

recent actions set the other bookend to his Presidency—withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Consider that in his very first week in office, he signed an Executive order that sought to end CIA's interrogation and detention programs and to close Guantanamo within a year. The problem was that he didn't have a credible plan for what to do with the detainees afterward. He still doesn't.

That was one of the first things he did in office, and it parallels disconcertingly with one of the most recent things he has done in office: announcing the withdrawal of all of our combat forces from Afghanistan by the end of his term. I say that because once again he announced step A without thinking through the consequences of step B. He seems determined to pull out completely whether or not the Taliban is in a position to reestablish itself, whether or not Al Qaeda's leadership finds a more permissive environment in the tribal areas of Pakistan, and whether or not Al Qaeda has been driven from Afghanistan completely—one of our primary aims in this conflict from the beginning.

The two examples I mentioned serve as bookends to his Presidency, but between these two bookends much has been done that undermines our national security—for instance, the President's inability to see Russia and China for what they are: dissatisfied regional powers intent on increasing their respective spheres of influence.

The failed reset with Russia and the President's commitment to a world without nuclear weapons led him to hastily sign an arms treaty that did nothing to substantially reduce Russia's nuclear stockpile. What do we have to show for the reset? Moscow was undeterred in its assault on Ukraine, as everyone can plainly see, and Russia has repeatedly found ways to undermine our national objectives.

Then there is the President's strategic pivot to the Asia-Pacific—a plan he announced without any real plan to fund it, rendering the strategy largely hollow. We see examples of that almost daily, with China undeterred in its efforts to intimidate smaller nations over territorial disputes. Let's be clear. We cannot pivot forces to Asia that are still needed in places such as the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf, nor can we constrain China's ambitions without investing or developing the forces needed to do so. I fear that the failure to make the kinds of naval, air, and Marine Corps investments that are necessary could have tragic consequences down the road.

Of course, we have all seen how eager the President is to declare an end to the war on terrorism. The threat from Al Qaeda and other affiliated groups has now metastasized. The turmoil unleashed by uprisings in north Africa and the broader Middle East has resulted in additional ungoverned space in Syria, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen. We have seen prison breaks in Iraq, Paki-

stan, Libya, and the release of hundreds of prisoners in Egypt. Terrorists have also escaped from prisons in Yemen, a country that is no more ready to detain the terrorists at Guantanamo now than they were in 2009. And the flow of foreign fighters into Syria—which has fueled the growth of ISIL—suggests that the civil war there will last for the foreseeable future.

The dogged adherence to withdrawing our conventional strength and sticking to campaign promises has created a more dangerous world, not a stable one—as just one example, the President's failure to negotiate a status of forces agreement with Iraq. An agreement such as that would have allowed for the kind of residual military force that could have prevented the assault by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Now we see the consequences unfolding before our eyes, and it is incredibly worrying. President Obama's withdrawal-at-all-costs policy regarding Iraq has proved deeply harmful to U.S. interests, and it ignores the sacrifices made by our servicemembers—those who sacrificed life and limb fighting to keep America safe.

Several weeks ago the President spoke at West Point, and in that speech he vaguely described a new counterterrorism strategy and pledged to engage “partners to fight terrorists alongside us.” He made clear that he hopes to use special operations forces in an economy of force, and he hopes to deploy, train, and assist missions across the globe—all as he withdraws our conventional forces and as our conventional warfighting ability atrophies.

As I said, he will leave his successor with a great many challenges.

So this morning my Republican colleagues and I will explain how, by inflexibly clinging to campaign promises made in 2008, the President has weakened the national security posture of the United States and why we believe he is likely to leave the next President with daunting security problems to solve.

Mr. President, I see the Senator from Arizona and others are here.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half of the time.

The Senator from Arizona.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Republicans be allowed an additional 15 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MCCAIN. I thank the Presiding Officer.

FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, today we see reports that now ISIS has taken over the major oil refinery in Baiji, Iraq. Names that we used to hear quite often, such as, Tal Afar, Mosul, Fallujah, Ramadi—all of these areas are now under the black flag of Al Qaeda and ISIS, which is an even worse organization than Al Qaeda, if that can be believed.

We now see the forces of ISIS marching on Baghdad itself, which I don't believe they can take. But the second largest city in Iraq—Mosul—is now under the black flag, and quantities of military capability and equipment have clearly fallen into the hands of what has now become the richest, largest base for terrorism in history. This has all come about in the last couple of weeks.

What has the United States of America done? Today we see on the front page of the Washington Post: “U.S. Sees Risk in Iraqi Airstrikes.” The President of the United States goes for fundraising and golfing and now is fiddling while Iraq burns. We need to act, but we also need to understand why we are where we are today.

The Senator from South Carolina and I visited Iraq on many occasions—more than I can count. We know for a fact that if we would have left a residual force behind, this situation would not be where it is today.

The fact is that the President of the United States, if he wanted to leave a residual force, never made that clear to the American people. In fact, on October 22, 2012, the President said: “What I would not have had done was left 10,000 troops in Iraq that would tie us down.” In 2011 he celebrated the departure—as he described it—of the last combat soldier from Iraq.

The fact is that because of our fecklessness and the fact that we did not leave that residual force behind, we are paying the price, and the people of Iraq are paying a heavier price.

