



Major General Michael P. Lehnert, USMC (Ret.)

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Dear Senator,

I am a member of a coalition of more than 50 retired general and admirals of the United States Armed Forces who have consistently worked to find a way to responsibly close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay. We are as we were on active duty -- nonpartisan. I was the first commander of the detention facility at Guantanamo. This week the Senate Armed Services Committee will mark up the Detaining Terrorists to Protect America Act of 2015.

I write to urge you to work with your fellow Senators and with this administration, no matter your party affiliation, to pass legislation that will facilitate shutting the detention facility. In making this recommendation, I recognize that each of you have strong opinions regarding the best course of action to preserve our national security. Our view recognizes the dangers of recidivism associated with releasing previously cleared detainees, but we feel strongly that the continued existence of the Guantanamo detention facility allows violent jihadis to use it to recruit others into their ranks. In sum, the insecurity created by having Guantanamo far outweighs any advantage that may be obtained by continuing to operate it.

Some of you have asked the administration for a plan to close Guantanamo. We agree that is a reasonable request and that any action of this magnitude deserves a plan. Perhaps rather than introducing legislation to keep Guantanamo open, national security concerns are better addressed with legislation that requires a well-crafted plan that addresses release of previously cleared detainees and continued detention of those detainees that still present a risk to our national security.

This is not a partisan issue. It is an American issue. I cannot overstate how damaging the continued existence of the detention facility has been. Repressive governments use it to deflect criticism of their own policies by charging hypocrisy. Guantanamo feeds violent extremists perverted narrative by allowing them to use it as a recruiting tool. Whether accurate or not, it is a symbol for many around the world of torture, injustice, and illegitimacy.

I urge you to work together to find a path that will serve our great nation. Closing Guantanamo is in our national security interest, and it is about reestablishing who we say we are as a nation.

Semper Fidelis,

Major General Michael R. Lehnert, USMC (Ret.)