



Isolationism's Threat to American Security and Prosperity

Chairman Mike Rogers - May 13, 2014

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you to Business Executives for National Security (BENS) for having me here tonight. Thanks to Bruce Mosler for that kind introduction.

I am always honored to be with Mike Vickers, who gets to testify before my committee about once a week. Mike, don't forget, you still have to be nice to me for seven more months. Mike Vickers does incredible work under incredibly difficult circumstances. America is in debt to you, sir.

General Norty Schwartz, thank you for the kind invitation and thank you for your years of service to America.

BENS is a wonderful organization that does great work. We can't have too many folks who are committed to the national security of the United States, and you all bring a level of expertise and credibility that is unmatched in this town.

What an honor to share a stage with Admiral Bill McRaven. Few people have contributed more to America's national security in the last generation than Admiral McRaven. Most of what he does the world may never know but for those of us who meet in the 3rd floor underneath the Capitol in our secret squirrel space – we know. And more importantly, the bravest, most capable fighters in the world who have had the privilege of being led by Admiral McRaven – they know. And the leadership of Al Qaeda, the ones who are still alive anyway, you had better believe that they know.

Please join me in congratulating Admiral McRaven one more time - a true American hero.

You know, I sure appreciate the honor this fine evening. I think once you finally decide to pack it up and leave Congress, people feel like they have to be nice to you. Either way, I'll take it.

As the youngest of five boys, I'm used to having a tough time of things. Heck, even my Dad has a favorite saying: "I've got five boys. Four turned out really good and I have one in Congress."

It is truly an honor to receive an award named after Dwight D. Eisenhower. If you are anything of an American history buff like me, you know all about Eisenhower. You know that he was one of a handful of men to ever attain the rank of a Five Star General in the United States Army. You know that he was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in World War II in Europe. You know that he was the first Supreme Commander of NATO and later, of course, a great and very popular President of the United States.

You may not know that he was one of seven boys, not a small family like mine.

And you may not know that when he first ran for President in 1952, he ran against an isolationist Republican in a primary. Senator Robert Taft from Ohio, son of President William Howard Taft, was an adamant isolationist who also ran for the Republican nomination for President of the United States.

Senator Taft opposed U.S. entry into World War II right up until we lost 2,000 Americans at Pearl Harbor. Taft opposed the creation of NATO because he thought it was too provocative towards the Soviet Union. And Taft opposed the Nuremberg Trials because he saw it as being fundamentally unfair and biased towards the Germans. Taft did not see Stalin's Soviet Union as a threat to the United States in the 1950s. Thankfully, the wisdom of Republican primary voters saw in Eisenhower that a strong American national security policy brings the strong economy and stability we all seek.

Some of this sound familiar to what you are seeing in certain segments of the two political parties in America today?

After victory in World War II, with stability in Europe preserved and a strong deterrent to the Soviet Union, the American GIs came home. The baby boom ensued. And the United States become the biggest economy and most powerful nation on earth, to the betterment of free people in every corner of the globe. That shining city on a hill was born.

Now though, I worry that the lessons of engagement overseas are being lost after difficult challenges from Iraq and Afghanistan weigh on the mind. A strange confluence occurs where the views of those who naively believe murderous dictators will behave differently if we behave differently merges with those who are frustrated with events overseas. This group simply believes if we mind our own business, the world's problems will not follow us home, and others will have to sort it out for themselves.

Unfortunately for humanity, history has shown that to be simply not true. That is not what happens in an interconnected world in the year 2014, or when you are the world's lone superpower. But you see, the folks in this room, we understand that this is the greatest nation in the history of the world, and our very way of life is worth defending. It's worth fighting for. And it's worth unabashedly protecting our interests, just as most every other nation has done throughout human history.

Just as neglect from Germany's aggressions in the 1930s did not serve American interests, recent history demonstrates what happens when we try to disengage or cede our leadership responsibilities to others. In Egypt we were late to the game and not clear in our policy. We wanted to be for the individuals in the street who were protesting an authoritarian government. But that may not have been in our interests at the time. A rush to democracy and shaky U.S. leadership got us an Islamist government who quickly undid most democratic principles and threatened to renege on its peace deal with Israel – the bedrock of a fragile stability in the Middle East. We got a Muslim Brotherhood-led nation that pulled back counterterrorism operations in the Sinai peninsula, impacting Israel's security and increasing threats to Western targets in Europe.

