

again. During fiscal year 2023, the Border Patrol apprehended 169 individuals on the Terrorist Watchlist attempting to make their way across our southern border into our country. That number, by the way, is more than the total of the previous 6 fiscal years combined.

FBI Director Wray noted at that same Judiciary Committee hearing that since the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, the threat level has gone to "a whole other level." Abroad, American troops have been attacked nearly 80 times since October 7. It is naive to think that there aren't terrorists out there currently trying to make their way into the United States to attack our country. Why wouldn't any terrorist trying to enter our country take advantage of the chaos at our southern border?

You don't have to take my word for it. The Department of Homeland Security, in its threat assessment released in September, noted the risk that "terrorists and criminal actors may exploit the elevated flow [of migration] and increasingly complex security environment to enter the United States." That assessment was written before—before—the October 7 attack or the many attacks on U.S. troops abroad that followed it.

If there was a risk before, I think it is safe to say that there is an even greater risk now.

This situation cannot continue. The massive flood of illegal immigration at our southern border has to stop, and that is why the national security supplemental must contain real measures to secure the border—not cosmetic fixes, not superficial tweaks, real border security measures.

I believe it is in our national security interests to support allies like Israel, Taiwan, and Ukraine, but we cannot support American interests abroad while continuing to sacrifice the security of the American people here at home.

For 3 years, the Biden administration has put out a de facto welcome mat at our southern border. If we want to protect our country, that has to stop, and it has to stop now.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Maryland.

SYRIA

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I understand that shortly we will be considering a motion to discharge S.J. Res. 51 from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and I take this time to urge my colleagues to vote against that motion to discharge.

I understand the concerns of my colleague from Kentucky about ensuring that Congress exercises the appropriate role in authorizing the use of military force. I appreciate the Senator's longstanding interest in these important matters.

I value having what I believe are critically important debates about when and under what authorities U.S. troops serve abroad. Decisions about

authorizing the use of military force are among the most solemn duties we have in this body. But here, the decision is not so simple as the Senator from Kentucky presents it.

The Middle East is unstable right now. I don't have to remind my colleagues about that. ISIS's territorial caliphate might have been defeated, but it remains a threat to Syrians, Iraqis, and to U.S. interests. Now is not the time to withdraw from the region, but that is what this joint resolution would do without weighing the consequences, without a plan.

Think about what impact it would have. Think about what it would do to the resolve of our NATO allies and Kurdish partners fighting ISIS alongside the United States. We are not there alone; we are part of a coalition. Will they stick it out if we don't?

Think about how this would hurt the Syrian people. Without U.S. presence, civilians would be caught between ISIS and the Assad regime. Think about the ISIS terrorist cells that would have free reign to expand their operations in Syria. They will use it as a base to attack Iraq, where just last week they killed 11 innocent people.

Think about what a gift this would be to the Assad regime, who has committed atrocities, aided and abetted by Russia and Iran. The regime would strengthen its control of Syria, putting at risk the very people who fought side by side with the United States, people who would be subjected to the Assad regime's industrial-scale system of torture and murder.

Then there are the Assad backers—Russia and Iran. Putin wants the Middle East to descend into chaos and distract the world from his war in Ukraine. Iran's longstanding strategic objective has been to push the United States out of the region. We see it in proxy attacks on U.S. facilities and on global shipping.

Not only would pulling U.S. troops out of Syria be a propaganda win for Iran, it would be a strategic victory. It would make it easier for Iran to move weapons through Syria to Hezbollah. Do we want Hezbollah to have more weapons aimed at our ally Israel right now? We don't want to see an escalation of the conflict.

At a time when the administration is working to prevent the Gaza conflict from spilling over, this would be the wrong thing for us to do. The last thing we want is the conflict in Israel and Gaza to expand across the region.

For all of those reasons, I would urge my colleagues to vote against the motion to discharge S.J. Res. 51 if that motion is made by my colleague from Kentucky.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MOTION TO DISCHARGE—S.J. RES. 51

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I rise today to invoke the War Powers Act. The War Powers Act requires that upon request from a Member of the Senate or a Member of Congress, that there will be a vote on whether or not troops should be put into harm's way or into a conflict without the approval of this body.

Our Founding Fathers felt very clearly on this that we should not go to war without a vote of the legislature. They wanted to make sure that the Executive or the President was prohibited from going to war without the authority of the legislature.

We have drifted away from that. There really hasn't been a valid declaration of war since World War II. We have, at times, taken votes to authorize a use of military force. They call them an AUMF. We did when we went into the Iraq war. So we did the voting properly. It was still a disastrous mistake to go there.

