DEFENSE FORUM FOUNDATION
Congressional Defense and Foreign Policy Forum

“How We Can Win the Global War Against Radical Islam and Its Allies”

SPEAKER:
Dr. Michael Ledeen
Best Selling Author of Field of Fight

Introduction and Moderator:
Suzanne Scholte
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Suzanne Scholte: Good afternoon, I am Suzanne Scholte the President of the Defense Forum Foundation, and it’s a great pleasure to welcome you to our Defense Foreign Policy Forum. I know all of you that RSVPed had time to know that General Michael Flynn was not able to be here, he had an emergency and had to go overseas, but those of you that might not have gotten that notice, we apologize if you came to hear General Michael Flynn, but we are really excited to have an excellent speaker, that co-authored the book, Field of Fight, with General Flynn. I wanted to mention for those of you who are coming to this Forum for the first time, this is bipartisan Forum that started many years ago, and we always promise to have an excellent speaker, a critical topic and the chance to have your questions answered. And even though General Flynn was our original speaker, we are really honored to have kept that promise, because we have an excellent speaker to present an extremely critical topic, who in fact coauthored the book with General Flynn. We brought copies of the book and encourage everyone to take a copy, and if we have some left over after the Forum feel free to take extra ones.
Before introducing our speaker I just want to recognize a very special person who is with us today. Many of you know that our Defense Forum Foundation is also involved in promoting freedom, democracy and human rights abroad. We are really involved in the information campaign, in fact we fund the daily broadcast of Free North Korea Radio every day broadcasting into North Korea, for example, to articulate freedom, human rights, democracy issues, and we do it with North Korean defectors. We do it with people that escaped from North Korea. But we now know, that we need an information campaign here in the United States of America, because it is important here to combat ISIS’s efforts to radicalize American citizens. And we have a man with us today, who with his wife Anita, have taken on this challenge. They began, on their own, as private citizens, and at their own expense, to create very compelling videos on social media depicting the reality of ISIS to combat their influence on Muslim youth here in America. They are proud Muslim Americans and they understand the importance of standing up to fight against radical Islam, and in their own words I just want to quote what they told me: “We are trying to make a difference, by exposing the reality of this group so that young Muslim men don’t fall for their propaganda.” And I just want to recognize this man, because I really want those of you who work for Members of Congress, that are interested in this issue and are involved in this issue, this is somebody that you really need to talk to. So I just really want to introduce you - if you could stand: Sean Rashid.

For our topic today, “How We Can Win the Global War Against Radical Islam and Its Allies,” we are really pleased to have Dr. Michael Ledeen, who literally wrote the book on this issue. Dr. Ledeen has served for decades in the service of our country. He was a special adviser to the Secretary of State and a consultant to the National Security Council. He is a prolific writer, he has written over thirty-five books, several hundred essays on National Security and other issues. He currently serves as a Freedom Scholar at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, and a contributing editor for National Review Online, as well as a columnist for PG media and The Hill. And when I was discussing with him about the format for our program, we usually have about thirty minutes of lecture and fifteen minutes of Q&A, I was really pleased by the fact he said, “Well I want to have as much Questions and Answers time as possible. I love to take Questions.” And I really appreciate the fact that he really wanted to spend time today talking with all of you, and hearing your concerns, and answering your questions about this critical topic. And when I found out, I was obvious really upset, that General Flynn wasn’t able to be with us, but our Vice Chairman Ty McCoy, right here sitting in front of me, he said “well actually, I think that Dr. Ledeen (don’t tell Michael Flynn we said this) is actually a much better speaker. And when I told my husband that General Flynn was not going be here he said: “Oh – but you have Dr. Ledeen, he is actually a much better speaker! He is so knowledgeable on this issue.” So I am really, really, pleased to recognize for this program today Dr. Michael Ledeen.
Dr. Michael Ledeen: Well I am going to tell Flynn, cause he needs to hear that. (Laughter) Thank you, Happy Friday. Congratulations, I know that your principals have left town for the most part, and so it's free at last. And I hope you have a wonderful autumn, and that they all get reelected successfully. Left to my own devices I could probably go on for 20 minutes, I always say that, and then I go on for hours, because I have such a wonderful voice, and we have a brand new granddaughter. And when I picked her up two weeks ago for the first time, I started talking to her, and I said that “you can call me Gramps.” And she fell asleep, so obviously my voice has a certain soothing effect, at least on tiny babies, and I hope it works for you to.

