

What does the region say? We have two enemies—Assad and ISIL. Our unwillingness to confront Assad has created a sense of abandonment in the entire region. Assad is a puppet of Iran. Iran is the mortal enemy of the Sunni Arab states.

So what has the President accomplished here? He said Assad must go. He trained people to help take him down. Russia came in and said Assad will not go. They have attacked the people we have trained, and we basically have abandoned the free Syrian opposition.

Now we are in Geneva talking about a peace agreement where the whole balance now is in Assad's favor. Does anybody really believe there is military jeopardy for Assad? And without his being in jeopardy, how do you get an agreement the Syrian people can live with? If Assad or his henchmen stay in power, how do you ever end the war in Syria?

So what we have accomplished is that we have given the Russians more influence in the Mideast than at any time since 1973. We have allowed Iran basically to dictate the terms in Damascus. We have jeopardized our relationship with our Arab partners. We have put in question Americans' reliability in terms of the people inside of Syria.

The Syrian policy of Barack Obama has done enormous damage. Without Russia being involved, none of this would have happened.

Mr. MCCAIN. The tragedy of all of this, I would say to my friend, is that when the United States of America was required to stand up because of the commitment of the President of the United States if the Bashar Assad regime had used chemical weapons and slaughtered—it is the gruesome pictures that you and I have seen—and then backed off, that was one of the seminal moments that American credibility disappeared. Here we are now still refusing to arm, train, and equip young men to fight against Bashar Assad and, in fact, making them pledge that they would only fight against ISIS. It is not ISIS that is barrel-bombing them. It is not ISIS that is dropping chemical weapons. It is not ISIS that has brought in thousands and tortured and beaten and killed. ISIS is our enemy. ISIS is evil. But to somehow excuse the behavior of Bashar Assad with the Russians' indiscriminate bombing is one of the most disgraceful chapters in American history in my view.

Mr. GRAHAM. To build on this, several years ago Russia took by force Crimea. This was not a fair election. It is pretty hard to have a fair election when there is a Russian tank parked in front of your yard. Good luck saying you don't want to go to Russia.

We have done nothing other than sanction Russia. Russia is still engaged in provocative behavior. We told him not to go into Crimea. We told him not to dismember Ukraine. He did. He is

stronger, not weaker. We told him not to use military force to help Assad, who is the Butcher of Damascus. He did. We pleaded with him not to attack non-ISIL targets. He did. He destroyed the opposition to Assad. Russia is in league with Iran. So the biggest winner of Russia's involvement on the ground in Syria has been the Iranians, which is the most destabilizing group of people in the entire Mideast. The biggest loser has been the free Syrian opposition, the Syrian people themselves, and close behind is the American reputation in the region.

I want the administration to know that your handling of Syria has been a disaster on multiple levels. It has emboldened Iran. It has made Russia stronger. We are losing credibility in the region at a time when the region needs leadership. If you go to Geneva and you close out a peace deal that is a joke that allows Assad or somebody—Bob Assad, not Bashar Assad—to stay in power, if you allow a peace agreement where the Iranians control Damascus and Russia has a naval and air force base and more influence than we do, what have you accomplished?

I hope and pray the administration will stop this insane desire to bring Syria to a conclusion where the conclusion is going to make the whole region subject to blowing up. A successful conclusion is not having Iran being the dominant force inside of Syria, Russia having more influence, an air base and a naval base, and the Syrian people losing the ability to replace their tormenter, and ISIL having a magnet for future recruitment, which is an Iranian-backed Assad. That is not a successful outcome.

What do you think, I ask Senator MCCAIN?

Mr. MCCAIN. For the last 5 years, we have been writing a shameful chapter in American history. To sum all of this up, leading from behind doesn't work. If America leads from behind, somebody else is going to be in front. If the United States leaves conflicts and creates vacuums, then bad things happen.

Look at a map of the Middle East in January of 2009, when this President came to the Presidency of the United States, and look at that map now—the way ISIS has metastasized, the way hundreds of thousands have been murdered and millions are on the march as refugees. We still have apologists for this leading from behind, a policy which is described as “Don't do stupid stuff.” This is the result of leadership that has left the scene in a way that we have not seen since the 1930s, in the days of Neville Chamberlain and “peace in our time.”

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

IRAN

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, last week the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC—the hard-line military force that answers only to Iran's Supreme Leader and is committed to the preservation of Iran's revolutionary regime—launched a number of ballistic missiles, in clear violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231. These missile launches are profoundly disturbing and suggest a regime that is content on continuing to destabilize the region and threaten our vital allies and its neighbors. They don't technically violate the terms of last summer's nuclear agreement, but they do serve as a vital reminder that Iran remains a revolutionary regime that does not respect world opinion and does not share our values or interests.