What do we need to do? First of all, we have to understand there are no good options remaining. This is a culmination of failure after failure of this administration. But for us to do nothing now will ensure this base for terrorism. We have tracked over 100 who have already come back to the United States of America. There are hundreds who are leaving—not only the battlefield in Syria and Iraq—and they will pose a direct threat to the security of the United States.

I say to the critics who say “Do nothing and let them fight it out,” you cannot confine this conflict to Iraq and

Syria. The Director of National Intelligence and the Secretary of Homeland Security have said these people will be planning attacks on the United States of America.

What do we need to do? Of course, Maliki has to be transitioned out, but the only way that is going to happen is for us to assure Iraqis that we will be there to assist. Let me make it clear that no one I know wants to send combat troops on the ground. But airstrikes are an important factor psychologically and in many other ways, and that may require some forward air controllers and some special forces.

We cannot afford to allow a Syria-Iraq enclave that will pose a direct threat to the United States of America. And if we act, we are going to have to act in Syria as well. A residual force of U.S. troops in Iraq could have checked Iranian influence in Iraq.

The other question is, What are the Iranians doing while we are not making any decisions? Well, probably the most evil man on Earth, the head of the Quds Force—an Iraqi terrorist organization—has been reported to have been in Baghdad. There are reports of Iranian forces moving into Baghdad.

I say to my colleagues that we must meet this threat. The President of the United States must make some decisions. I am convinced that the national security of the United States of America is at risk, and the sooner all of us realize it, the better off we will be.

I yield to my colleague from South Carolina.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be recognized for 4 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, contrary to what may be popular belief, there are plenty of Democrats in this body who are very much worried about Iraq. The question is, What do we do about it? I will be the first to admit it is complicated.

The first thing we have to assess as a nation is, does it really matter what happens in Iraq? Clearly, I think it does. Economically, if Iraq becomes a failed state, the oil production in the south will fall into the hands of the Iranians, and Iraq will become a failed state that spreads economic chaos throughout the region. We will feel it at the gas pump, and we will eventually feel it in our wallets. An economic collapse in Iraq would affect our economy. I think it would throw the world oil market into turmoil. So it matters economically.

Militarily, does it matter? It does in this regard: ISIS is an offshoot of Al Qaeda because Al Qaeda kicked them out. These people now are going to have a safe haven from Aleppo, Syria, to the gates of Baghdad. They have sworn to attack us. Part of their agen-

da is to strike our homeland. Their goal is to create an Islamic state—a caliphate—that would put the people under their rule into darkness. I don't want to hear any more war-on-women stories unless we address Iraq and Syria. Do we want to see a war on women? I will show my colleagues one. Can we imagine what little girls are thinking today in the Sunni part of Iraq and in Syria? Can we imagine the hell on Earth? The people who will do that to their own—what would they do to us?

I don't mean to be an alarmist, but I am alarmed. I am just telling my colleagues what they are saying they will do. Our Director of National Intelligence has said that the safe haven for ISIS in Syria, and now in Iraq, presents a great threat to our homeland. The mistake President Obama is making is not to realize we need lines of defense.

Why did we want to leave a residual force behind in Iraq? Ten thousand to 15,000 would have given the Iraqi military the capacity they don't possess today, the confidence they don't possess today. It would have given us an edge against ISIS we don't have. A Toyota truck doesn't do very well against American air power. But when we have no American air power and when the intelligence capability of the American military leaves, the Iraqi Army goes dark. We have seen a collapse of the Iraqi Army that I think could have been prevented.

We can't kill all the terrorists to keep us safe. Our goal in this trying time is to have lines of defense, to keep the war over there so it doesn't come over here. It is in our national security interests to partner with people in Iraq. There were many who wanted a different life than ISIS would have. There are many Shias who want to be Iraqi Shias, not Iranian Shias. I have been there enough to know.

So this fateful decision to look for ways to get out totally has come back to haunt us, and we are on the verge of doing the same thing in Afghanistan. I promised my colleagues the Taliban would be dancing in the streets—they just do not believe in dancing—when they heard we were leaving in 2016. Can we imagine how the Afghan people feel who have fought these thugs by our side believing we would not abandon them and now to hear we are going to pull all of our troops out but for a couple of hundred. Can we imagine how a young woman in Afghanistan feels. Can we imagine how people in Pakistan feel—a nuclear-armed nation that could be in the crosshairs of the people trying to take Afghanistan down.

But it is not just about the people in Afghanistan. What about us? President Obama is going back to a pre-9/11 mentality. On September 10, 2001, we had not one soldier in Afghanistan, not one dollar of aid, not even an ambassador. So those in America who think if we leave these guys alone they will leave us alone, you are not listening to what they are saying. The only reason 3,000

Americans died on September 11 and not 3 million is they can't get the weapons to kill 3 million of us. If they could, they would, and they are very close.

So, Mr. President: Recalculate your decision on Afghanistan. If you pull all of our troops out, the Taliban will regroup, the Afghan National Army will meet a terrible fate, and the people who wish us harm will be coming back our way. The region between Afghanistan and Pakistan is a target-rich environment for the world's most radical terrorists, radical Islamists. So at the end of the day, Mr. President: Your job is to protect us. You are destroying the lines of defense that exist. The Afghan people are willing to have us stay there in enough numbers to protect them and us. Mr. President: Before it is too late, change your policies in Afghanistan. Mr. President: Do not take this country back to a pre-9/11 mentality where we treat terrorists as common criminals when we read them their rights rather than gathering intelligence.