This book is a surprising bestseller. It’s a New York Times bestseller, it was number one on The Washington Post bestseller list a few weeks ago, which gave me singular pleasure, since The Washington Post won’t publish a commentary written by me. And here they had to put it on top of the bestseller list. And I am sure they have no special affection for General Flynn either. I want to stress that that book, I don’t know how other collaborations have worked, but that book is a true collaboration. Everybody always thinks that when you see two names on a book, one being a famous person (Flynn), the other being a talkative excessive writer (me), that the excessive writer wrote the book, and the famous person read it over to make sure, that the most important facts are there, but not so with this book – not at all. This book is a true collaboration, I learned an enormous amount. Flynn organized dozens of interviews for me, people who talked to people who worked for him, commanded him. People liked him, people didn’t like him, people admired him, people despised him. So I got the whole range of opinions. And I suppose, from what I hear, I mean, I always see him now socially, and the way that he and I got to know each other is interesting. We have two Marine officer boys, and a daughter, Simone, who has probably spent more time on battlefields in Iraq and Afghanistan than the boys have, and she had the desk next to Flynn at his headquarters in Afghanistan, and then followed Flynn back to Washington and worked at the ODNI [Office of the Director of National Intelligence] and all those other alphabet places, that he was at. And so we met him because he was Simone's boss. So it’s been a friendly relationship all over.

This book is a bestseller to my surprise, and I’m sure that I understand why, because it has taken me 75 years to learn to write a bestseller. It’s my first one in English. I had one in Italian. And the reason is, that this book, like Flynn, is really straightforward. He is a straightforward person. I have not, in the several years that we have known each other, found him engaging in vagnness, which is really un-Washington. He is really un-Washington in that way. And, of course, he was fired because he was testifying one day, and somebody asked him if we are better off than we were five years ago, in the period where the President was bragging about how much better off we were, and so my friend said no, we are at greater risk. And that was the end of him. So now he is in the private sector.

So what does this book say? This book, like General Flynn, is a simple and straightforward story. It’s says: We are in a war. It’s a global war. It’s not limited to whatever your favorite upset area is, it’s not limited to the Middle East, or Central Europe, or Southeast Asia, or South America,
whatever it is, it’s a global war. It runs from Pjöngjang to Caracas. We are facing an enemy alliance that consists of radical Islamic Groups, radical Islamic States, and radical Secular Groups, and radical Secular States, they are not all Muslims. Vladimir Putin is an enemy of the United States, and he is no Muslim. He doesn’t like them. And yet he is conspiring with them, and working hand-in-glove with them, to do us in. And they are at it all the time. And their objective is the same as it has been all along. When I set up lunch here next to Ty, I was thinking backward 45 years, these people been running around, trying to get us. And back when they were called the Soviet Union they tried to get us and they didn’t manage it. And now they are called Russian and they are still trying to get us, and they got new allies. This alliance is really very interesting if you are like me. I am an historian by trade, and spend most of my professional life studying totalitarian movements: Fascism, Communism, Terrorism, so forth. People are always surprised when they see that radical Muslims and radical Seculars get along well, and cooperate well.

