

flows, and the growth of terrorist networks. Responding to this crisis requires a regional strategy and leadership. What we have gotten instead is an administration that seems more interested in telling us what the mission is not—more interested in telling us what the mission is not—rather than what it is. We have gotten the same timid, reluctant leadership that I have seen from the President for nearly 5 years.

As I have said, this decision was not easy. When the President of the United States asks you to take a question like this seriously, you do so. Because just as our credibility in Syria is tied up with our credibility in places such as Iran and North Korea, so too is the credibility of the Commander in Chief tied up, to a large extent, with America's credibility in general. There is no doubt about that. So let me repeat: I will stand shoulder to shoulder with this President or any other in any case where our vital national security interests are threatened, our treaty allies are attacked, or we face an imminent threat.

As for Israel, very few people, if anyone, expect that Syria would test its readiness to respond on its own, which just goes to show you the importance of credibility on the world stage. As Prime Minister Netanyahu put it last week, the enemies of Israel have very good reason not to test its might. But the Prime Minister should know nonetheless that America stands with him.

I have never been an isolationist, and a vote against this resolution should not be confused by anyone as a turn in that direction. But just as the most committed isolationist could be convinced of the need for intervention under the right circumstances when confronted with a threat, so too do the internationalists among us believe that all interventions are not created equal. And this proposal just does not stand up.

So I will be voting against this resolution. A vital national security risk is clearly not at play, there are too many unanswered questions about our long-term strategy in Syria, including the fact that this proposal is utterly detached from a wider strategy to end the civil war there, and on the specific question of deterring the use of chemical weapons, the President's proposal appears to be based actually on a contradiction: either we will strike targets that threaten the stability of the regime—something the President says he does not intend to do—or we will execute a strike so narrow as to be a mere demonstration.

It is not enough, as General Dempsey has noted, to simply alter the balance of military power without carefully considering what is needed to preserve a functioning state after the fact. We cannot ignore the unintended consequences of our actions.

But we also cannot ignore our broader obligations in the world. I firmly believe the international system that was constructed on the ashes of World War

II rests upon the stability provided by the American military, and by our commitments to our allies. It is a necessary role that only we can continue to fulfill in the decades to come. And especially in times like this, the United States cannot afford to withdraw from the world stage. My record reflects that belief and that commitment regardless of which party has controlled the White House. We either choose to be dominant in the world or we resign ourselves and our allies to the mercy of our enemies. We either defend our freedoms and our civilization or it crumbles.

So as we shift our military focus to the Asia Pacific, we cannot ignore our commitments to the Middle East, to stability in the Persian Gulf, to an enduring presence in Afghanistan, to hunting down the terrorists who would threaten the United States and its people. And when the Commander in Chief sets his mind to action, the world should think he believes in it. When the Commander in Chief sets his mind to an action, the world should think he believes in it. Frankly, the President did not exactly inspire confidence when he distanced himself from his own redlines in Stockholm last week.

It is long past time the President drops the pose of the reluctant warrior and lead. You cannot build an effective foreign policy on the vilification of your predecessor alone. At some point, you have to take responsibility for your own actions and see the world the way it is, not the way you would like it to be.

If you wish to engage countries that have been hostile, so be it. But be a realist, know the limits of rhetoric, and prepare for the worst.

For too long this President has put his faith in the power of his own rhetoric to change the minds of America's enemies. For too long he has been more interested in showing the world that America is somehow different now than it has been in the past; it is humbler; it is not interested in meddling in the affairs of others or in shaping events.

But in his eagerness to turn the page, he has blinded himself to worrisome trends and developments from Tunisia to Damascus to Tehran and in countless places in between.

A year ago this month four Americans were senselessly murdered on sovereign U.S. territory in Benghazi. Last month the President ordered the closing of more than two dozen diplomatic posts stretching from west Africa to the Bay of Bengal. As I have indicated, and as the decision to close these embassies clearly shows, the terrorist threat continues to be real. Expressions of anti-Americanism are rampant throughout Africa and the Middle East, even more so perhaps than when the President first took office.

So the President's new approach has clearly come with a cost. And for the sake of our own security and that of our allies, it is time he recognized it. Because if America does not meet its

international commitments, who will? That is one question that those on the left who are comfortable with a weakened America cannot answer, because the answer is too frightening. No one will. That is the answer.

If this episode has shown us anything, it is that the time has come for the President to finally acknowledge that there is no substitute for American might. It is time for America to lead again, this time from the front. But we need strategic vision, in the Middle East and in many other places around the world, to do it.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 11 a.m., with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, and with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Illinois.

PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I listened carefully to the statement made by the Republican Senate leader. He is a member of the loyal opposition and it is no surprise that he is critical of the policies of President Barack Obama. That is the nature of the debate, the American debate, which takes place on the floor of this Chamber on a regular basis. But in fairness to this President, there are some things that were not mentioned.

This President, under his leadership, has brought the war in Iraq to a close. This President is bringing the war in Afghanistan to a close. This President, with the best military minds and the best military talent in the world, has made Osama bin Laden a piece of history. He was captured and killed. The man who, sadly, led an attack on the United States that cost almost 3,000 innocent lives has been dispatched because of the leadership of this President and the wonderful abilities and talents and resources of the United States military.

So to stand here and criticize this President as some reluctant warrior is unfair. Yes, I would say in some instances I want a President to be a reluctant warrior, to think twice before America is engaged in a war, to think twice before this country commits its troops to a foreign theater. Certainly, as of this moment, having lost more than 5,000 brave Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan, we know the terrible price that is paid by the men and women who so bravely represent this country. And I would like every President to think twice before committing