

International Center for Religion and Diplomacy
U.S. Policy to Defeat Terrorism 13 Years After 9/11
May 30, 2014

Thank you for the kind invitation to speak this evening. Bud McFarlane is a friend, and I appreciate his invitation to speak with you tonight. I can't say no to Bud. Few people have done as much to advance America's national security interests as Bud McFarlane. Thank you for your service to America.

Tonight, I want focus on American leadership in the world and the future of our battle against global terrorism and extremism, 13 years after 9/11. Leadership requires more than words and well-crafted speeches. Leadership requires providing a vision for the future and making the hard choices to achieve that vision.

We are not far from the Pentagon. So I know I don't have to remind you all of the devastation brought by al Qai'da on September 11, 2001. But I do want to remind everyone tonight what Qa'ida and other Islamic extremist groups continue to do around the world -- to Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike. Their vision for the future is antithetical to the fundamental human desire for freedom and liberty that is universal across the world. The terrorists' vision of the world -- which they seek to force through fear, terror, and death -- does not allow for freedom of speech, freedom of religion, or freedom of thought.

The terrorists' vision must be countered. And what is required is American leadership; American presence; American strength.

If America doesn't lead by providing assistance to our allies and appropriate resistance to our adversaries, no other country will fill the void.

Recently, the world has been understandably captivated by the more than 200 girls in Nigeria kidnapped by Boko Haram, a group the U.S. finally declared a foreign terrorist organization. I am glad that the world has rallied around the girls and demanded their rescue.

What concerns me is why this present outrage hasn't existed for years.

- Where was the outrage when Boko Haram kidnapped smaller groups of girls year after year?
- Where was the hashtag when they blew up the United Nations building in 2011, killing 21?
- Where was the outrage these many years when Boko Haram sought to destabilize whole countries?

Combatting global terrorist networks who seek to kill and terrorize the innocent requires more than hashtags and selfies. It requires more than tepid responses to crises as they arise. And it requires more than sternly-worded speeches from the Rose Garden in Washington, DC.

It requires a comprehensive strategy utilizing all aspects of American power. This is a strategy we are sorely missing and for which many of our allies around the world are begging.

Of course, we should all care about the plight of the missing Nigerian girls and help bring them home. But at the same time, shouldn't we also care that we are about to walk away from millions of vulnerable girls and women in Afghanistan? People forget that it was against the law to teach a female to read in Afghanistan before 2001. The brutality of the Taliban against women and anyone who does not think and act exactly like them has been forgotten. If the United States and the international community leave before Afghanistan is truly stabilized, what will happen to the brave women who have entered politics in Afghanistan? What will happen to the brave girls who risk their lives every day to go to school, or to the women who teach them? What will happen to the creative souls who dare listen to music or enjoy art? If the United States of America does not stand up for these women, who will?

In Syria, we confront the criminal Assad regime -- that uses fighter jets, Scud missiles, and chemical weapons -- with meaningless threats, unenforced red lines, and pretty speeches from Washington, DC. The most powerful nation on earth has done little, as more than 150,000 civilians, mostly Muslims, have been slaughtered. There are even reports that an Assad-regime barrel bomb crudely configured with toxic chlorine gas hit a school, killing 25 children sitting at their desks.

The ongoing conflict has displaced millions, created a massive humanitarian crisis, and threatens to destabilize the whole region. I believe that America's lack of resolve to address decisively the threat posed by an imploding Syria will embolden dictators and terrorists around the world. Terrorists from every region of the world have taken advantage of the chaos to establish a safe haven from which to train and plan attacks, and they intend to eventually focus on western targets. The largest pool of al Qa'ida fighters since 9/11 now exists in Syria, and that represents a direct threat to the United States.

And yet -- three years later -- we still have no effective plan to combat this threat.

In Iran, I fear this administration is so desperate for a deal that they will agree to almost anything and ignore the evidence of noncompliance by Iran. Meanwhile, Iran will get explicit approval to continue a nuclear program—allowing them to quickly develop a nuclear weapon if they decide to do so. That surely would set off a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, empowering Iran to further terrorize and bully its neighbors, and threaten Israel with annihilation.

In Iraq, we were in such a hurry to check the box to remove troops that we failed to secure peace, opening the door for a resurgence of al Qa'ida in the Western provinces that contributes to the safe haven in Eastern Syria. Today, al-Qai'da linked groups terrorize and brutalize the local population and threaten Baghdad's ability to govern.

In Lebanon, terrorists continue to destabilize an American ally. While Iran's proxy, Hizbollah, attacks al Qa'ida targets and vice versa, Hizbollah has infiltrated the government and holds territory the government has not reclaimed.

In North and West Africa, as in Iraq and Lebanon, we should be doing far more to empower the local governments to address the terrorist threat within their borders by offering resources and our superior expertise to improve their security forces. Leadership and security forces in countries such as Libya, Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Niger, and now Nigeria are desperate for American help. No one is talking about

military boots on the ground, but simply increased coordination, intelligence sharing, and training to improve the host nations' capacity to combat not only the problems within their own borders but also the threat of terrorist attacks against U.S. and Western targets.

For this, we should look to Jordan as a model. After years of close American cooperation, training, and support, the Jordanians have a robust, capable, professional counterterrorism force. And when we have this type of strong bilateral relationship, we can also more effectively promote improved governance and respect for human rights.

As for America's overall counterterrorism policy 13 years after 9/11, we cannot assume the threat has passed. We must maintain pressure anywhere terrorists plan, train, and fundraise. In recent months, the Obama Administration has made troubling changes to its counterterrorism policies by introducing new red tape that leaves key al Qaeda leaders on the battlefield. I think this is a dangerous mistake, and I intend to continue pushing the Administration to aggressively pursue terrorist threats against America and our allies.

Every American is counting on us to get this right. Each of our allies around the world is counting on us to get this right. As is that little girl learning to read in a Kabul classroom, or the girl in Syria who has difficulty concentrating as bombs and gun fire are heard continuously in the distance.

Serving as Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee has been one of the greatest honors of my life. It has allowed me to travel all around world representing my fellow Americans and the United States government. On a recent trip to the Middle East, a very senior intelligence official from a strong American ally grabbed my arm and said: "Please, Congressman, do not let the American people give up on themselves. We need your leadership. If you do not help us, who will? The Chinese? The Russians?"

I agree with him completely. We cannot ignore the world outside our borders. We must stay engaged. It is in our interests and in the interest of humanity. We are exceptional, and as the world's lone superpower, the United States of America has a responsibility to lead. This is certainly a challenge, but one to which we must rise if we are to secure our interests and promote the peaceful, legitimate interests of Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike all around the world.

Thank you again for having me tonight. God bless.