

The latest developments in the Middle East are a clear reminder of what the global war on terrorism really is: our fourth world war. We should use the lessons from the prior world wars to ensure we win the current one with a minimum of bloodshed. Now, in case I lost you a second ago, and you are sti...

The latest developments in the Middle East are a clear reminder of what the global war on terrorism really is: our fourth world war. We should use the lessons from the prior world wars to ensure we win the current one with a minimum of bloodshed. Now, in case I lost you a second ago, and you are still trying to figure out when World War III occurred, let me explain. As your history books will tell you, World War I was the struggle that broke up the old order of European monarchies and empires. Fascism rose from the ashes of those empires, and World War II soon followed. In the wake of fascism's defeat in World War II, communism sprang up in the Soviet Union and its satellites in Europe and around the world.

Along with communism's spread across the world came a conflict with the democratic west, which I and some others would argue was World War III. Admittedly, the casualties were only a fraction of the tens of millions killed in the prior two world wars, but there were armed conflicts on almost every continent.

As Americans, we honor those who served in what President Kennedy called "a long twilight struggle." Brave Americans served from Korea to Vietnam to Beirut in what we commonly call the Cold War. But that name falls short of adequately describing the global nature of that war and its eventual result of eliminating communism from all but a few nations.

Now in World War IV, we fight Islamic extremism instead of empires, fascism or communism. There should be no doubt that this is a worldwide conflict. Terrorists have bombed New York, Washington, London, Spain, Japan, Indonesia, Russia, India, Israel, Egypt and other areas. The recent war between Israel and Hezbollah is just the latest clash in this ongoing conflict between the civilized world and barbaric terrorists. The question now is whether the nations that ally themselves with the civilized world will learn from the lessons of prior world wars. It is naive to assume that al-Qaida, Hezbollah and their ilk will give up because the international community asks them to. Militarism, fascism and communism certainly didn't. If we are to extinguish this ideology of hate and the terrorism it breeds, it will require united leadership in the world and the same commitment to victory required for the defeat of communism and fascism.

World War III taught us how to win while minimizing bloodshed by being strong and resolute and not letting weakness prevail or the enemy expand its power and influence. In World War IV, we cannot predict or control who will be attacked or when it will occur. But what can be controlled is how the civilized world responds to acts of terror.

The Israelis have consistently chosen to fight and destroy enemies who are determined to destroy them. Jews around the world have seen this kind of hatred and bigotry before, and they know what can spring from it if it is allowed to prosper.

When nations relent in the face of aggression, the terrorists grow stronger in boldness and influence, and the states that support these terrorists are not deterred. If the civilized world does not stand and fight with a collective resolve to eliminate this form of evil, we will find ourselves facing an enemy with greater international influence, better financing and an unrelenting commitment to bloodshed.

In each of the world wars, the enemy and the tactics used to defeat them have differed. What doesn't change is the need to stand up to those who perpetuate evil. Ronald Reagan said, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free."

Once again freedom finds itself under assault, and if it is to survive for the next generation to enjoy, today's leaders must learn from and follow the resolved leadership of Reagan, Churchill and other great political leaders of the 20th century.