America and our allies must seek every opportunity to push back on Iran's aggressive behavior—especially behavior such as this that is outside the parameters of the nuclear deal—by enforcing existing sanctions on Iran's illegal ballistic missile tests, its ongoing human rights abuses, and its support for terrorism across the Middle East and the world.

Another critical way the international community can demonstrate we are serious about holding Iran accountable is by aggressively enforcing the terms of the nuclear deal. Today I will discuss a key element of enforcing that deal: fully funding the International Atomic Energy Agency, IAEA, the world's nuclear watchdog, which is responsible for monitoring Iran's compliance with the deal. The case for providing robust, sustainable funding for the IAEA is further strengthened by a second topic I will discuss, which is Iran's continued human rights abuses.

Iran's compliance with the nuclear deal so far does not mean that its government intends to embrace the international community or heed the call of the Iranian people for greater democracy. In fact, I believe the actions of the IRGC and Iran's hard-line conservative leaders indicate that the Iranian regime intends to continue to repress dissent, block democratic reforms, incite anti-Semitism, and violate basic human rights.

Mr. President, in a speech to the United Nations in December of 1953, President Eisenhower proclaimed American support for a new international organization tasked with putting nuclear technology “into the hands of those who will know how to strip its military casing and adapt it to the arts of peace.”

Since its founding in 1957, the IAEA has undertaken a broad array of responsibilities—from promoting international nonproliferation efforts to supporting peaceful nuclear power—but none more vital than maintaining its safeguards program, which provides

credible assurances that countries are honoring their international obligations to use nuclear technology and material only for peaceful purposes.

The IAEA could not do its job without the ongoing full support of the United States. The United States develops the inspections technology on which the IAEA depends. We train and support the IAEA inspectors, scientists, and staff, particularly through our system of National Laboratories. Since 1980, every single IAEA inspector has been trained at least once at the Los Alamos National Lab in New Mexico. At any given time, roughly 20 percent of all the inspectors who work for the IAEA are undergoing training or retraining at the vital National Labs of the United States.

The commitment made by American scientists and taxpayers to the IAEA is even more important now in light of the agreement reached by world powers last summer to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. This agreement, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action, or JCPOA, gives the IAEA unprecedented access to monitor Iran's nuclear efforts through highly intrusive physical inspections and 24-7 remote monitoring technology. Unlike previous nuclear agreements, the JCPOA requires Iran to allow the IAEA to monitor Iran's entire nuclear fuel cycle, which includes all the steps required to go from mining and milling raw uranium to producing centrifuges that enrich uranium, to the actual enrichment sites.

The IAEA's regular inspections and continuous monitoring and oversight mean that the international community will know if Iran tries to cheat on the terms of the JCPOA before it can dash to a nuclear weapon or build a bomb in secret. But access alone is not enough. The IAEA must have the resources to actually inspect, monitor, and verify Iran's compliance with the nuclear deal by confirming that Iran's nuclear declarations are accurate and comprehensive, by monitoring their declared sites to ensure Iran's behavior actually complies with the terms of the JCPOA, and by tracking all nuclear-related material leaving every facility to make sure Iran doesn't divert and pursue illicit nuclear activities elsewhere in their country.

Given Iran's long record of cheating and of pursuing nuclear weapons illicitly over the decades past, investing resources in ensuring that the IAEA can take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity is a wise investment not just for the American people but for the world. To fulfill these responsibilities in addition to its regular and ongoing mission of ensuring nonproliferation in every other country in the world, the IAEA must have the resources to turn access into oversight.

Back in January, I traveled with seven other Senators to the IAEA's headquarters in Vienna, Austria, and there we heard directly from Director General Yukiya Amano about the chal-

lenges the agency faces in fulfilling its new responsibilities under the JCPOA. At the top of that list of challenges is securing a reliable, long-term source of funding. A recent report by our own nonpartisan Government Accountability Office here in the United States echoes those very same concerns, stating that "the IAEA faces potential budgetary and human resource management challenges stemming from the JCPOA-related workload."

Effectively enforcing the terms of the JCPOA will require more than just additional inspectors, while inspectors are vital; the IAEA will also be required to train a new generation of nuclear scientists and to continue to develop more and more innovative nuclear detection and monitoring technologies as well—an undertaking as complex as it is important. That is why I urge Congress to increase America's voluntary contribution to the IAEA to a level at least \$10.6 million above the President's fiscal year 2017 request and commit to a sustained and long-term investment so that we can be confident that the IAEA has the resources to recruit, to train, and to place the very best inspectors the world can produce. The increase of \$10.6 million that I am urging will provide reliable funding for the IAEA—the funding they need to monitor the Iran nuclear program while continuing to work for safe, secure, and peaceful use of nuclear technology throughout the rest of the world.