We are letting our defenses erode all over the world. The enemies are emboldened and our friends are afraid. I can tell my colleagues this. If we continue on this track, it will come here again.

With that, I yield the floor for Senator CHAMBLISS.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I rise today to join my colleagues in discussing the current direction of U.S. foreign policy, especially as it relates to the Middle East. The Obama administration's foreign policy in this regard has unfortunately totally unraveled. The President, to his credit, made the Middle East his priority and engaged the Arab world early on in his presidency. He attempted to forge a new beginning between the United States and the Muslim world, but his idealistic strategy simply has not worked.

The Middle East over the last 3 years has been besieged by a resurgence of violence, instability, and terrorism. The administration has chosen to confront this challenge, which has major implications for U.S. national security, by leading from behind and by relying on an ineffective diplomatic strategy that involves few concrete security measures.

The shortcomings of this diplomatic strategy are painfully evident today in both Syria and in Iraq. In September of last year the administration praised the U.S.-Russian deal to disarm Syria of its chemical weapons. The deal was designed to rid Syria of chemical weapons and buy time for a diplomatic solution. Yet here we are today, in a situation where the Syrians have missed countless deadlines, still have chemical weapons, and continue to use barrel bombs filled with chlorine and other chemicals, as well as ball bearings, with impunity. In addition to the humanitarian disaster that has unfolded in Syria, allowing the status quo to

continue has also given the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL, and the al-Nusra Front the safe haven they needed to grow into the force we face today. Make no mistake about it. Terrorists are training inside of Syria today, planning to attack America and American interests.

I have been shocked to hear news commentators and some in this body refer to recent events in the Middle East, including the rise of ISIL in Iraq, as intelligence failures. The intelligence community makes its fair share of mistakes and I am the first to criticize them when they do. But these recent events, including the resurgence of ISIL, are not intelligence failures; they are policy and leadership failures. As we saw in Benghazi, the intelligence community provided ample strategic warning of the deteriorating security situation in Libya. Yet the administration did little to enhance security in Benghazi. Failing to protect the diplomatic facility, despite repeated warnings, is not an intelligence failure, it is a policy and a leadership failure on the part of the administration.

With regard to Iraq, intelligence, including Director Clapper's testimony at a January 29, 2014, hearing, has been abundantly clear that Iraq was vulnerable to the threat from ISIL. I encourage any Member to read the intelligence if they have questions regarding the intelligence community's assessment about security in Iraq and the rise of ISIL before the fall of Mosul. It was clear in 2011, as U.S. forces were withdrawing, that Iraq was vulnerable to a resurgence in extremist activity, and we have seen the violence escalate steadily in the last 3 years during this administration's failed policies. This collapse in security was again easily predicted, but we have stood by and watched as it has occurred. Again, this is a policy failure, not an intelligence failure.

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of this administration's foreign policy is its inadequate counterterrorism strategy. I often hear administration officials touting Al Qaeda's demise or describing the organization as on the run. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. As my friend from South Carolina alluded to earlier, before we began on the floor this morning, he said: Yes, Al Qaeda is on the run. They are running from one country to the next and taking over one country and the next.

Violent extremism is on the rise in the Middle East, and the warning signs have been visible for years. These warning signs include the September 11, 2012, attack in Benghazi, the rising of Al Qaeda-affiliated extremist groups such as the al-Nusra Front in Syria, the resurgence of ISIL, and most recently the fall of Mosul. Just yesterday we saw a terrorist flag raised over the largest refinery inside of Iraq. Despite these stark warning signs, the administration has only been willing to take very limited steps to curb this dis-

turbing trend. Instead of focusing on making counterterrorism operations more effective, the administration has been focused on ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan while America's enemies grow stronger. This approach has been a huge gamble that continues to jeopardize America's security.

The administration has sidelined many of the tools we used to successfully counter Al Qaeda in the years immediately after 9/11, including the effective, long-term detention and interrogation of enemy combatants. As a result, we know far less today about many of these terrorist organizations. Since the President ordered the closure of the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay in January of 2009, our Nation has been without a clear policy for detaining suspected terrorists. Without such a policy, including one that identifies a facility for holding terrorists that are captured outside of Afghanistan, the intelligence community's ability to conduct ongoing intelligence operations have been severely limited. I recognize there is no one-size-fits-all solution for handling terrorists, but our detention policies must foster full intelligence collection before any prosecution begins.

Al Qaeda and its affiliates and other terrorist groups are determined to attack the United States. We constantly face new plots and operatives looking for ways to murder Americans, such as the foiled May 2012 AQAP plot to put another IED on a United States-bound aircraft. Thankfully, this plot and others didn't materialize, but we are not going to always be that fortunate.

We know that Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula—or AQAP—today represents one of the biggest threats to the U.S. homeland and personnel serving overseas. They are continually plotting against our interests and seeking new recruits, especially among our own citizens as well as former Guantanamo detainees. Explosive experts such as Ibrahim al-Asiri continue to roam free, posing a tremendous threat to the safety and security of U.S. citizens.

The proposed closure of Guantanamo Bay presents significant risks for the United States and Yemeni efforts to counter AQAP inside Yemen. A substantial portion of the detainees remaining at Guantanamo Bay are Yemeni citizens. Transferring these individuals to a country plagued by prison breaks, assassinations, and open warfare at this point could prove very catastrophic. These detainees would likely join several other former Gitmo detainees who have returned to the fight in Yemen, further destabilizing the country and worsening an already tenuous security situation.