But we never have voted on being in Syria. We never have voted on having troops in the middle of the Syrian civil war in which hundreds of thousands of people have died, millions of people have been displaced. We owe it to the soldiers who are in Syria—the U.S. soldiers, the young men and women in Syria—to have a debate and have a vote.

Now, the Senate doesn't want to do this. They are only doing this under duress because I am forcing them to vote on this issue. I have the power because it is called a privilege vote. They can't deny me this vote or this debate.

This will put the Senate on record: Are you for having troops in Syria? If so, why? What are they doing in Syria? I fear that they are merely a tripwire to a greater war or to a tragedy should a terrorist attack occur. They have become the target for the Iranian proxies. Will we ever learn?

As the fire of war spreads across the Middle East, the Biden administration sends aircraft carrier strike groups into the region without the debate of Congress about whether the United States should be further enmeshed in these region's conflicts. And will there be a debate at all?

For the past two decades, the wisdom of Washington foreign policy, the establishment, has embroiled our country in one war after another, imperious to the catastrophic consequences resulting from this adventurism. Some 7,000 U.S. servicemembers lost their lives in post-9/11 conflicts, tens of thousands more live with missing limbs, burn scars, or are confined to wheelchairs, to say nothing of the mental wounds of war. More than 30,000 veterans committed suicide since Washington's misguided project to remake the Middle East.

While our soldiers carried out their missions with honor, the Washington establishment has consistently failed them. Both Democrat and Republican Commanders in Chief repeatedly have ordered our troops into ill-advised conflicts with no vital national interest and no possibility of victory.

Syria is but one example. In 2014, the Obama administration entangled the United States in yet another endless war in the Middle East without congressional authorization, without a definition of victory, and without an exit strategy.

Operation Inherent Resolve was ostensibly intended to destroy the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, ISIS, an abhorrent terrorist organization that was only able to thrive because of the chaos created by the Iraq war, by Bush's foolish invasion of Iraq.

The U.S.-led coalition carried out a significant air campaign against ISIS targets, conducting more than 11,000 airstrikes in Syria alone. But of course our intervention didn't stop there. President Obama unilaterally deployed boots on the ground, sending 300 Special Forces into Syria. My comments at the time were: Who goes to war with 300 people? Who sends 300 soldiers to a battle of thousands and thousands of troops? It was a terrible military strategy and still is.

By the end of 2017, the Pentagon revealed that we had, in fact, 2,000 American troops stationed on the ground in Syria. There were tens of thousands of Turkish troops; there are Syrian Kurds; there are Assad's troops; there are Russian troops; and we have got a couple thousand troops, sitting ducks, in the middle of this chaos.

Congress enacted the War Powers Act in 1973 to prevent this exact type of situation. At the time, the Nation was emerging from the national tragedy of the Vietnam war. That war was never declared as such. Yet it cost the lives of 58,000 Americans. Vietnam started with a few hundred U.S. military advisers but subsequently escalated to a point where there were over 540,000 troops, U.S. troops, in Vietnam.

The calamity of Vietnam prompted Congress to resolve that the President should never again be permitted to enter the United States into a prolonged war without congressional authority. The President doesn't have this constitutional authority. The President does not have the constitutional authority to unilaterally declare war anywhere at any time for any reason. It is the prerogative of Congress; the Constitution is clear.

Congress must heed the lessons of the past and seize abdication of their constitutional war-making power to the executive branch. If we are going to deploy our young men and women in uniform to some farflung corner of the planet and ask them to fight and potentially give their life for some supposed cause, shouldn't we, as their elected representatives, at least have the courage to debate the merits of

sending them there? Shouldn't we debate if the mission is achievable? Shouldn't we debate what the mission actually is, what the purpose for having the troops actually is, and if it is possible for them to accomplish that mission?

The Syrian civil war is one of the greatest tragedies of our time. For the past 12 years, the Syrian people have endured unimaginable suffering. That country has been torn apart, beset by conflict from within and without.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the war has cost the lives of 600,000 people. The United Nations claims that more than 6.8 million people are internally displaced and another 5.2 million people live as refugees abroad.

It is a disaster.

Today, some 90 percent of the Syrian population lives in poverty. The war, which began as a civil uprising of the Syrian people against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, quickly transformed into a global catastrophe as other countries, militias, and terrorist groups turned Syria into their own proxy battlefield.

Like Vietnam, Syria should serve as a powerful warning of the dangers of Presidential overreach and the dangers of mission creep.