In Syria we have tried to wage a war fought with fighter jets, Scud missiles and chemical weapons by the soulless, criminal Assad regime largely by issuing speeches from Washington, DC. The most powerful nation on earth has stood by and taken little action as more than 150,000 people have been

slaughtered, families are hit indiscriminately with Scud missiles, and even as there are reports of a school being hit with a barrel bomb crudely configured with toxic chlorine gas. That attack killed 25 kids while they were learning at their desks. I believe that America's lack of resolve in the face of this inhuman cruelty in Syria is a stain on our moral character that may take decades to wash off and will embolden dictators like Kim Jong Un, Vladimir Putin and the mullahs in Tehran.

A deal with Russia to get rid of most of Syria's chemical weapons is a positive step in some regards but does little to change the outcome on the battlefield. It also has not stopped the largest pooling of al Qa'ida fighters from around the world that we have seen since 9/11. We have no plan to effectively combat this direct threat to the United States of America. We know that once the Syria conflict is over, the jihadists training in Syria today will look to a new target. And their favorite target is always the U.S. or Western interests.

The lack of strong American leadership in Ukraine is perhaps most troublesome. I have to tell you a story.

First of all this job has been the great privilege of my life, other than marrying Kristi and having two beautiful children. On behalf of my constituents and the United States House of Representatives, I have been blessed to travel the world meeting with foreign leaders and military and intelligence professionals like some with us tonight. Earlier this year, I had one of the most difficult visits to any nation I have ever been. And believe me I have been to some doozies. Go ahead and scratch Yemen in the summertime off of your vacation destination list.

That difficult visit was to Ukraine earlier this year; right after the Russians invaded, occupied and then stole Crimea from their neighbor. We met with Ukrainian military and intelligence officials. They weren't asking for tanks or planes to fight the Russian army. They were asking for some basic intelligence and for food. After weeks, the most powerful military of the most powerful nation on earth had not been able to deliver the Ukrainians meals ready to eat (MREs). And while we were there, the White House told our American diplomats to stop asking for intelligence sharing as it wasn't going to be approved. Yet another nation was left disappointed in the promise of America.

Later, we met with a new Ukrainian government minister who weeks earlier was protesting in the streets of Kiev against the corruption of the Yanukovich government. He was kidnapped by Russians, had his ear cut off and was crucified against the wall until he agreed to record a video saying the protests in Kiev were sponsored by the Americans. When we met him, he teared up and apologized to us for recording the video. I was embarrassed as he was apologizing to us.

This is the Russia we are dealing with today. This is how KGB-trained Vladimir Putin and his thugs in power operate. It doesn't matter if we wish the world was not this way. It is. And to make foreign policy based on a world that doesn't exist is dangerous.

From the refugee camps along the Syrian border, to the women of Afghanistan, to African countries pleading for help to push against al Qa'ida affiliates, to our Arab League partners pushing us to deal with

the menace of a nuclear Iran, we must join and work against an American withdrawal from the world and against an isolationism that has never served us well.

That Ukrainian minister who was protesting in the streets of Kiev, getting beaten and shot at by Russian-sponsored goons was looking out to the distance for any signs of that shining city on a hill, any signs of real help from the United States. Unfortunately, he has barely seen a flicker.

So as you can see I am passionate about these issues. I hope you know that I don't plan to go away. I plan to use the new platform I have been offered next year to talk about the importance of national security to normal Americans in their cars, their kitchens, and while they are at work, every single day.

I believe national leadership has been missing on this issue for years now and my intention is to try to do something about it. I believe to my core that an articulate, dogged, national message against the temptations of isolationism is essential to the future prosperity of the United States of America. I know you do, too.

Thank you again for having me, thank you for the work that you all do to keep America safe. And thank you for the great honor of the Eisenhower Award. My wife lets me keep nice things like this in a special room she has for me in the basement.

Thanks again. Good night and God bless.