

What a President Bush Would Do About Guantanamo Prison

Republican Jeb Bush will pledge on Wednesday that if elected president next year he will keep open the disputed U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as long as the fight against Islamic militants lasts.

Bush, looking to show he is capable of being commander in chief in the face of multiple threats abroad, will lay out a national security strategy in a speech that he retooled in order to take account of the Paris attacks that killed 129 people last Friday.

The Bush campaign provided details of his plan in advance of the speech at The Citadel, a military college in Charleston.

"This brutal savagery is a reminder of what is at stake in this election. We are choosing the leader of the free world," he will say, according to excerpts released early on Wednesday.

Bush will vow to restore \$1 trillion in cuts to the U.S. military that President Barack Obama agreed to as part of a budget-cutting deal with Congress, which in the excerpts Bush labels "completely arbitrary." He also would add 40,000 personnel to the U.S. Army and 4,000 to the U.S. Marines, and would bolster U.S. relations with key allies from NATO nations to the Middle East and Asia.

To counter Islamic State militants specifically, Bush would embed U.S. special operations forces with Iraqi forces to help identify enemy targets. He would build an anti-militant international coalition and include regional partners. He is not calling for a massive reintroduction of U.S. troops to Iraq.

According to the excerpts, Bush traces the roots of the current Middle East crisis to "the underlying conflicts in

Syria and Iraq,” which he says spiraled out of control as Democratic President Obama and Hillary Clinton, then secretary of state and now a Democratic presidential candidate, failed to act.

Iraq is a sensitive subject for Bush, given the dismay some Americans feel over the rationale for the 2003 invasion of Iraq ordered by his brother, former President George W. Bush.

Bush’s plan to counter Islamic State includes a provision that if elected in November 2016, he would maintain the Guantanamo prison that his brother used to house terrorism suspects and which President Barack Obama is trying to close by the time he leaves office in January 2017.

This week the Defense Department said it had sent five Yemeni detainees at the prison to the United Arab Emirates, reducing the number of inmates at the Cuba facility to 107.

Bush is eager to make an impact on a Republican race that in some respects has been leaving him behind. He is in single digits in many polls of Republican voters, who so far have been more enthusiastic about non-politician candidates Donald Trump and Ben Carson.

Bush’s belief is that voters eventually will come around to a serious, policy-minded candidate like him but with the Iowa caucuses to kick off the 2016 election season on Feb. 1, his plan has not helped him in polls.

A Reuters-Ipsos poll found on Tuesday that 33 percent of Republican voters felt Trump would be the strongest candidate to deal with terrorism, followed by Senator Marco Rubio at 17 percent. Carson and Bush were tied at about 9 percent.

(Reporting By Steve Holland; Editing by Edmund Klamann and Bill Trott)

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