up and going, was explained to me in great detail by the women entrepreneurs as one of the reasons they were able to be successful.

The American College and the American High School that for many years educated Bulgarians and then was closed because of the communist takeover and not reopened until 1990, is now educating a new generation of Bulgarian students for the new future that awaits them. In many more instances, over and over again, I was thanked for American help and American expertise, not only from our government, but from business and academia and labor groups and non-profit organizations who had been there and been engaged.

In the Czech Republic, when I had been there a few years ago, I met with the beginnings of the non-governmental organizations that were finding their way in a newly constructed civil society. They didn't really know much about how to fill that space between the government and the economy that we call civil society. And they were worried that they wouldn't be able to do it.

And then upon this return visit, I met with some of the same people who told me with great pride of what they had accomplished on behalf of the arts and culture and health and medical research, and so many other issues. They were finding their legs and they thanked me and asked me to thank the many Americans who had helped them.

Next door in Slovakia, when I had visited just a few years ago, I saw just how dangerously close it was to falling back into authoritarianism because of its leadership. When I met there with the non-governmental organizations, the leaders came despite threats and intimidation from the government at the time. They were told not to meet with me, not to be open with me, not to tell me the truth about what they were trying to do to reverse environmental degradation -- to teach people how to be voters and citizens in a newly free country.

All of us were worried about what would happen in Slovakia. But because of the determination of the people and, again, because of many Americans in both private, professional and public capacities who spent time democracy-building and working with NGO's and working with students, the government was just turned out in free elections. And there was a great sense of accomplishment among the Slovaks with whom I met in the Czech Republic because they had seen first-hand what they could do to make democracy work for them. And again they thanked me and asked me to thank Americans for that engagement that helped them understand how to take back their own destiny.

When my plane landed back at home last week, I could see that once again the Congress was engaged in the debate that they had at the very end of this session about how to allocate our nation's resources. And behind all that discussion about appropriations, there are some very important values. Just how will we be engaged? Whether we will take on the responsibility that has fallen to us.

There was touch-and-go, as many of you know who followed this debate. There was reluctance to fund our basic responsibilities. But finally when the dust settled, the President and the Administration were able to see some real accomplishments. Significant progress was made toward the President's goal after very hard and long struggles.

First and foremost the Administration won the full \$18 billion it had been requesting to replenish the IMF. It also got increased funds for the export-import bank in the amount of \$109 million. That is an important symbolic as well as real statement about our role in helping to stem the global financial crisis.

More assistance will be going to the newly independent states -- a very important American priority. We also saw increases in AID development funds -- up \$70 million over last year's government. And there were dramatic gains in funding for the African and Asian development banks. They will come at critical times for these regions.

We also won more funding for the Peace Corps, another important symbol of American engagement. Yet our nation's foreign policy agenda also suffered losses. Once again, Congress refused to pay our debts to the United Nations, whose work is essential to peace and stability in our world. That issue of paying our UN arrears remains entangled in the issue of family planning overseas. I respect those who in good faith are against family planning. But that is not an issue to be entangled with whether or not we fulfill our obligations to the United Nations. We should not and we cannot continue to fail to pay our dues because of this unrelated issue. It should be unacceptable to all Americans, of any political persuasion, that the richest and most powerful country in the world is the number one debtor to the United Nations.

We also suffered another defeat. Not one dime went to the United Nations International Family Planning Program. I don't know how we could best make this argument persuasively with those who, for both political and personal reasons, oppose family planning and use it to undermine our capacity to pay our arrears to the United Nations. But I have personally been in clinics all over the world, from the Ukraine to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and Russia, where family planning is not only helping women gain authority and dignity in their own lives, but is actually decreasing the abortion rate. So this is an argument that has no inherent logic to it. By refusing to fund decent family planning services, we force women to fall back on abortion as the family planning choice. So I would hope that the Congress, when they reconvene, will once again visit that issue.

There are accomplishments in this budget as well as losses, but overall we have to recognize that development assistance is at some of the lowest levels since World War II. In real dollar terms, USAID's budget is 30 percent lower than it was in 1982. The agency has had to cut its staff by

one-third. And total Board Affairs spending is down 43 percent from 1982 in real dollars.

