

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

those troops to battle. Reluctant? Yes. But wise? Yes, I want a wise warrior too.

I listened to the Senator from Kentucky criticize the President because he is, quote, telegraphing his punches when it comes to what is going to happen in Syria. Well, you cannot have it both ways. This President could make a unilateral decision and attack without even consulting Congress and thereby maintain the element of surprise or he could do as this President has done and follow what he considers to be our constitutional requirement of a national debate before we engage in military action.

So I would say to the Senator from Kentucky, do not criticize the President for letting us know what he might do when he turns this over to Congress to debate. It is something most of us in Congress should welcome.

I also take exception to this notion that we have somehow abandoned our commitment to the world—this notion that what we hope to do in the Pacific is unreachable, or the closing of embassies because of danger is problematic or that there is austerity in the Department of Defense.

It is hard to reconcile those statements from the Republican side of the aisle with the fact that repeatedly we have asked for a conference committee on the budget to work out our budget differences when it comes to funding the Department of Defense and our Nation's national defense and time and again the Republicans have objected—objected to even sitting down and trying to work out differences so we can restore some of the funds cut through sequestration.

You cannot have it both ways. Do not criticize the President for not spending enough money when it comes to our Nation's defense and then stand by the sequestration which continues to cut even more from that same Department and many others.

As for the war on terror, what the President has said is there comes a moment, and we have reached it, where we cannot always be on a war footing. It causes a nation to make decisions which in the long haul may not stand the test of time and history. The President has said, yes, there is a war on terrorism, but we have to resume our leadership in this world with the view of a stable nation, not always thinking about the wartime status we face.

I listened to the Senator from Kentucky, who talks about saving money and cutting budgets, trying to hang on to that relic of times gone by at Guantanamo, where we are spending so much money—hundreds of thousands of dollars for each prisoner to be kept at Guantanamo—when we know full well that at least half of them should be released—carefully released—and should not be maintained at Guantanamo.

Today, we have hundreds of convicted terrorists safely incarcerated in the Federal penitentiaries of America, including one in Illinois in Marion, and

the people in the nearby community would not even know it because they are safely incarcerated.

Let me say a word too about this issue of Syria. You cannot, on the one hand, criticize this President for stepping up and saying we need to take action, if necessary, to stop the use of chemical weapons and then, on the other hand, say he is a reluctant warrior and that he does not support it. How in the world do you reconcile those two points of view?

The President has shown leadership. What he has asked is for the Congress to follow. What I heard from the Republican Senator from Kentucky is he is not interested in following that leadership.

Let me also add, this Putin overture, that we find some peaceful way to resolve this—I hope it turns out to be true and something that works. And if it does, give credit where it is due. This President stepped up and said we have to challenge the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Even if it does not affect the United States directly or its allies directly, we have to stand up to them. And if this Putin overture leads to some containment or destruction of those chemical weapons, give the President credit for it. Do not criticize him for not leading. He has shown more leadership on this issue than, frankly, many politicians of either party wanted to face.

I think when it comes to a credible strategy, this President has one.

It is a strategy which is ending two wars, which has put an end to the leader of that terrible terrorist attack on the United States on 9/11. It is a strategy which has improved the image of the United States since this President has come to power over the last several years. It is a strategy we can build on in the future. But we need to make certain that what we do is done with an eye toward the reality of this world in which we live. It is a dangerous world. It is one where the United States may be called on to lead at times when we do not want to lead. We cannot be isolationist. The United States has a responsibility in this world. That responsibility has to be used very carefully. This President understands that.

I hope that at the end of the day we can, in fact, see a peaceful resolution of the chemical weapons issue in Syria. I hope we can find a way to harken back to Ronald Reagan where we can trust that will happen but verify it as well. That would be the right ending. I think the President has taken the right position.

I would like to add something. When it comes to the nation of Israel, our closest and best ally in the Middle East, they understand what we are trying to do with chemical weapons in Syria. They have made it clear through their friends in the United States and other ways that they support it without fear of retaliation by Syria. They are ready, according to Prime Minister Netanyahu, for whatever Syria chooses

to do. We should not be any less forceful or less committed when it comes to ending the threat of chemical weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes and that following my remarks Senator PORTMAN be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SYRIA

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I know that—and what we have heard this morning—what is rightfully at the forefront of all of our minds this week is the debate about whether to authorize the use of force in Syria. This is a very serious matter, as we all know. It raises a number of geopolitical and national security issues.

The decision to undertake military action is not one to be taken lightly. I am very aware that people are war-weary, that they are concerned about the consequences of the use of military force. Consequently, I believe we should pursue every possible diplomatic solution prior to engaging in military action.

I welcome the possibility of international cooperation to secure and destroy Syria's chemical weapons stockpile. I hope that Russia is being serious and that they will take real, legitimate actions to quickly follow through on what they have raised with their effort to try to encourage Assad to give up his chemical weapons to international control. I am working with some of my colleagues on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on an amendment to the resolution that would incorporate this new development and pressure the Syrians to ensure that we see credible concrete steps in any possible effort to place their chemical weapons under international inspection. I look forward to hearing from the President today and this evening, and I look forward to the debate later this week as we consider the situation in Syria.

ENERGY SAVINGS AND INDUSTRIAL COMPETITIVENESS ACT

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I wish to take a few minutes this morning to talk about legislation that was previously scheduled to be debated on the Senate floor this week—the Energy Savings and Industrial Competitiveness Act, also known as Shaheen-Portman. I know the Presiding Officer has been very involved in energy issues for all of his time in public life, and I do appreciate the work he did as a Member of the House. I know he is following this debate very closely. I appreciate that.

This bill is one Senator ROB PORTMAN and I have been working on for 3 years.