



# AmericanRhetoric.com

## John McCain

### *Address at the 2017 Munich Security Conference*

delivered 17 February 2017, Munich, Germany



**AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio**

Not every American understands the absolutely vital role that Germany and its honorable Chancellor, Chancellor Merkel, are playing in defense of the idea and the conscience of the West. But all of us who do, let me say thank you.

My friends: In the four day -- four decades I have attended this conference, I cannot recall a year where its purpose was more necessary or more important.

The -- This next panel is going to ask us to consider whether the West will survive. In recent years, this question would invite accusations of hyperbole and alarmism. Not this year. If ever there was a time to treat this question with a deadly seriousness, it is now.

This question was real half a century ago [for] Ewald von Kleist and the founders of this conference. Indeed, it's why they first started coming to Munich. They did not assume the West would survive because they had seen its near annihilation. They saw open markets give way to beggar-thy-neighbor protectionism, and the poverty that imposed. They saw a world order fracture into clashing ethnic and nationalist passions, and the...misery that brought.



# AmericanRhetoric.com

They saw the rise of hostile great powers, and the failure of deterrence, and the wars that followed.

From the ashes of the most awful calamity in human history was born what we call the West - a new and different and better kind of world order, one based not on blood-and-soil nationalism, or spheres of influence, or conquest of the weak by the strong, but rather on universal values, rule of law, open commerce, and respect for the national sovereignty and independence. Indeed, the entire idea of the West is that it is open to any person or any nation that honors and upholds these values.

The unprecedented period of security and prosperity that we have enjoyed for the past seven decades didn't happen by accident. It happened not only because of the appeal of our values, but because we backed them up with our power and persevered in their defense. Our predecessors did not believe in the end of history, or that it bends inevitably towards justice. That's up to us. That requires our persistent, painstaking effort, and that's why we come to Munich year after year after year.

What would von Kleist's generation say if they saw our world today? I fear that much about it would be all-too-familiar for them, and they would be alarmed by it.

They would be alarmed by an increasing turn away from universal values and toward old ties of blood and race and sectarianism.

They would be alarmed by the hardening resentment we see towards immigrants and refugees and minority groups, especially Muslims.

They would be alarmed by the growing inability, and even unwillingness, to separate truth from lies.

They would be alarmed that more and more of our fellow citizens seem to be flirting with authoritarianism and romanticizing it as our moral equivalent.

But what would alarm them most, I think, is a sense that many of our peoples, including in my own country, are giving up on the West; that they see it as a bad deal that we may be better off without; and that while Western nations still have the power to maintain our world order, it's unclear whether we have the will.



# AmericanRhetoric.com

All of us must accept our share of blame for this turn of events. We grew complacent. We made mistakes. At times we tried to do too much, and at others we failed to do enough. We lost touch with many of our people. We've been too slow to recognize and respond to their hardships. We need to face up to these realities, but this does not mean losing hope and retreating. That we must not do.

I know -- I know there is profound concern across Europe and the world that America is laying down the mantle of global leadership. I can only speak for myself, but I do not believe that that is the message you will hear from all of the American leaders who cared enough to travel here to Munich this weekend.

That's the not -- not the message you heard today from Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis.

That's not the message you will hear today from Vice President Mike Pence.

That's not the message you will hear from Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly.

And that is certainly not the message you will hear tomorrow from our bipartisan congressional delegation.

Make no mistake, my friends: These are dangerous times, but you should not count America out, and we should not -- and we should not count each other out. We must be prudent but we cannot wring our hands and wallow in self-doubt. We must appreciate the limits of our power, but we cannot allow ourselves to question the rightness and goodness of the West. We must understand and learn from our mistakes, but we cannot be paralyzed by fear. We cannot give up on ourselves and on each other. That is the definition of decadence. And that's how world orders really do decline and fail.

This is exactly what our adversaries want. This is their goal. They have no meaningful allies, so they seek to sow dissent among us and divide us from each other. They know that their power and influence are inferior to ours, so they seek to subvert us, and erode our resolve to resist, and terrorize us into passivity. They know they have little to offer the world beyond selfishness and fear, so they seek to undermine our confidence in ourselves and our belief in our own values.



# AmericanRhetoric.com

We must take our own side in this fight. We must be vigilant. We must persevere. And through all -- it all, we must never, never cease to believe in the moral superiority of our own values: that we stand for truth against falsehood, freedom against tyranny, right against injustice, hope against despair -- and that even though we will inevitably take losses and suffer setbacks, through it all, as long as people of goodwill and courage refuse to lose faith in the West, it will endure.

That's why we come to Munich.

That's why we come to Munich, year in and year out -- to revitalize our common moral purpose, our belief that our values are worth the fighting for. Because in the final analysis, the survival of the West is not just a material struggle; it is now, and it's always been a moral struggle. Now more than ever we must not forget this.

During one of the darkest days of the early Cold War, the great American novelist, William Faulkner, delivered a short speech in -- in Stockholm upon receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature. "I decline to accept the end of man," Faulkner said.

*I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.*

Even now, when the temptation to despair is greatest, I refuse to accept the end of the West.

I refuse to accept the demise of our world order.

I refuse to accept that our greatest triumphs cannot once again spring from our moments of greatest peril, as they have so many times before.

I refuse to accept that our values are morally equivalent to those of our adversaries.

I am a proud, unapologetic believer in the West.

I believe we must always, always stand up for it. For if we do not, who will?

Thank you.