The most recent example of a totally failed and dangerous policy on the part of this administration is the exchange of five Guantanamo detainees for Sergeant Bergdahl. We are all glad Sergeant Bergdahl is back. We should have done everything we could to get him back, and thank goodness he is now

with his family. But the deal—the exchange of five individuals from Guantanamo Bay who now wake up every morning thinking of ways to kill and harm Americans—was not the right thing to do. There were other ways to handle it. Yet this administration, almost callously, without notifying Congress—by the way, that was clearly intentional. The failure to notify Congress of what they planned to do when they signed a memorandum on May 12 and didn't release these individuals for another 2½ weeks gives us a pretty clear indication that this administration did not want to come to Congress and say we are going to exchange these five Guantanamo prisoners. The reason they did not is because they knew there would be objections from both sides of the aisle to doing such a dangerous thing and setting such a terrible precedent.

So whether it is in Iraq, Afghanistan or in other parts of the Middle East, Americans have fought and died in the war against Al Qaeda. Our Nation is weary of war, but threatening elements still remain. And those five individuals who I just alluded to are clearly threats to the United States.

I have asked the President to declassify the personnel files on those five individuals: Tell the American people what we know about them, Mr. President, and then look the American people in the eye and say: This was a good deal. I know they are going to return to the fight, and they are going to seek to kill and harm Americans, but this was a good deal.

Well, that is for the American people to decide ultimately.

I urge President Obama and my congressional colleagues, as well as the American people, not to abandon the gains we have made in the fight against terrorism since 9/11, but let's remain steady and let's continue to fight the good fight.

With that, I yield for my friend from North Carolina.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 5 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I join my colleagues today to discuss the administration's misguided foreign policy, especially as it relates to Afghanistan and the threat of Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Haqqani Network. Despite what the administration would have you believe, Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Haqqani Network remain capable and committed adversaries in Afghanistan. They are a clear strategic threat to the safety, the security, and the stability of the region and continue to commit to acts of violence against U.S. troops and plot against U.S. interests in the region and here at home.

Yet, for some reason, this administration has time and again failed to

recognize this simple fact, or worse, they have chosen to ignore it. Al Qaeda is not decimated—regardless of what Ambassador Rice may have communicated to the American people. Its senior leadership continues to plot devastating attacks and, more troubling, serve as an inspiration to a series of affiliates in Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, and elsewhere. These affiliates are plotting against the United States of America here at home, with the guidance, advice, and financial support of Al Qaeda's senior most leadership.

The Al Qaeda brand is alive and well, and the Obama administration's AfPak strategy to end the conflict, not win it, reveals a profound failure to analyze threats to the region, the world, and the United States of America.

Despite what this administration would have you believe, leaving Afghanistan before our work is done will not—will not—end the fighting. We cannot take the pressure off or our enemies will bring the fight to our doorstep here at home.

But Al Qaeda is not alone in Afghanistan. It is well established that the Haqqani Network, one of our deadliest adversaries, is the link between the Taliban and Al Qaeda—a direct link.

The Haqqani Network is directly responsible for a significant number of U.S. casualties and injuries on the battlefield in Afghanistan and continues to actively plan potentially catastrophic attacks against our interests and the interests of others in the region.

The group routinely targets civilians—civilians—and uses murder as an intimidation tactic against the Afghan people. They have mounted numerous assaults and suicide attacks on civilians and U.S. forces with deadly effectiveness. Yet the administration took until late 2012—at the urging of the Senate of the United States in a bill that I introduced—to actually name the Haqqani Network as a foreign terrorist organization.

Why was that important? Because that act changes the game. It provides us the full range of diplomatic and military tools to use directly against the Haqqani Network. It is against that backdrop that the administration then negotiated with the Haqqani Network the release of five high-level Taliban fighters for SGT Bowe Bergdahl's return. In other words, the President rewarded the Haqqani Network for its incarceration of a U.S. servicemember, strengthened its relationship with the Taliban, emboldened the Taliban, and undermined the Afghan Government—all with one decision.

Does anyone in this administration believe that five high-ranking Taliban officials, when set free, would not return to the fight? If they do, then they have not paid attention for the last decade or longer.

I understand that this Nation is weary of war. I understand the sacrifices made by our servicemembers, and I work every day to ensure that

our brave veterans are provided the care and treatment they deserve. Their efforts should not be in vain.

As we are here today, Marine Cpl Kyle Carpenter will receive the Medal of Honor. He was a 19-year-old when he signed up to go in the Marine Corps. The young marine, in combat—to save a fellow marine—jumped on a grenade. Kyle Carpenter lived—not only lived—after 40 surgeries, today he just completed his freshman year at the University of South Carolina, at 24 years old.

He is an American hero. He could be any one of our children or grandchildren. What makes this country great is that we have people such as Kyle Carpenter who step up, when asked, and they do more than we could ever ask of them.

Our servicemembers served and sacrificed overseas so that we could be safe at home. We cannot in good faith let the administration dishonor their efforts with a misguided policy.

The continued drawdown of U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan will provide Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Haqqani Network with a safe haven to train operatives and plot further attacks against the United States of America and our allies.

Contrary to the campaign statements of the President and Vice President, Al Qaeda is not “on the run,” and I urge this administration to avoid further actions that may endanger our Nation. I yield the floor for Senator INHOFE.