An additional \$10 million would not crowd out contributions from other states. American representatives at the U.N. offices in Vienna could direct extra funding to specific projects or withhold it from others, allowing us to address unanticipated needs by the IAEA without discouraging other donors from fulfilling their obligations as they should.

We also need to continue to insist on full transparency so that reports received by the IAEA, things they might learn, are shared with the United States—with our intelligence community, with our lawmakers, with our executive branch—and to ensure, frankly, that we know if there are additional classified or secret agreements, side agreements between the IAEA and Iran.

Look, whether my colleagues supported the JCPOA or opposed it, surely we can agree that it is in America's interest to see the IAEA succeed in monitoring Iran's behavior and attracting the best and brightest young scientists from around the world for years to come. As Brent Scowcroft—who served ably as National Security Advisor to both President Gerald Ford and later President George H.W. Bush—wrote in an August 21 Washington Post op-ed, Congress "should ensure that the International Atomic Energy Agency and other relevant bodies and U.S. intelligence agencies have all the resources necessary to facilitate inspection and monitor compliance" with the nuclear deal with Iran.

To fully and sustainably fund the IAEA is to make a sound investment in a highly technical organization that directly contributes to international peace and our security. But why exactly is it so important that we fund the IAEA, enforce the JCPOA, and push back on Iran at every opportunity? A brief review of Iran's dismal human rights record might reinforce why it is crystal clear that this is a priority for our Nation and must remain so.

Iran's Government continues to preach anti-Semitism, to incite hatred against Israel, and to call for the destruction of the Jewish State of Israel, and it uses state-run media to blame the Jewish people for the instability and violence that currently dominates the Middle East. Just last week, one of the ballistic missiles Iran illegally launched supposedly had a message printed on the side in Hebrew saying, "Israel must be wiped off the earth."

In January, as the international community marked Holocaust Remembrance Day, Iran's Supreme Leader published a video on his official Web site in which the narrator condemns the world for supporting Israel and questions the legitimacy and magnitude of the Holocaust. These statements should deeply concern and outrage the world community, but they are simply another reflection of the Iranian regime's longstanding disregard for international values and human rights.

Earlier this month, the United Nations issued a report showing that the number of people executed by the Iranian Government skyrocketed to nearly 1,000 last year—twice as many as in 2010 and 10 times as many as in 2005. Most of these executions were allegedly for drug-related offenses. According to some reports, last year one village in Iran saw every single adult male—every single one in the entire village—executed for so-called drug crimes.

These alarming statistics follow a January report from Amnesty International that documented Iran's execution of over 70 juveniles in the decade from 2005 to 2015, with another 160 young juvenile offenders still on death row. No country in the world uses capital punishment for minors more than Iran. And despite Iran's ratification of an international treaty banning capital punishment for minors, Iranian law still allows the death penalty for girls as young as 9 and boys as young as 15.

In addition, Iran's unelected Guardian Council suppressed democracy in its most recent elections, preventing the vast majority of either female or reform-minded candidates from even appearing on ballots.

Iran has illegally and inappropriately detained American citizens, including retired FBI agent Robert Levinson and Iranian American energy executive Siamak Namazi—both of whom we believe remain detained in Iran. The Committee to Protect Journalists estimates that at least 19 reporters are

today still being held unjustly by the Iranian Government.

These are just a few examples among countless many of Iran's unwillingness to respect even the most basic norms of international human rights. Effectively pushing back on these egregious human rights abuses and enforcing the JCPOA demands international collaboration, but increasing our voluntary contribution to the IAEA makes a direct impact without requiring approval or action by any other country.

There are two other additional unilateral steps this Congress can take today.

First, we could increase Federal investment in our National Laboratories, which train the IAEA inspectors I spoke about, develop technologies that nuclear inspectors depend on, and undertake research that improves the lives of people around the world.

Second, and more promptly, the Senate could and should confirm Laura Holgate, a nonproliferation expert who was nominated more than 5 months ago to serve as America's Ambassador to the U.N. agencies of Vienna, which includes the IAEA. After months of delays for purely political reasons, her nomination was finally approved by the Foreign Relations Committee on January 28. The full Senate should not delay any further to ensure that our government is represented at the very organization the world relies upon to prevent Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon.

Later this month, the President will convene heads of state from around the world for a fourth Nuclear Security Summit, a conference dedicated to preventing nuclear terrorism and securing stockpiles of nuclear material from around the world. The IAEA is at the very forefront of this vital mission, and we need to work together to make sure it has the tools it needs to take on these serious tasks.