Now I have seen, as many of you have, how there can be a real difference made in the lives of people with a relatively small amount of assistance. We obviously are putting our major focus on increasing trade and investment, but assistance often goes hand-in-hand in making trade and investment successful and in creating a climate in which that can thrive.

I have seen from Nicaragua to Uganda how small loans, for example, subsidized and backed by our government through USAID for the non-for-profit sector, encouraged by our government, have transformed the lives of poor women and improved the living standards of entire communities.

I have met, in places like Bolivia, with expectant mothers learning how to care for themselves and their babies in a primary health care center run by an NGO with government support, again because of the help we provided. And in many of the newly independent states I have seen how the difficult transition to free-markets and democracy has been supported as well by our development efforts. But the other side of the coin is that I have seen what happens when we have not come forward. When we have not exercised the leadership that we should.

And so here we are at the end of this century, at the beginning of a new one -- even a new millennium -- and we're having to ask ourselves what is America's role, how best can we define it, how, going back to the roots of FPA to those 19 great individuals, would we explain our mission today. We have to first recognize, as my husband has said on several occasions, that the United States can not pretend to be an island of prosperity in the global economy. We have to demonstrate to ourselves, to Congress, and to the world, that we are not only engaged because we care about the rest of the world, but we are engaged because it is in our interests to do so. There are great benefits that we derive from working on ? multi-lateral actions like peace-keeping. And we have to make sure that the ideals that we profess here at home are put into practice around the world as well.

It's one of the great paradoxes of our foreign policy situation that we know that the American people, in poll after poll, are far more supportive of engagement than their representatives in Congress would have us believe. I have seen the research surveys and studied the data, and if Americans are asked whether they want to help people overseas or support international organizations like the United Nations, in great numbers they answer "yes."

They also believe that we are already doing far more than we are. They think that foreign assistance is the single largest item in the federal budget. While in fact, economic and humanitarian assistance abroad makes up less than one-half of one percent of the federal budget. And the United States lags behind all other industrialized nations when foreign assistance spending is considered as a percentage of GNP.

So how do we explain this paradox of an American public that supports an effective engagement, yet believes we are already spending far more than we are in bringing that about? Well, one of the roles that the FDA has always had is to get the facts to the American public. To

do away with the misperceptions, to clear the air, and to try to get a clear channel to people so that the discussion about what we should be doing and what our responsibilities are can be carried out accurately. And the work that you have done in the past has been very important to that effort, but we have a lot of work ahead of us. We need to do much more to try to make sure that those numbers of Americans who intuitively know we should be engaged and leading and cooperating with other nations, and working with organizations like the United Nations, get the facts straight so that they then can interact with and discuss with their representatives why they support many of the programs that I previously referred to.

We have to raise the interest that Americans have to a newer and higher level of intensity and commitment. Because what so often happens is that although Americans do support such issues as paying our dues to the United Nations, the constituency that speaks for such Americans is woefully small and silent. There is not a great outpouring or concern about paying our U.N. dues whenever the issue comes up in Congress. All those people, those American citizens, who care about this issue are not organized and their voices are not being heard in a way that affects policy. So we have an opportunity -- the association does as well as the rest of the country. We have an opportunity to explain clearly the advantages of engagement around the world. We have an opportunity to talk about the commercial and economic advantages of opening up markets, creating jobs, advancing Americans' economic well-being. We have an opportunity to talk about how foreign assistance is critical to combating global problems that directly threaten the interests of Americans -- whether it is the spread of infectious diseases, air and water and land pollution, global climate change, population growth or the flight of refugees.

We have such an opportunity today, and I believe the time has never been better. So what is it we can tell our fellow citizens? Well first, I would make the argument that we have a great stake in what happens around the world, for both national security and economic reasons. You have discussed many important issue decisions in the Great Decisions Program, and I would urge that we do everything we can to expand the impact and the reach of that program, and that we spawn as many imitators and others as we possibly can to try to create much more interest in, activity around, and discussion of foreign policy objectives and reasons for our involvement.