Well, how can that be? I mean, these secular guys hate religion. And here they are, working hand-in-glove with deeply religious people. Well, but this has always been the case. I spend much, too much, time studying Iran and writing books about Iran, and so on. Iran went to war with the United States. Iranian leaders have repeatedly declared war against the United States and they have been waging war against us and are doing it still today. And they are getting help from the Russians. The whole Iranian nuclear program, hardly anybody says these things but I mean they are so simple and obvious, is Russian. It’s a Russian program. The reactor for sure is Russian, even the internal systems to protect the nuclear facilities against possible Israeli/American/Saudi - whatever your favorite attacker is – those are all Russian! And the alliance in the war in Syria, the basic group, is Russia, Syria, Iran. So they are in bed with each other, and you can see it.

Yes, I grant that it is impossible for any normal person to figure out what’s going on in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan at any given moment. They themselves might not know. Wheeling, dealing, making arrangements and so forth, but a basic pattern is quite easy to see. And the nature of our enemies is easy to define. Their goal is to destroy or dominate us. There are other countries who they’d like to destroy and dominate. Israel is number two on their list, but we are their basic target. And you can see it. How many times have they tried and failed to carry out big deal terrorist attacks on the United States? Even recently. Even the stuff in New York and New Jersey. These were IEDs - weapons of chose in Iraq and Afghanistan – produced largely by Iranians, provided to both Islamic terrorist groups, and then the users where payed, trained, taught how to operate these things. And yet they screwed it up. The IEDs at the Marine Marathon in New Jersey went off early and others of them didn’t go off at all – Right! Now that is a great advantage we have in this war.

Let me draw another second point, because political correctness generally forbids us from saying these basic things, and yet they’re terribly important. My favorite press conference of all time was with Israeli General Moshe Dyan after the Six Day War when Israel had defeated all the forces that outnumbered them a hundred and fifty thousand to one, God knows what. Anyway, he is up there answering questions, and some journalist said. “Well, General Dyan, how good is the Israeli army anyway? How do you compare it with the great armies of the past? With Caesar, with Alexander, with Napoleon, and so forth” And Dyan said: “Nobody knows. We only fight Arabs.” So to compare our army fighting an Arab military force, isn’t fair to people who are comparing armies in the past fighting competent military forces. The fact of the matter is, that that part of the world, that the president likes so much, that he calls the Muslim World, is a failure. It’s a failure on epic lines. There has hardly ever been a failure as colossal as the failure of the Islamic world.

My favorite fact, and you will find it in The Field of Fight, is that as of a few years ago more books had been translated from foreign languages into Spanish in the past year, than had been translated from foreign languages into Arabic in a thousand years. Ok? Let me say that again, because it is hard to swallow first time around. More books translated into Spanish in a year, than translated into
Arabic in a thousand years, in a Millennium. So when the president or some advocate for that part of the world, stands up and says, “well, you know, they saved culture for the West, it’s true. But only up to a certain point. It’s a long time ago. What was the last time a Muslim won a Nobel Prize in Art, in Science – right! It happens, there are two or three of them in the history of the Nobel Prize. And they all worked at or studied at Cambridge or Oxford. Anyway, we are dealing with failures. A failed civilization, and they know it!

Bernard Lewis’ greatest book, I trust you, go and read “What Went Wrong?” Bernard Lewis’s great book after 9/11. Bernard Lewis was pointing out for years, that Arabs and even Persian Muslims know that they are failures. They know that they have failed, because the world now between the Internet and TV and cable, travel and so forth, people – you can’t trick them anymore. You can’t say that Beirut is the Paris of the Middle East. Well, alright, but no one would want to live there, you want to live in the real thing, not in its fallen State in the Middle East. So we are blessed with a good choice of enemies. They are forever getting it wrong. They are setting their own underwear on fire. They are failing to blow up their car bomb in Times Square. I mean these were all things, this is not advanced physics. Not at all. And yet they somehow just can’t pull it off right to get their maximum effect. Plus we have a government that really doesn’t want to win this war. It doesn’t even want to talk about the war.