These goals demand involvement from every actor on the international stage, but by increasing America's voluntary contribution to the IAEA by an additional \$10 million, Congress can send a strong signal that we intend to hold Iran to the terms of the JCPOA, to support the international cause of nonproliferation, and to provide a vital incentive for our international partners to dedicate more of their resources to this important agency.

Iran remains today a revolutionary regime fundamentally opposed to America's values and interests. Iran's ballistic missile tests just last week serve as another reminder that the Iranian Government is neither America's friend nor ally. We must be relentless in our efforts to push back on these missile tests, on Iran's destabilizing support for terrorism, and on its human rights abuses. We must continue to enforce the existing sanctions in American law and be willing to consider imposing new ones when Iran's behavior warrants it.

Let me be clear about one thing in closing. The Persian culture, the cul-

ture of the people of Iran, is one of great richness and complexity. I have had the blessing of knowing many Persian Americans in my life and have known them to be people of great intellect and inventiveness and capability and to be the products of an ancient and respectable culture. We in the United States do not wish the people of Iran ill, but the Iranian regime and those who support it deserve international condemnation for a decades-long pattern of human rights abuses, support for terrorism, and other bad behavior. But we can and should make a distinction between the Iranian regime and the Persian people.

The people of Iran—those who turn out at polls to vote even in elections that are neither free nor fair and who have repeatedly demonstrated in the streets for democracy and engagement, risking life and limb to do so in the decade past—must know that the American people support the struggle of those who hope for real democracy someday in Iran and those who hope for an Iranian regime that someday respects international values and human rights.

So today, just a few days before Monday's Iranian New Year of Nowruz, we wish the people of Iran a happy, healthy, and peaceful new year, while continuing to stand firm against the values and actions of the Iranian regime.

Thank you.

With that, I yield the floor.

Mr. COONS. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PUERTO RICO

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I am trying to assess the financial and economic challenges facing Puerto Rico, an issue I have been speaking about since last summer. In fact, it was July of last year when I first wrote to Treasury Secretary Lew, expressing my concern about the fiscal situation in Puerto Rico and inquiring about the Obama administration's plans to address this predicament. While I did eventually get a response from the Treasury Secretary, numerous questions that I asked in that initial letter to this day remain unanswered.

Over the ensuing months, I made other inquiries to Health and Human Services Secretary Burwell because, for some time now, we have been told that funding—or to be more specific, a decline in funding—for Federal health care programs was a factor contributing to Puerto Rico's debt crisis. So as the chairman of the Senate committee of jurisdiction over most of

those programs, I wanted to know what HHS thought needed to be done.

Not surprisingly, I am still waiting for a substantive response to those inquiries.

Instead of detailed proposals, I was initially told simply that health funding issues surrounding Puerto Rico are difficult and that the administration expected Congress to address these issues in a fiscally responsive way—and to do it quickly.

Eventually, last month, with the release of the President's budget proposal, we learned that the administration wants to provide \$30 billion—that is with a "b"—in additional Medicaid funds for Puerto Rico. When asked how the administration thought we should pay for this, Secretary Burwell suggested we simply adopt the President's budget. However, given that there are more surviving members of The Beatles than there are Senators willing to vote in favor of an Obama budget, I don't know if anyone can take that suggestion very seriously.

That is the sum total of the input we have gotten from the administration on dealing with Puerto Rico's health funding issues—a proposal for dramatically increased spending with no credible way to pay for it and a demand that we provide that funding as quickly as possible. That is all they are willing to say publicly on this matter, even though administration officials have labeled this a humanitarian crisis.

By the way, buried in all of the details is the fact that this proposal for increased Medicaid funds is meant to shore up an inequity created by the so-called Affordable Care Act. Apparently, the Democrats' partisan health law provided billions in additional Medicaid funding for Puerto Rico, but also included a cliff—or a point in time when that funding would drop off quickly and dramatically—and that cliff is fast approaching.

Let's be clear: The Democrats constructed that cliff, presumably knowing what they were doing at that time. The Democrats in Congress voted for it, and the Democrat in the White House signed it into law. No Republican in Congress supported that cliff.

Yet, now we are told that we must act quickly to eliminate the cliff that they have created and add even more funds without a realistic way to pay for them. And, on top of that, Democrats in Congress have labeled any hesitation on the part of Republicans to fix a problem they created and to fix it in the exact way they prescribe as callous indifference toward the plight of the American citizens living in Puerto Rico.

I have been as clear as I can be on this issue. I have said repeatedly that I want to work with my colleagues to find a solution, but we need to do so in a manner that is fiscally responsible with an eye toward righting the irresponsible course taken by the Government of Puerto Rico.