

## IFE/INFO hosts Congressmen Mike Rogers and Dutch Ruppertsberger



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In the hours leading up to President Obama's Tuesday night remarks to the American people on the possibility of military strikes in Syria, the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Intelligence Committee came together to make the bipartisan case for authorizing military action.

In front of members of the diplomatic corps, press and business leaders at the Institute for Education's (IFE) INFO Public Policy Salon at the Canadian Embassy, Chairman Mike Rogers (R-Mich.) and Ranking Member Dutch Ruppertsberger (D-Md.) spoke to looming military action against Syria, and the unexpected series of events that has placed Russia in a central role to potentially avoid military action.

"We are in the weakest possible negotiating position," explained Rogers. Both congressmen agreed that the vote to authorize action is not one to take because of a desire to launch missiles, but rather one that allows Obama to negotiate with weight behind his words. Rogers, arguing that threat of military action is undermined by what he described as "a divided Congress and an unsupportive public."

Ruppertsberger, striking a different tone in his support of a resolution authorizing military strikes, offered praise of President Obama's approach.

"Obama's actions brought Russia to the table," said Ruppertsberger, while praising the President's threats of action, and arguing that they spurred Russia to reach out and bring their ally, Syria, to a possible diplomatic solution.

In a rare scene in DC, the two members of opposing parties disagreed on Obama's foreign policy vision, while maintaining civility.



"Backing into the Russian plan is not foreign policy," said Rogers. He went on to explain the reluctance of Americans to support military action as stemming from two places, arguing that the Administration was going from "zero to action," with no clear policy or broader framework for action. Rogers painted the picture of this reluctance as being part of a larger push toward isolationism by Americans-at-large.

Ruppertsberger, however, disagreed and said that Obama's strong track record on national security and foreign policy are what forced Russia to reach out to Syria in an effort to avoid military strikes. This pressure, Ruppertsberger argued, stems from a belief among Russian leadership that they are on the wrong side of this issue and see a peaceful resolution to this standoff as being in their own interest.

When asked about the broader implications of the use of chemical weapons and the American debate on military action, Rogers expressed concern about the message sent by global inaction in response to the violation of long standing international opposition to the use of these weapons.

"What do you think North Korea is thinking right now, with their young, immature leader?" asked Rogers, while noting that North Korea has a huge stockpile of chemical weapons. "What about al-Qaeda or Iran?"

Looking forward, the two speakers expressed concern over tracking these stockpiles in the "fog of war" or the chaos if President Bashar al-Assad should fall suddenly. These outcomes, they argued, posed significant threats to the security of other countries in the region, including Israel and Jordan.



Beyond just their shared views on a vote authorizing Obama to act against Syria, a recurring theme throughout the evening's remarks was that of trust and bipartisanship. The two spoke of their working relationship and efforts to bring their staffs together to restore neutrality to a powerful House Committee. Taking the reins of a committee that Washington Post columnist David Ignatius once called, "one of the meanest snake pits in Congress," the pair agreed to restore a collaborative tone to the committee.

Both men shared lessons of what they believe enables their Committee to operate above the political fray. From holding joint briefings with democratic and republican staff to the power of their "strong personalities", they described a concerted effort to change the atmosphere of the Committee and shared their desire for a similar approach to spread to other committees.

The event, moderated by The Hill's Jordy Yager, was hosted by His Excellency Gary Doer, the Canadian Ambassador to the United States. The event was attended by H.E. Elena Poptodorova of the Republic of Bulgaria, H.E. Peter Taksoe-Jensen of the Kingdom of Denmark, H.E. Ritva Koukku-Ronde of the Republic of Finland, H.E. Jose Cuisia of the Republic of the Philippines, H.E. Sergey I. Kislyak of the Russian Federation, and H.E. Manuel Sager of Switzerland. In addition to members of the Washington press corps, policymakers, and business leaders, audience included: IFE Stewards, Chris Caine of Mercator XXI, Norm Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute, Beverly Perry, Judge William Webster, IFE Chairman of the Board of Stewards Marci Robinson, Stephen Ciccone of Toyota, David Fenstermaker of Raymond James, Tom Patton and IFE Fellows and Interns.

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