I think we also have to humanize -- even personalize -- our foreign assistance, and our foreign relations, stories. It sometimes causes eyes to glaze over if we start talking about the issues around the world in abstract ways. But I have found that if we can put into stories, symbolic stories, about why we are involved in certain places around the world, we can catch Americans' attention.

When I talk, for example, about the USAID program called "Lessons Without Borders," Americans are amazed that things we learned overseas we are now bringing home to do here to help our own citizens. Two examples: We have really pioneered micro-credit around the world, building on the example of the Granine? Bank in Bangladesh. We have many organizations working with USAID to provide these small loans and extend credit to many people who are credit-worthy but without any collateral. One of those groups, called FICA?, I have seen from Nicaragua to Uganda, working miracles on behalf of credit and the way that it not only builds family incomes, but self-confidence, and creates citizens out of people who before didn't

understand what their role in democracy was.

We are now bringing those lessons home to America. I recently met with lower-income Americans in inner-city Washington, D.C., who felt they had been left out of the mainstream of economic life here at home. No bank would lend them money to start their businesses or expand their small home operation. They didn't know where to turn. The only places they could have gone were the loan sharks, and they weren't going to do that. So FICA ?, a group that only dealt with the poorest of the poor before, is now working with Americans to help them get the credit and build their businesses as well. I've also visited neighborhoods in places like Baltimore, Md., where grassroots strategies to immunize children that were pioneered in places like Nairobi, Kenya, are being used. And we've seen incredible increases in child immunization rates. And we know that bringing those lessons home of how to reach hard-to-reach families to make sure they immunize their children is something we would never have pioneered in the United States alone, but we took our development assistance and learned from it.

We also, in addition to humanizing those kinds of lessons without borders, I think we need to put a human face on a lot of the dilemmas that we confront around the world today. Just a few quick examples: On my last trip, before this one with my husband, to Russia, I traveled beyond Novosibirsk to a place called Academe Borido which had then one of the closed communities, it was a closed academic center in Russia. And I made a speech at the university there in front of people who just a few years ago were among the highest status citizens in the former Soviet Union. They were applied mathematicians and physicists, they were pointed out as being the people who had really created the space program and built the great industrial machine of the Soviet Union. Now, of course, many of them no longer had much work to do. They're uncertain about this new world that they're a part of. Many of them had advocated for democracy, and now they don't know what it has brought to them.

I sat down with three generations of a family: the grandfather, an applied mathematician, and the grandmother, a research librarian; the two daughters, now both teachers of English; and the two grandsons, as well as the son-in-law. We sat in their apartment and we talked about how they saw Russia today. The grandfather was very pessimistic. He said, "It's just not what I expected at all. I thought democracy would bring great opportunity. I don't see that happening. And never before did I have to worry about things like my bicycle being stolen. Now it's been stolen twice." One of the daughters interrupted and said, "Daddy, don't you remember what it was like before? We had to get up at 2:00 in the morning to stand in line for butter. It is so much better now. We have so many more opportunities." And the grandfather said, "But, my bike gets stolen."

In this conversation that I witnessed and participated in, you could see the fault lines in what is happening in Russia as clearly, and perhaps for me, more persuasively, than anything I read in the mass media as I try to follow all of the financial and political challenges. How do we create an environment in a country that had to change so fast and change so much? Where people feel that they can invest in the future and it will get better for them and their children.

The same in Africa, where in so many different settings I have seen people struggling to

understand democracy, and being stymied in some respects, and being very hopeful in others. But I was particularly pleased to see again where we are helping people to understand democracy, it is working. In a village in Senegal I watched as women performed for me the skit that they perform in their village and other villages to explain what democracy is. They act out people speaking up. They act out people leading. And they took on a very difficult challenge as a result of their education about democracy. They took on the challenge of ending female circumcision in their village, going against ancient tradition and custom. But they have learned their lessons well, from a USAID-sponsored grantee, who had empowered them to make sure their voices could be heard. And when I came back to Senegal with my husband, I learned that out of that small village had grown a movement. Where some of the men who had been enlisted on their behalf began traveling to other villages, where the skit was performed for more people, and where all of a sudden the president was petitioned to pass a law ending that custom.