THE ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak until the arrival of the Senator from Alabama, Mr. SESSIONS.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, the subject today, of course, is the failed foreign policy of this President and this administration. It is really hard to do it in a limited period of time because once something happens like Benghazi, and we get into the middle of that thing, then all of a sudden you turn around and this President turns loose arguably the five most heinous terrorists from Gitmo. At the same time, we have a policy that was going so well in Iraq, and now we find out that is not working out either. If I have time, I will touch on that.

But the first thing I want to do is just mention this Benghazi thing. Being the ranking member on the Armed Services Committee, I had the opportunity to really be in there and see as it was happening. It happens that Chris Stevens—the Ambassador who was sent over there and who was killed, one of the four who was killed in Benghazi—was a friend of mine. He was in my office. We spent time together. We talked about the threats that were out there. Then, as we got closer to this time, he realized and started sending messages to the President, to the White House, to us, to send

security over there. He said that right now the terrorists are actually training in Benghazi. They actually had their flags flying. They knew they were organizing something, probably for an anniversary of 9/11. So he knew that. He had requested it, and the President elected not to send help at that time.

The question a lot of people have is—they will say: INHOFE, how do you know the President knew that was an organized attack? Well, I can tell you how. In our system of government, we have four people who are responsible for advising the President on threats, on intelligence. They are the CIA Director—at that time it was John Brennan. The Director of National Intelligence was James Clapper. The Secretary of Defense at that time was Leon Panetta. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was General Dempsey.

Now, all of them acknowledged, when the annex was hit in Benghazi, that it was an organized—that same day—an organized terrorist attack. They all knew it. They expected it, but then they knew for a fact it was.

So you are talking about the individuals who are responsible for advising the President. All of them were well aware that on the day of the annex attack in Benghazi that it was an organized terrorist attack. It was several days later that they sent Susan Rice to all of these shows in order to try to make it sound like it was some video that somebody had.

Now, why would the President not want to admit that this was an organized terrorist attack? It was right before the election and the polls showed a lot of the people thought—Osama bin Laden having been captured—there was no longer that big threat out there in the Middle East and that would inure to his benefit. So it was for political reasons, and we ended up losing four lives.

Then, just recently, they are saying, oh, they have now found this Abu Khattala. This is someone who has been around for 2 years. The press has been talking to him for 2 years. Why, all of a sudden, are they saying—now of all times—this is the guy who perpetrated Benghazi, when, in fact, this all came from the White House? I just think it is just covering it up, and I am very much offended by that.

But the one thing I wanted to talk about—and I know some of the other Members are going to be here, and I will not abuse the time that has been given to me—but it is having to do with the release of the five Taliban terrorists on the American people. Let me tell you a side of this that people are not talking about that I feel strongly is the reason for it.

First of all, this President is in the last half of his second term—or approaching the last half of his second term. As is always the case, when you get down toward the end of your term, you start looking for a legacy. What was his legacy?

One of his legacies is closing Gitmo. This President has been talking about

closing Gitmo for as long as I can remember, certainly longer than he has been President.

Now, you wonder why. I go back and I tell people in Oklahoma—they say: Why does he want to close Gitmo? You cannot answer that. We have had Gitmo since 1903. It is one of the few good deals we have in government. We only pay \$4,000 a year for that, and half the time the Cubans do not cash the check. So we have this thing. We had actually 778 people there incarcerated and being interrogated prior to the time that Barack Obama became the President of the United States. Now we are down to 149.

But as far as Gitmo—that resource—no one argues with the fact that the humane treatment is beyond anyone's expectation. There is no place else in the world they can do that. They are fully compliant with the Geneva Convention. They have had people go in there and look at the maximum security prison, and it is attested to. Human rights organizations, the Red Cross, and everyone else agrees that it is a very humane place while they are interrogating. As I said, there is no place else they can do this. Because if you start doing this in our court system, obviously, they get Miranda rights, constitutional rights, and people are pretty offended when they find out. That keeps us from getting information that would affect some of the others.

We have an expeditionary legal complex there. It is the only one like this in the world, where they can actually do this.

So this is a place where we can actually get in there, interrogate, get information, incarcerate people, not intermingle the terrorists with the prison population in this country, which is what the President has been talking about doing.

Why do I say that? I say that because these guys are terrorists. They are not criminals. You put them in our prison system, and by definition their job is to train other people to become terrorists, and that is what they would be doing in training the prison population to become terrorists.

I have to say this too. All of the talk about Osama bin Laden and the fact that we do have him—and I am very glad we were able to bring him down. But how did we do it? We did it through information that we received through interrogation at Gitmo, Guantanamo Bay.

So I only say that because people wonder, why in the world would he be wanting to do this? And how does he want to fulfill this expectation or this legacy he has?

Let me tell you, tell you how I think. If he would take, out of the 149 individuals who are left there, the 5 most heinous terrorists, most dangerous Taliban terrorists, and turn them loose, that would put him in a position, then, to get rid of the rest of them, with the exception of those who are awaiting war crimes trials.

So what happened? He turned them loose. No. 1. No. 2, he told the Taliban exactly when the United States is going to leave, regardless of the conditions on the ground. And then, thirdly, he has said that he is going to declare an “end of hostilities.”

That is a proper phrase, “end of hostilities.” This is not a war, it is a hostility. If he does that, that would then give him the justification for opening the gates, turning everyone loose from Gitmo and closing Gitmo. That, in my opinion, is the estimation.