As we point out over and over again in The Field of Fight, this administration will not let members of the American government pronounce the words “radical Islam” and “Terror.” And yet this is a big part of what we are up against. If you can’t say radical Islam and Terror you’re going to have a hard time defeating it. Cause if you don’t know who and what your enemy is, how are you going to win? There is no desire to win, in fact the president has said publicly;” I don’t want to hear any talk about America winning!” All right? Politically unacceptable talk.

So, what are we supposed to do about this? Militarily, every single time that we have gone after a radical Muslim army or terrorist groups or so forth, we have won. Without exception. Every time we have gone after them militarily with a desire to win we have won. We won in Iraq, we destroyed Al-Qaeda. In Afghanistan we won in every area we chose to fight Taliban. When our younger son went to Afghanistan, which had been a year and a half earlier the worst place, he and his troops were there for eight months looking for Taliban. They couldn’t find any. And they would go to people in the towns saying:” Hey, we came over here to meet Taliban. We are Marines, we are friendly. And we would like to talk to Taliban. Where are they?” And it turned out that the Taliban had gone into Pakistan and the Pakistanis had gotten upset and said:” What are you doing here? You are supposed to be killing Americans!” And the Taliban said “Nope . We don’t want to do that.”

Ok, so every time we have won. And ISIS, or ISIL, whatever you want to call it, is an outgrowth of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which was restored to life after we defeated them, because Obama pulled all our troops out of Iraq. And they said, ”Can that be true? Is this really happening?” So first they tested it, and they went in and out of that came ISIS. They grew better even than Al-Qaeda in Iraq. So militarily we don’t have a problem, history shows. Our problem with them is to go after the doctrine, go after the ideology. Take The Cold War. You would be amazed at how much money and how much manpower we devoted to going after communist doctrine. To expose all the lies they told. We had whole teams of people working on Soviet Disinformation, so they were all really important. We don’t have anything like that today. And yet there is the probably second greatest disinformation program in the world, after the Russians, because they are the great geniuses. And then there is Iran. Iranians are really good at this. They are really good at making up stories, let’s put it that way. They are extremely good at intimidating enemies without really having to deliver on threats. And so we need today what we had then, which is teams where people work on the lies they tell about themselves, the heart of the doctrine. So we need to take off after the doctrines of radical
Islam. And the world will welcome that. The people know that, they themselves know it. There are no greater critics of Iran in the world, than the Iranian people themselves. Whenever the regime takes a public opinion poll it turns out, that so many present, 80 present of Iranians, want regime change. And yet to listen to the great majority of foreign policy experts who deal with the Middle East, in particular with Iran, regime change is something so crazy and so unspeakable, that you don’t want to be associated with anybody who thinks about it.

Well, my view, and the view that General Flynn shares, as you find in The Field of Fight, is, if we could bring down the Soviet Empire without firing a shot we can certainly bring down Iran without sending an army in to invade. This is not a military issue. Our greatest weapons against these people are political. We need leadership that wants to win, and knows how hollow their doctrines are, and brings the fight to them. Both on the real battlefield, and in the political universe. And if you do that, we will win. The question is whether there is a candidate out there who really wants to win this war. The first thing you’ve got to get is somebody who is willing to talk about it. And I must say it’s really frustrating to somebody like me, who wants to stop writing books about Iran and so forth, that I still haven’t heard a presidential candidate, including Trump, stand up and say: “We’ve got to bring down Iran.” But we do have to bring down Iran. And the way to bring down Iran is not to bomb it and not to invade it, but to support the internal opposition, just as we did it in the case of the Soviet Union.

Ask Gorbachov. He’ll tell you how it happened. So that’s my sermon for today. My alloted twenty minutes are up. Please ask me anything that’s on your mind.

QUESTION ONE: Lt Col. Alton A. Warthen (Deputy Director, Marine Corps House Liaison) A quick question for you about the regime change please: How do you recommend, and I agree on you in terms of shaping internal opposition, but along those lines, how are we careful to make sure that the people who replace the others aren’t worse than the devil that we already know? And how would you recommend going ahead and shaping that?