The American people are told that the United States is in Syria to fight ISIS, but we are not fighting ISIS. ISIS is gone. We also have been directly attacked by the Syrian government and pro-Assad forces. It is a much more complicated situation. We have targeted Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard and Iranian-backed proxies. We have targeted every stripe of jihadist and militia group we could find in the region, which is lots.

In 2018, then-CIA Director Mike Pompeo admitted to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the United States has even killed a couple hundred Russians who were in Syria as part of the Wagner Group. We also had our troops take fire from our own NATO ally Turkey. Just this past September, we returned the favor by shooting down an armed Turkish drone that came within 500 yards of U.S. forces. It is, obviously, a conflict; it is, obviously, a war; and it is, obviously, a dangerous place to have a few hundred troops with no clear-cut mission.

None of these conflicts were debated or authorized by Congress. Nine American servicemembers have been killed in Syria, and not once has this body debated the merits of our troops being deployed in harm's way there. The only reason the debate occurs today is because I am forcing them to have the debate. They would rather wash their hands of this and say: President—Republican, Democrat, whoever you are—you take care of it. We are washing our hands of this. We have no responsibility.

But, today, the Senate will take responsibility. Those who vote against my motion will be voting to have

troops in Syria, and it will be their responsibility if calamity occurs.

There is a bipartisan agreement that the executive branch does not have authorization for military action, or at least there has been in the past. In 2017, the current chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee said in an interview—he's a Democrat—said:

The President does not have authorization from Congress to use force against the Syrian regime. He should come to Congress and get the authorization for use of military force. He has to come to Congress and the American people and tell them what the game plan is. How do we get a resolution?

This was Democrats in 2017. Fast forward to Democrats today, and they say: No big deal. We have got a Democrat President. We don't want to appear to be critical of him. So even though we used to say there needs to be congressional authority when there was a Republican President, we no longer say that. Now we are just peachy keen with whatever happens.

If it was true in 2017, it is still true in 2023. Congress should either authorize a war or we should come home.

The Biden administration continues to say that we are there to defeat ISIS. Well, the ISIS caliphate was completely eradicated in 2019. Four years later, we still have 900 troops in Syria.

The administration claims it seeks an "enduring" defeat of ISIS. Not surprisingly, they don't define what "enduring" means. Obviously, it doesn't mean complete destruction of the ISIS caliphate, because the ISIS caliphate no longer exists. They hold no land. Our intelligence folks have said they don't even have the capacity to attack, much less have the desire to attack us now.

The administration's quarterly combined State and Defense Department inspector general reports that "the majority of ISIS's branches likely lack the intent or capability to have direct attacks on the U.S. homeland."

The only way they can get at us is if we are there. So, ISIS hasn't controlled territory for 4 years. They lack the capability and intent to attack the U.S., and those remaining members of ISIS—there are, indeed, still radical extremists—they are surrounded by numerous state and non-state actors who also seek to eradicate them. Between the Turks, the Syrian Kurds, the Syrian government, none of them are happy to have ISIS there if it should try to arise again.

It seems to me, though, that our 900 troops have no viable mission in Syria; that they are sitting ducks; they are a trip wire to a larger war; and without a clear-cut mission, I don't think they could adequately defend themselves. Yet they remain in Syria, and they remain vulnerable to attack by other groups.

Our troops in Syria regularly come under attack—not from ISIS, but from Iranian-backed militias. Since Joe Biden took office, Iranian-backed proxies have attacked U.S. forces in Syria

and Iraq more than 160 times. They attack us because we are in close proximity to them; and they couldn't attack us, frankly, if we weren't there.

These attacks have accelerated following Hamas' monstrous October 7 attack on Israel. Since October 17, U.S. troops have been attacked at least 76 times—40 times in Syria and 36 times in Iraq.

According to the Pentagon, a total of 60 U.S. military were injured in these attacks. Of those, at least 32 were at the al-Tanf garrison in southeastern Syria, where our soldiers suffered various injuries including traumatic brain injuries.

The U.S. responded with a series of strikes on facilities used by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and its proxies in Syria and Iraq.

During his time in office, President Biden has carried out strikes on Iranian proxies on at least eight separate occasions. Each time, the White House claimed that the strikes were necessary to deter further attacks.

How many times do our troops need to be attacked for the administration to realize that we are not deterring anyone?

Does anybody believe the ninth air strike will make a difference or do the trick?

We are actually a target. We are a trip wire. We are a place they can actually reach by being there with no clear-cut mission.