What are the threats we are facing as a result of that? We are in a position right now where we have five people who are turned loose. Even if we trusted Qatar to hold these five guys for a period of 1 year, still the philosophy there would be: All right, we will turn you loose if you few promise not to kill Americans for 1 year. That does not make sense.

So this is something that should not have happened. We now have the people there making decisions, and they are celebrating as we speak. One of the five individual's name is named Fazl. I will end with this: There is a guy named Mullah Salem Khan. He is a Taliban commander over in Afghanistan. Listen to this. He is talking about Fazl, one of the five guys. He said:

His return is like putting 10,000 Taliban fighters into the battle on the side of jihad. Now the Taliban have the right lion to lead them in the final moment before victory in Afghanistan.

That is what happened with these guys. That is how it is viewed over there. It is an atrocity that it did happen.

I yield the floor for Senator CORNYN. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, how much time remains in the allocation of this side's time?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republicans have 8 minutes remaining.

Mr. CORNYN. I know we perhaps have another Member coming to speak. Would the Chair please advise me after I have used 5 minutes of that 8 minutes?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Chair will do that.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I wish to talk about the intersection of national security and our mounting debt. Over the last 5 years, President Obama has had multiple occasions to embrace real structural entitlement reform that would help solve our long-term debt problem. One might wonder why am I talking about debt when the subject we are generally talking about is national security, including what is happening in Iraq and Syria.

It is because as the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, ADM Mike Mullen, when asked what the single biggest threat to our national security was, he said: It is our debt. The President had an opportunity, when the Simpson-Bowles Commission re-

leased its recommendations in late 2010. As you will recall, this is a bipartisan commission the President himself appointed to help come up with a formula to deal with our fiscal problems.

Unfortunately, once they made their recommendations in December of 2010, the President walked away from them and nothing came of it, even though we are facing, in addition to \$17 trillion in debt, more than \$100 trillion in unfunded liabilities. Perhaps it is because those numbers are so big that we have a hard time getting our head around it, that people have become desensitized to the urgency of dealing with our debt and these unfunded liabilities.

But the President has never once endorsed any sort of reform necessary to deal with this challenge or to prevent a future crisis. The fact is, somebody someday—probably these young men and women who are working as pages and others their age, is going to have to be the ones to pay this back because our generation will have failed them unless we meet the challenges this presents.

It seems as though the only part of the Federal budget the President is eager to cut is national defense. Under his latest budget plan, defense spending would drop from 3.4 percent to 2.3 percent of GDP by 2023. At the same time, we are told the U.S. Army might be shrunk to the smallest size since pre-World War II.

President Obama needs to realize that even America's current military capabilities are proving inadequate to meet global challenges. For example, one former Assistant Secretary of Defense has declared that because of Pentagon budget cuts, President Obama's highly touted pivot to Asia cannot happen. In other words, despite promoting the Asia pivot as a crucial element of American foreign policy, the President has failed to take the necessary fiscal steps to make sure that happens or could happen.

This of course makes it a hollow policy, one where the promises are extravagant, but the delivery is anemic, and one that will do major damage to U.S. credibility among our allies and adversaries. The prospect of bringing DOD spending back down to sequestration levels has alarmed our senior military officials in all branches of government. Chief of Naval Operations ADM Jonathan Greenert has said that reverting to sequester levels in 2016 “would lead to a Navy that is too small and lacking the advanced capabilities needed to execute the missions that nation expects of its Navy.”

The Secretary of the Air Force has said that going back to those spending levels “would compromise our national security.” Ray Odierno, Chief of Staff of the Army, said it would put “our young men and women [in uniform] at much higher risk.” In other words, the President cannot simply keep cutting defense spending and the military in order to fund his other priorities and at

the same time ignore the 70 percent of spending that is on autopilot, so-called entitlement spending. That is where the big money is. That is where the reforms need to take place, but it will not happen without a leader.

We all know what is happening in Iraq. I know time is short. I do not want to take away any more time than necessary from my colleague from Alabama, but this map reflects what is happening now in Iraq. The civil war in Syria, the President had drawn a red line which once crossed—there were no consequences associated with that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has consumed 5 minutes.

Mr. CORNYN. Now this border between Iran and Syria has basically been wiped away. We see all of these places where the ISIS, a horrific terrorist group that is even worse than Al Qaeda, has basically taken charge. So this is what happens with a failure of leadership. Unfortunately, this is where we are in so many places around the world.

In short: President Obama simply cannot keep asking America's military to shoulder such a disproportionate share of the spending cuts while our biggest entitlement programs remain virtually untouched. DoD spending did not cause our long-term budget problem, so slashing it to the bone would not solve that problem. Moreover, seemingly every week brings fresh reminders of the challenges our country will face in the years to come. At this very moment, we have Russia's ongoing aggression against democratic Ukraine. We have an Iranian theocracy that shows no signs of abandoning its quest for a nuclear weapon. We have a persistent terrorist challenge in Afghanistan. We have a potential failed state in Libya. We have growing Al Qaeda activity in many parts of Africa. We have a Chinese dictatorship that is increasing its annual military budget by more than 12 percent while continuing to bully its neighbors on the high seas.

