

A speech you didn't hear: The search for absolute security

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Ladies and gentlemen, we live in a dangerous world. We don't know whether, when or where terrorists will strike again. If elected, I will do all that is humanly and humanely possible to protect this nation and its people. But I must level with you: there are no guarantees of safety. And the search for absolute security is itself full of risk.

History is replete with leaders who have risen to power by playing on people's fears and assuring them they will be protected. They diagnose the illness—and then prescribe themselves as the cure.

Fear is the most primal of human emotions. It's a God-given response to danger. But it's a short path from heeding dangers to being overcome by irrational fears; it's a quick trip from acting out of fear to letting fears control us.

One problem with the politics of fear is that our fears may, in fact, be misplaced. Is our greatest danger that some radical jihadists will get weapons of mass destruction and wreak massive havoc in the U.S.? Or is there also a great danger that in the quest for security and safety we will undermine the very values that have made us strong—a pledge to equality and opportunity for all; a constitutional guarantee of the right to free speech, the freedom of religion, a free press and the freedom to assemble; a commitment to serve as a beacon of hope to marginalized and oppressed peoples around the world, and a haven for the world's poor in search of a better life?

It is possible in the war on terrorism to save our skins but lose our own souls. We could win the war on terror but end up as a mirror image of our enemies, both real and imagined. Will we be better off if we become so afraid of strangers that we mistrust our neighbors? If we're so paranoid about foreigners that we seal off our borders and retreat into isolationism?

Not only our fears but also our trust can be misplaced. We are tempted to believe that Patriot Acts, intelligence operations and military might will keep us safe and secure; we are tempted to put our faith in all-too-human leaders. But in the end there are no guarantees. We can only have faith in the God who created and sustains us. May God bless America—and may God bless all the peoples of the world.