In 2019, Joe Biden, as Presidential candidate, promised to end the forever wars in the Middle East, saying:

Staying entrenched in unwinnable conflicts only drains our capacity to lead on other issues that require our attention.

I wish he still had the same belief.

But 900 troops sitting in the middle of the Syrian desert does not advance U.S. interests or provide deterrence. In fact, their presence does the exact opposite. Their presence invites the Iranian proxies to be able to reach them with attacks. This is the only way these groups can strike at the United States. It is the only way they can get attention. If they kill each other, no one seems to pay attention; if they kill Americans, they pay attention. So why would we plop Americans down in the desert within a few dozen miles of these folks and allow them to be attacked? We actively are providing Iran leverage to direct proxies to attack U.S. forces. This is the sort of strategic genius—so-called genius that the Washington establishment parades around as prudent foreign policy.

Our troops' presence also risks getting us dragged into a wider regional war. Imagine if these recent attacks resulted in the deaths of 60 of our servicemembers—not injuries but deaths. How would the Biden administration react to that? History is replete with major wars breaking out for less.

President Biden would do well to channel the wisdom of President Ronald Reagan.

In 1984, Ronald Reagan withdrew U.S. troops from Lebanon following the Beirut Marine Corps barracks bombing that killed 241 U.S. military personnel.

Remarking on the decision in his autobiography, Reagan wrote:

In the weeks [immediately] after the bombing, I believed the last thing that we should do was to turn tail and leave. Yet the irrationality of the Middle East politics forced us to rethink our policy there. If there would be some rethinking of policy before our men die, we would be a lot better off. If that policy had changed towards more of neutral position and neutrality, those 241 marines would still be alive today.

President Reagan made the right decision in 1984, and we now have the chance to make the right decision in 2023, without any more American servicemembers being injured or killed.

The American people have had enough of endless wars in the Middle East. The American people have had enough of the uniparty—the “demopublican” party directing their sons and daughters to fight and risk their lives in these internecine conflicts when the United States is not directly threatened and no vital U.S. interest is at stake.

My War Powers Resolution that I put forward today offers the American people an opportunity to see how clearly their elected Senators view our unconstitutional, unnecessary, and dangerous presence in Syria.

This vote makes it impossible for Senators to avoid voting or stating their opinion on having troops in Syria. Today's vote essentially puts every Senator on record as being either for or against having U.S. troops in Syria.

I urge all my colleagues to muster the courage to reclaim their constitutional responsibilities by voting to remove U.S. troops in Syria. Let's finally bring our troops home.

With that, I move to discharge S.J. Res. 51 from the Committee on Foreign Relations.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is pending.

The majority leader.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 410.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Harry Coker, Jr., of Kansas, to be National Cyber Director.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 410, Harry

Coker, Jr., of Kansas, to be National Cyber Director.

Charles E. Schumer, Gary C. Peters, Ben Ray Lujan, Tammy Duckworth, Margaret Wood Hassan, Jack Reed, Angus S. King, Jr., Michael F. Bennet, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Tim Kaine, Chris Van Hollen, Mazie Hirono, Richard Blumenthal, Benjamin L. Cardin, Richard J. Durbin, Jeanne Shaheen, Sheldon Whitehouse, Mark Kelly.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call for the cloture motion filed today, December 7, be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

SYRIA

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, I rise in opposition to this resolution. First, this resolution obscures the facts and alleges that American troops are involved in hostilities in Syria.

American troops have remained in Syria across multiple administrations to ensure the lasting defeat of the Islamic State. Our presence is authorized under the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force, the legal cornerstone of our counterterrorism operations around the world. The Islamic State remains a threat to Americans and our partners. According to the State Department's latest reports on terrorism, the Islamic State “remains resilient and determined to attack.”

Senator PAUL no doubt recalls the Islamic State's attacks across the region—the depraved videos of slaves, beheadings, the Yazidi genocide, and the attacks against civilians in France and into the heart of Europe. As recently as last year, we saw the Islamic State conduct a prison break in northern Syria and witnessed an uptick in attacks. Despite the fact that we shattered their caliphate, the group is down, but not out. Our troop presence is a critical element to maintaining pressure on the Islamic State and keeping Americans safe.

Senator PAUL's resolution points to the numerous Iranian-sponsored attacks against our troops in Iraq and Syria. I share these concerns and urge the administration to do more to establish deterrence against Iran.

The House went through this exercise as recently as March and voted down a similar effort to pull our troops by a wide margin.

I urge my colleagues to oppose this resolution.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

VOTE ON MOTION TO DISCHARGE

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays on S.J. Res. 51.