Dr. Ledeen: My grandmother, who was Russian, always used to say: “Things are never so bad that they can’t get worse.” Typical Russian approach to life. I can’t guarantee you that things will be better, but it sure looks like they will be better. The Iranian people, on balance, want to be part of the Western World. They don't want to be part of the Middle East. They want to be over here, with us. That’s their dream. My favorite line about Iran is, they might be crazy but they are not stupid. So they would rather be on our side of the line, than the other side of the line. They know they are terribly oppressed and terribly poor. They know that they have one of the most corrupt ruling classes in the world. I mean, they know all those things. And there are all these funny stories about when we where invading Iraq. Iranians standing along the Iran/Iraq border, holding up a big bull sized banner saying “Here, Here”, because they wanted us to go in there. And so, I mean if you look at the leaders of the opposition Karroubi and Moussavi, who were under house arrest and have been since 2010, they wanted an end to Iranian support for Terrorism. They were talking about been willing to give up nuclear weapons. Who knows, we would have to test it. But there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic. And it’s hard to be worse than these people, you know what I mean? I mean, it’s possible. But it’s hard. It’s really rare that you find someone worse than Khamenei, or that great president Rouhani under who's rule the execution rate in Iran has increased by 50 percent — a big number.

QUESTION TWO: KaLeigh Long: Hi, thank you for speaking. I really like how you brought out the doctrinal war against radical Islam, and I thought back to 1979, when nearly 500 Wahhabis besieged Mecca Juwayman al-Otaybi. The Wahhabi terrorists were motivated by the declaration of a caliphate, which come forth from their belief that the Mahdi had arrived: Mohammed Abdullah al-Qahtani - Juwayman's brother in law. Once the Mahdi was killed, the supporters lost faith in the
prophecy and the caliphate was delegitimized. The siege ended. Now, we see a new rise of Wahhabi terror with the Islamic State and its declaration of a caliphate. If the caliphate were delegitimized by Quranic prophecy, would the Islamic State dissolve? If so, can the U.S. play a role in that delegitimization by exposing the lack of control over the al-sham and many other Quranic requirements of the prophesied caliphate?

Dr. Ledeen: Well, it’s a great question, and there is no doubt, that there is a really intimate relationship between victory on the battlefield and success of the ideology. When we defeated Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Al-Qaeda’s ability to recruit terrorists, in particular foreign terrorist, dropped dramatically. They were in a really rough time. The same thing seems to be happening with ISIS now, as they lose stronghold after stronghold foreign terrorists are less enthusiastic about signing up. Why, why would you want to be with the losers? So, what I said after Iraq was, we need the president of the United States to stand up and say:” Hey, you people have been telling us all along that the reason you won on the battlefield was that Allah has blessed your enterprise. And because you practice Islam in its proper form. So what happened here? What’s the deal in Iraq? Has Allah changed sides? Is He now with us? Because if, by definition, Allah blesses the enterprise of the winning forces on the battlefield, then if we win, it means that he is blessing us – right?”

We need a president, and the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense - someone – who will say that!...During the Cold War, nobody knows this anymore, whenever there was an international meeting and the Secretary of State [George] Schultz was going to go and meet with the Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, Schultz would always go with a list of Soviet political prisoners, a list of who they were. And at that conference every day he would say:” We want these people out! These people are unjustly in prison, they are political prisoners. You shouldn’t be holding them. Let them out. And here is the list.” And he gave copies to the journalists. We have to be doing that now. Hell – we didn’t even do that for our own hostages in Iran very often. Very rare they were mentioned. I wrote and kept on writing over and over again, that you can bet a farm that American hostages are part of the Nuclear Negotiations. Not a single journalist really worked hard on that subject, and there is a lot that we don’t know. Almost every day now some new form of payment to Iran emerges, kept secret from not only you and me, but the guys in the Pentagon, at Treasury at Justice

But I want to come back to my basic points which you nicely highlighted with your excellent question, which is they are doctrinally weak, they are militarily weak, we can win this war, but we have to want to win it. We have to have the will to win. And I think General Flynn is doing so well and that book is doing so well because that book tells you how to win. What we have to do to win.

