



Neoconservative Republicans Knock Obama's Shift in War on Terror

A number of [neoconservative Republicans](#) spent part of the Memorial Day weekend roundly criticizing the plan announced by President Obama to limit the scope and eventually end the war on terror that was declared by President George W. Bush after the 9/11 attacks. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.; pictured) called the president "tone deaf" to national security needs.



"At a time we need resolve the most, we are sounding retreat." Graham said on [Fox News Sunday](#). A strong supporter of the use of unmanned bombers for strikes on selected targets, Graham criticized the president's statement in his speech at the National Defense University May 23 that stricter guidelines and more oversight are needed for the drone attacks.

"Changing the standards of when you can go after somebody with a drone; it has to be a continuing imminent threat to the American people with no chance of civilian casualties," Graham said in voicing a catalogue of faults he finds in the way the president is dealing with foreign policy and national security issues.

"Our enemies are emboldened all over the planet. Al Qaeda in Iraq is coming back with vengeance," Graham said. "Syria is falling apart. We are talking about helping the rebels but doing nothing about it. Iran is marching toward a nuclear weapon. And we show this lack of resolve, talking about that war being over. What do you think the Iranians are thinking?" Graham, who has been in Congress for 18 years, said: "I've never been more worried about our national security than I am right now. And the [Obama] speech did not help."

"I see a big difference between the President saying the war's at an end and whether or not you've won the war," [said](#) Sen. Tom Coburn, (R-Okla). "We have still tremendous threats out there, that are building — not declining, building — and to not recognize that, I think, is dangerous in the long run and dangerous for the world."

Obama did not say the war on terror is over in [his May 23 speech](#), but he said it must end at some yet-undefined point. He also called for a "refinement" and eventual repeal of the Authorization for the Use of Military Force, passed by Congress a week after the 9/11 attacks. In contrast to "the global war on terror" proclaimed by the Bush administration, Obama rejected the concept of a "boundless" war in favor of a more focused attack on specific terror networks that threaten the United States. With U.S. combat units scheduled for withdrawal from Afghanistan by the end of next year, Obama said groups such as the al-Qaeda affiliates on the Arabian Peninsula "must be dealt with, but in the years to come,



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 27, 2013

not every collection of thugs that labels themselves al Qaeda will pose a credible threat to the United States.”

Obama continued: “Unless we discipline our thinking, our definitions, our actions, we may be drawn into more wars we don’t need to fight, or continue to grant Presidents unbound powers more suited for traditional armed conflicts between nation states.”

Two GOP [members of the House Homeland Security Committee](#), meanwhile took issue with the president’s renewal of his call to close the detention center at the U.S. Naval Base on Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Obama promised to close the facility as a candidate for president, but has been blocked by a congressional ban on relocating the foreign terror suspects held there anywhere in the United States.

“Name me one American city that would like to host these guys,” Committee Chairman Michael McCaul said on CNN’s *State of the Union*. Rep. Peter King of New York, appearing on ABC’s *This Week*, said he is “very concerned about sending detainees back to Yemen.” More than half of the 166 prisoners still on Guantanamo are from Yemen, and 56 have been cleared for return to their country. Others are deemed too dangerous to be released, but have not been prosecuted because, claims the Obama administration, their trial would compromise security secrets.

Ironically, Republicans have not been heard criticizing another aspect of the president’s speech, calling for an increase in foreign aid and nation building, as Obama described it, “from North Africa to South Asia.”

This means patiently supporting transitions to democracy in places like Egypt and Tunisia and Libya — because the peaceful realization of individual aspirations will serve as a rebuke to violent extremists. We must strengthen the opposition in Syria, while isolating extremist elements — because the end of a tyrant must not give way to the tyranny of terrorism. We are actively working to promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians — because it is right and because such a peace could help reshape attitudes in the region. And we must help countries modernize economies, upgrade education, and encourage entrepreneurship — because American leadership has always been elevated by our ability to connect with people’s hopes, and not simply their fears.

So while the president speaks on the one hand of a more limited role for the war on terror, with the other he would draw us deeper into all the turbulence of “democracies” in the Middle East and further into the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. At a time when our own economy is mired in a stagnant “recovery” and burdened with enormous debt, we will be spending more money we don’t have to “help countries modernize economies.” We will help undeveloped nations “upgrade education” when it might be considered a near miracle if we improved our own. Lyndon Johnson’s plans to build a Great Society on the Mekong Delta in Vietnam seem modest by comparison.

If all the efforts the United States has made in trying to manage other people’s political affairs, and all the money spent on efforts to “modernize” and “upgrade” other nations in the past seven decades have not yet produced a more peaceful world, chances are more of the same won’t do it. Yet that part of Obama’s speech seems to have escaped the notice of neoconservative Republican critics, who appear more troubled by a vaguely suggested contraction of the warfare state than by an expanded role for a global welfare state.

Photo of Sen. Lindsey Graham: AP Images



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