Most notably, we have a burgeoning terror state in the heart of the Middle East, where a ruthless band of jihadist killers—a group that is even more radical and murderous than Al Qaeda, if you can believe it—now controls a massive piece of territory spanning both Syria and Iraq. Calling their movement the “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria,” or ISIS, members of this organization have taken over major Iraqi cities, including Fallujah, Mosul, Tikrit, and Tal Afar, leaving a trail of blood and medieval terror in their wake.

The map to my left shows just how much territory ISIS has conquered. To make matters worse, they have seized a tremendous amount of weaponry and money—almost half a billion dollars—making them perhaps the most well-resourced terrorist group on earth.

And again, just to reiterate: This group is considered more radical, and more vicious, than even Al Qaeda.

Amazingly, even after ISIS took control of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest

city, a National Security Council spokeswoman stuck to the White House's 3-year-old talking points and said, “President Obama promised to responsibly end the war in Iraq and he did.”

Of course, the President did no such thing. By the time he assumed office in January 2009, Iraq had largely been stabilized. All the President had to do was convince the Iraqi government to sign a new Status of Forces Agreement, SOFA. Unfortunately, he was more interested in keeping a misguided campaign promise from 2008.

As a result of his failure to maintain a significant U.S. troop presence in Iraq, America emboldened the Iranians, the Shiite militias, and the Sunni terrorist groups to become more aggressive. We also emboldened Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to behave in a more sectarian and dictatorial manner.

Meanwhile, amid the fallout from America's Iraq withdrawal, President Obama's failure to take early, decisive action in Syria made it much easier for Sunni terrorists to increase their territory, weapons, and manpower. As you can see from this map, the jihadists have effectively been using their bases in Syria as a launching pad for attacks in western Iraq.

The path forward in Iraq is highly uncertain, but I would urge President Obama to explain to the American people what is at stake, and to formulate a robust strategy for defending U.S. interests and preventing the creation of a new terror state. The President may well believe—as a recent New York Times article suggested—that “he is managing an era of American retrenchment.” But with bloodthirsty jihadists marauding through Iraq and approaching the gates of Baghdad, now is not a time for U.S. retrenchment. Instead, now is a time for clear thinking, clear decisions, and clear action.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for up to 5 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, when a nation commits itself to a military effort, it is a very significant, august decision. I was here when we voted to utilize military force in Iraq and Afghanistan. A majority of the Democrats in this body supported that. The American people supported that.

Through tough times, success was achieved in the sense that Iraq had elections, they had a functioning government, the U.S. military was drawing down its personnel, the country had a reconciliation with the Sunni and the Shia and the Kurds, and we were on a path that gave us some prospect, I believe it is fair to say—critics can have different opinions—but it is pretty clear to me we had prospects for a successful conclusion of that effort which would allow a relatively stable,

relatively democratic nation to be established that did not threaten its neighbors or the United States.

So we should have not done that. Well, we did that. That is what has happened. That was the situation when President Obama took office. He failed, in my opinion, in negotiating the kind of drawdown in the status of forces agreement that needed to be established to be able to create credibility in this new and fragile regime and help hold their military together, keep them trained, while we reduced dramatically our presence and military activities. We would be there as support, supplying equipment, intelligence, aircraft lift capability. That would have given them confidence.

It was very clear when we just said: We cannot reach an agreement. We are pulling everybody out. We had General Bednarek talk to us recently. He told us he has 100 soldiers. I asked him if he was the current General Petraeus.

He said, yes, with a bit of a smile, but he only has 100 people. So I guess I would say we are worried about it. One of the things that is so critical in our conduct and understanding of what we are involved in is to understand that the terrorist threat is going to be there for a long time. We are going to be dealing with this for a long time. There is a significant number, not a majority by any means but a significant number, of radicalized people in the Middle East who want to destroy the United States. They see us as an evil force. They support what we oppose. They want to take over their neighbors and continue to expand. They want to knock down reasonably functioning regimes that provide at least some freedom and order in their societies. They want to impose a caliphate. They want to impose on those countries a theocratic government and legal system.

It is not good for the United States and it is not good for the world. One of the things we have to do and have to understand is that when we capture a person committed to the destruction of the United States, and who is attacking our people, they are not criminals. They are warriors. Most of their activities are clearly contrary to the law of war. So they are unlawful enemy combatants.

When we capture a soldier in battle, whether lawful or unlawful, if they have complied with the rules of war, unlike this group, we do not try them, per se. We hold them until the war is over, until a peace treaty has been signed, until an agreement has been reached. That is not happening now. As a result, we have a confused policy that results in the release of dangerous enemy combatants, such as the five Taliban leaders we just released under this confused thinking.

It fundamentally arose when the left—determined to attack President Bush—attacked the secure terrorist detention facility at Guantanamo Bay. They argued that it became some symbol of the policies we are using to detain people who are captured enemy

combatants, lawful or unlawful. When we capture them, we hold them. We do not release them so they can go back to the war and kill us. We are going to send soldiers out to capture them, and then once they have been captured, we are going to release them so they continue into the war? It goes against all common sense. As Justice Jackson once said: The Constitution is not a "suicide pact."

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. SESSIONS. I ask unanimous consent for 1 additional minute.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SESSIONS. So they have to be treated properly and that sort of thing, but they do not have to be released. We captured, for example, Nazih Abdul-Hamed al-Ruqai last year for conspiring with bin Ladin to attack U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Somalia and for his part in the 1998 bombings of two U.S. Embassies in East Africa that killed 224 people before 9/11. He is a treasure trove of intelligence.