QUESTION THREE: (inaudible)

Well, I mean we saved them. They were ready to fall. There is a really good book about all this the Wall Street Journal on the Iranian bailout. Iran was ready to go bankrupt and we bailed them up.

QUESTION FOUR: What about the Turks, talking to Putin and Assad, (inaudible)

I don’t know. I don’t do Turkey. It’s too complicated for me. I spent too much time on Iran. Please don't make me do Turkey too (laughter). And you know, Italy is my basic thing. You know Italy will tax a smart person but trying to figure out what’s going on in Turkey: Was that coup real, or was it his own deception? I don’t know. But if it was real we should support it. I keep hearing, that we didn’t expect it to happen, we were taken by surprise when it happened – all of that. I mean I do Iran, we have always been surprised what the Iranians where doing. Our intelligence community is very weak. And I am still waiting for the results of the IG investigation to tell us whether it is true that 50 plus analysts allege that top political people out there had been dampening the worries
expressed in the intelligence reports being sent up the line, and that intelligence provided regarding Afghanistan has been changed for political purposes. Cause you know, I am pretty old, but I don’t remember a case, I don’t remember any time, that a number like that, 50 + intelligence analysts protesting the politicization of intelligence. 50. that’s a pretty big number.

QUESTION: Sean Rashid: What I wanted to ask you: In terms of the failures which you mentioned in the Muslim world, which I would say more in the last 200 years, which was also played by the cruel Wahhabism that was spread from Saudi Arabia taking them back 1400 years. As the education level is more from India all the way to Indonesia but not in the Middle East because 100 years ago they had no schools and they used to go to other countries to study, so they have destroyed their education system. My father used to say, that God sent all the profits to the Middle East because he said, if I can have the Arabs I can have the rest of the world. So now going back to the theology of winning the minds and hearts in terms of their ideology to battle that, as you said we did with the Soviets, what should we do? Because there is a big conspiracy theory in the Muslim world, that America wants to destroy Islam, that America wants to destroy Muslims. How do we tackle that and how do we win? Our own government is doing nothing, what should we do about it?

Ledeen: Just win the war and expose the extremists of radical Islam, support moderate Muslims, support people like El Sissi, who is fighting extreme Islam, and there are others in places from Indonesia to Singapore and so forward. And above all here, support moderate Muslims here. Which we don’t do at all. And once we have won that war, it’ll be a lot easier for them to sort it out because at the end of the day they have a lot of sorting to do. And it’s not easy and it shouldn’t surprise us, that it’s bloody. The people, Americans, toss up the expression, “well they need a new reformation.” As if the reformation were a matter of sort of sitting down and drafting a good doctrine. The religious war is the reformation. Just to judge by the kind of language that is used in public. We have plenty of talent, we don’t suffer from lack of talent, we suffer from lack of interest of the part of talent of people to go into government and to do politics. The best people don’t go into politics. They don’t do politics. What do the best people do? Business. War. Religion. Sometimes Military in dramatic moments. But that is it. The best people don’t to politics. And it is true today as it was true then.

QUESTION: What is the next book to read after your book Field of Fight?

Ledeen: Bernard Lewis. “What Went Wrong” is the basic book about the Middle East and ISIS. And he is still alive. You know he is a hundred. Have you noticed how many people are living to be a hundred? You know when I was a kid I thought that 60 was one foot in the grave and here I am, 75 and I love it that the world’s oldest man is about to have his Bat Mitzwa.

Scholte: Thank you so much. Well thank you all for joining us today. Sean's YouTube videos combating Isis are called the State of Doom. Thank you very much.
Sean Rashid, DFF Intern Nicole Martin, Scholte, Ledeen, and DFF Board Vice Chair Ty McCoy following Ledeen’s presentation.