So I have seen both ends of the dilemmas of democracy. And I would like to have more Americans understand what is happening in those personal terms. Because I think if more Americans could see what I have seen, they would not only come away gratified and pleased by what the accomplishments we have been able to help others make on their behalf have meant to them, but more willing to support that kind of grassroots engagement that builds relationships and creates a real bedrock for democracy in country after country.

I also believe that if we were able to humanize the foreign policy issues better than we have in recent times, we would have much more response from the Congress, because they would begin also to understand it. Remember, we have 100 members of the House of Representatives who have never had a passport. We have the majority leader of the House of Representatives saying, "Why does one need a passport? I left the country to go to Europe once in 1982, and that was enough for me." So unless we can break through that kind of ideological wall with stories, with human interests, with things people can understand, our task will be harder than it needs to be.

So I guess we will have to think about the challenges we face in order to make sure that the work of this association does all that it can do to give us the support we need. We have, certainly, some very good examples from the past. One of my favorites is what happened around the Marshall Plan. Leaders like Harry Truman and George Marshall not only had the vision to devise the plan, but they understood how difficult it would be to sell the plan. And they therefore enlisted literally hundreds of Americans, from business executives to academics to religious leaders, to go and speak in every small town and college campus they could reach to talk about what was at stake. And out of that great commitment to public education at the end of World War II not only came the Marshall Plan, but U.S. leadership was supported.

As we began to create the structure that we now look to to lead us into the future -- the United Nations, the World Bank, the Iron Map, Nato -- certainly we're going to have to take a hard look again at whether or not we have the structures and institutions we need and whether they are functioning as well as they should. In order to bring that about, we need something comparable in terms of a public education effort.

So I would challenge first the Congress to live up to their commitments, to pay our debts, to

maintain support for international lending institutions, to boost funding for programs like AID, and to understand how important it is to support rhetorically America's engagement in the world, and to reach out to America's citizens to be part of that engagement.

I would challenge business leaders to be sure that they support America's leadership around the world. I have found, unfortunately, that there has been a drop-off in elite opinion support for foreign engagement. Many business leaders today spend more time traveling around the world than their predecessors did a generation ago, but they speak up less on behalf of what we need to do to maintain our engagement, and they are not involved in helping to educate their peers or supporting programs in Congress.

I would challenge the media to increase its coverage of foreign affairs which has fallen off so dramatically in recent years. It is difficult for us to point fingers at Americans if they don't know what is going on unless it is a crisis or a humanitarian disaster. Churches and humanitarian groups, not (just?) governmental organizations, foundations and others, have to do more to make sure their work is leveraged and linked. There are lessons all of us can learn from what many have been doing abroad for many years, and now is the time to share those lessons, and try to make more of them to reach even more Americans as well as doing the work that is being done.

Most of all, I think we have to reach out to young people. We have to be sure that they understand what is at stake in American engagement. And I want to commend the Association's Great Decisions Program, which since 1954 has done so much to attract the interests of all citizens, but especially young people. I recently read a letter from a student who had participated in the program, and she wrote that, I quote, "I continue to regard the Great Decisions Program as one of the few opportunities an undergraduate has to have a meaningful impact on foreign policy, both by educating others about contemporary issues, and encouraging good citizenship through the promotion of discussion."

More than 50 years ago, when Eleanor Roosevelt was pressing her case for the United Nations, she spoke to a high school forum here in New York City. She urged students to learn more about the languages and cultures of other nations, but also to work on the problems and conflicts right here in their own neighborhoods. "What we do at home in our communities," she said, "builds the kind of nation we have and the kind of influence that nation is going to have in the international arena." We have to pay attention to that good advice as well. We have to model living together peacefully, respecting our diversity, being open to new ideas, if that is what we hope and expect the rest of the world to do as well.

We celebrate this year the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And we face unparalleled opportunities to share the world's prosperity and growth, and to continue the march of human rights and democracy around the globe. Like those who first decided to create this remarkable organization, we may not always know how to proceed. But if we stick to our founding principles, educate ourselves and engage the interest of Americans in debating our new role in the world, then I am convinced America will once again rise to the challenge, that our leadership in the world will remain firm and confident in the 21st century, and that

America's best days will be ahead of us because we will have learned how to be global neighbors in our new global neighborhood. Thank you very much.