U.S. forces went in and captured him, took him away at risk of their lives. He had been undergoing interrogation on the USS *San Antonio* until he said he was sick and not doing well. So what happened? They took him to New York, where he was formally arrested and taken into the custody of the U.S. Justice Department, and put into the civilian justice system. The purpose of capturing him was to get intelligence. This is a warrior. We want to talk to him. We want to see what we can learn about him. Even the New York Times said "his capture was seen as a potential intelligence coup because he had been on the run for years and so would, presumably, possess information about al Qaeda." However, when he appeared in Federal court, he was appointed a lawyer, guaranteed a speedy, public trial—the things that prisoners of war are not entitled to—yet this has been happening over and over again. Al-Ruqai's cooperation ended, leading to a major lost opportunity to obtain valuable intelligence.

This evidences a serious lack of understanding of the nature of the conflict we are engaged in. It evidences a policy that is dangerous to our safety. It is wrong to send Americans to capture people such as this and then treat them in a way that allows them to minimize the opportunity to obtain intelligence.

Indeed, the gravest danger with bringing enemy combatants to U.S. soil is that the President cannot absolutely prevent their release into the United States. And, once foreign nationals are here, there are legal limits on the government's ability to remove them from the U.S. The reality is, once here, their fate is no longer simply up to the administration but also a federal judge.

There are many examples of foreign nationals who have committed murder

and other serious crimes and were released into the U.S. when our government could not transfer them to another country.

This risk extends to the detainees at Guantanamo Bay. We saw that in the case of *Kiyemba v. Obama*. There, the D.C. District Court ordered the release into the United States of a group of ethnic Chinese Uighers who were detained at Guantanamo, many of whom had received military-style training in Tora Bora. Fortunately, the D.C. Circuit reversed the decision based on the fact that the Gitmo detainees had not been brought to the United States. If, however, Gitmo detainees are brought here, a judge may very well order them released into the United States if they cannot be removed to another country. That very real risk obviously does not exist if Gitmo detainees are not brought to the United States in the first place.

The course this administration has chosen on national security matters has steered us into a head-on collision with reality. The American people unequivocally oppose transplanting terrorists from Gitmo into their own communities, either for detention or trial. Our primary goal is to prevent future terrorist attacks, especially through obtaining intelligence. We should not jeopardize that goal in order to afford foreign terrorists who seek to harm the United States and its citizens the rights and privileges granted to ordinary criminals. The administration's policy has put this country at grave risk.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Connecticut.

LORI JACKSON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR PROTECTION ACT

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, photographs on this poster are of a young woman, Lori Jackson, a Connecticut resident, who died tragically, needlessly, savagely in Oxford at the hands of her estranged husband.

Lori is the reason I have introduced legislation named after her to close a gaping loophole in our Federal law—well, she is not the only reason. Tragically, there are thousands of other women and some men who have shared her fate because of a gap in Federal law that permits intimate partners to continue to have firearms, even when they are under restraining orders from the court. Those restraining orders are placed against them because they evidence clear danger to their partners, whether their husband or their spouse.

The reason they pose danger is that they become violent. The gap in the law is it applies only to permanent restraining orders, not temporary ones.

Lori Jackson sought a temporary restraining order when her estranged husband threatened her physically and her two 18-month-old twins at their home. She sought and she obtained a

temporary restraining order and literally the day before that temporary restraining order was to become permanent and the prohibition against her husband having a firearm would have gone into effect, he gunned her down at her parents' home where she had sought refuge with her children—gunned her down and savagely and severely wounded her mother as well with those same firearms.

The temporary restraining order against Lori's husband was completely ineffective, powerless to prevent him from using that gun against her and killing her—and her mother, severely wounding her.

Tragically, Lori's story is far from unique. Jasmine Leonard also had a temporary restraining order against her husband. She died last week after her husband shot her.

Chyna Joy Young celebrated her 18th birthday just days before she was shot and killed by her estranged boyfriend, despite the temporary restraining order she had against him. Young was 3 months pregnant.

Barbara Diane Dye was granted a temporary restraining order and then fled to Texas. She returned only for a hearing on the permanent restraining order, and that is when her husband cornered her in a bank parking lot and shot her repeatedly with a .357 magnum revolver, killing her there.

When domestic abusers have access to firearms, it isn't only abuse victims who are at risk. A violent husband under a temporary restraining order in Brookfield, WI, followed his wife to the salon where she worked. Not only did he shoot and kill his wife but he killed two additional people and wounded four more.

After Erica Bell got a temporary restraining order against her husband, he came to her at church. He followed her there. He shot and killed Erica and he also shot four of her relatives, including her grandparents, great-aunt, and a cousin.

This scourge of domestic violence, combined with the epidemic of guns in our society causing gun violence, is a toxic recipe, and we must do more against domestic abuse. That is why I have formed an organization in Connecticut called Men Make a Difference, Men Against Domestic Violence. It is a program launched in cooperation with our largest domestic prevention and response agency, Interval House, which does a wonderful job against domestic violence. It is a commitment of prominent men, all men, providing role models for young men and boys to reach out to other males and take action to prevent domestic violence. We can truly make a difference as men. We can fight domestic violence. We can gradually make progress against it because it is a cycle.

More than 70 percent of all men who commit domestic violence have seen or experienced it in their own lives, and these kinds of organizations can help stop and stem domestic violence. But