

deal actually weakens our ability to address the JCPOA's perceived flaws by alienating our partners. Instead, we should remain committed to the JCPOA and lead the international community in imposing additional sanctions, where necessary, to change other Iranian behaviors—namely, their respect for human rights, ballistic missile development efforts, and other malign activities.

We must also seek to help enable the Iranian people to make their choices heard, including by encouraging the adoption of social media and other means of communication. We could start by building upon general licenses issued by the Obama administration designed to encourage the export of communications technology to Iran.

Secretary Mattis told the Armed Services Committee at his confirmation hearing: "When America gives her word, we have to live up to it and work with our allies."

If the President decides this week not to continue nuclear-related sanctions relief for Iran, he will be effectively choosing to restart the Iranian nuclear program, thereby making military conflict with Iran more likely.

Withdrawing from the deal would also be a devastating blow to our efforts toward diplomacy with North Korea—and for that matter, any future diplomatic efforts to constrain aggressive behavior by our adversaries. Why would any nation engage with us in serious dialogue to resolve differences if they fear we will later withdraw unilaterally, even when the other parties are complying with the agreement?

Regardless of whether you supported the JCPOA before it was signed, the truth is that it has removed the greatest threat we faced from Iran while also preserving all other means to address Iran's malign activities. Let there be no doubt—Iran continues to be a state sponsor of terrorism and an abuser of human rights. Iran continues to destabilize the region through its development of ballistic missiles and support of proxies in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and elsewhere. If Iran behaves this way without a nuclear weapon, imagine how much worse a nuclear-armed Iran would be.

Fortunately, our nonnuclear sanctions on Iran remain in place and are unaffected by the JCPOA. In fact, Congress authorized additional sanctions in July to help deal with these issues. The administration should work with our international partners and use all tools at its disposal, including by ramping up nonnuclear sanctions, where necessary, to counter Iran's unacceptable behavior in these other areas.

Abrogating the JCPOA only invites another nuclear crisis like the one we are currently facing with North Korea—a concern echoed by General Dunford when he appeared before the Armed Services Committee and said: "It makes sense to me that our holding up agreements that we have signed, un-

less there's a material breach, would have impact on others' willingness to sign agreements."

Many have criticized the JCPOA as a "flawed deal." For example, concerns have been raised that certain provisions sunset after a period of years, thereby delaying rather than permanently preventing Iran from achieving a nuclear weapon. If the concern is that Iran may seek to resume nuclear weapons development activities after these sunsets—a concern that I share—the appropriate course of action is not to throw out the deal but to work with our international partners to ensure that necessary restrictions on the JCPOA are appropriately extended or supplemented.

As I noted before, Iran has committed in perpetuity not to develop or seek to acquire nuclear weapons. We should not take them at their word; we should verify their adherence to this commitment, just as we are doing under the JCPOA. If at any point in the future we have evidence to suggest Iran is taking steps that would indicate a violation of that commitment, we should use that information to rally the P5+1 and other international partners to take a unified stand against such efforts. Unilaterally withdrawing from the JCPOA would seriously damage our ability to exert such leadership in the future.

Again, according to General Dunford, in the absence of the JCPOA, Iran would likely resume its nuclear weapons program and "a nuclear-armed Iran would likely be more aggressive in its actions and more dangerous in its consequences." General Dunford also told the committee that "the intel community assessment is, in fact, that Iran is in compliance right now [with the JCPOA], and therefore, I think we should focus on addressing the other challenges: the missile threat they pose, the maritime threat they pose, the support of proxies, terrorists, and the cyber threat they pose." I wholeheartedly agree with General Dunford's assessment.

Our troops in Iraq and Syria are operating in close proximity to Iranian-aligned militias, including those who previously targeted American troops. Unilaterally withdrawing from the JCPOA could embolden these hardline militias and possibly result in Iran giving them a green light to begin targeting U.S. forces once more.

Furthermore, while I have full confidence in our military's ability to fight and win wars when necessary, we cannot escape the reality that military contingencies to respond to both a nuclear-armed North Korea and Iran would result in massive loss of life and national treasure and greatly stress our military's capacity and capabilities.

In conclusion, I will return to where I began. Now is not the time to impose a self-inflicted wound upon our foreign policy and standing in the world. Unilaterally withdrawing from the JCPOA

would empower Iranian hardliners and dramatically undermine the reform-minded protests we should be seeking to empower. Worse still, it would leave us more isolated in the international community and, by extension, less able to address the range of national security challenges posed by Iran, North Korea, and our other potential adversaries.

We must not abdicate the JCPOA or American leadership on these issues. Therefore, I urge the President to stay the course with respect to the JCPOA, while also rallying the international community to take effective actions intended to change other unacceptable behaviors by the Iranian regime to suppress dissent at home and sow instability abroad. We must not squander this opportunity by making the story about the United States rather than the courageous Iranians who at great risk to themselves have taken to the streets to demand a better future.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 12 noon tomorrow, all postcloture time on the Brown nomination be considered expired and the Senate vote on confirmation of the Brown nomination with no intervening action or debate; further, that if cloture is invoked on the Counts nomination, all postcloture time be considered expired at 1:45 p.m. tomorrow and the Senate vote on confirmation of the Counts nomination with no intervening action or debate; finally, that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider with respect to the Brown and Counts nominations be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

The Senator from Oklahoma.

MISSILE DEFENSE

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, for about 20 years now, I have viewed the development and deployment of a layered ballistic missile defense shield as probably singularly the most vital thing we could be doing around here. People are aware of that now. Adversaries, like North Korea and others, have ballistic missiles, and they are increasing their range capability. Iran is getting almost everything. One of the problems you have is that you get countries like North Korea developing missile capabilities, and if they have it, then other adversaries have it. I am talking about Yemen and all the rest of them.

It is important for us to communicate to the American people that the

threat we face is probably the most imminent threat we have had in the history of this country. Today, it is the greatest threat we have had certainly in my lifetime.

I have come to the floor and spoken on this issue in 2001, 2009, 2012, and this will be the fourth time this year. Over the last 30 years, we have witnessed the missile defense programs go through dramatic investment periods, followed by extreme starvation and cancellations—I am talking about in the United States—depending on who happens to be President at the time.

Remember, of course, when Reagan came in and people made fun of him with “Star Wars” and tried to defame him in any way they could. Yet he was able to be persistent and start a program, and we should be very thankful we have it today. That was followed in 1989 by President Bush. He continued that program.

However, in 1993, when President Clinton was in office, the first thing he did was to cut \$2.5 billion out of the Bush missile defense budget request for fiscal year 1994. He also terminated the Reagan-Bush Strategic Defense Initiative and downgraded the National Missile Defense Program to a research and development program. He cut 5-year missile defense funding by 54 percent, from \$39 billion to \$18 billion.

I say this because these times are changing. Continuing with his administration in 1996, he cut the funding and slowed down the development of THAAD and the Navy Theater Wide Systems. To remind ourselves of how important that was at that time and the cuts he made to that and how critical that was, THAAD right now is the only thing we have to join forces with South Korea to be able to knock down something coming from North Korea to South Korea. The Aegis system is a defensive system that we could share with Japan. Without these systems, they would be wide open. That was 1996.

In 1999, the last of the Clinton years, he delayed by at least 2 years the Space Based Infrared System, which is a very complicated system that knocks down incoming missiles. Then, in 2000, Bush came in. By the end of 2008, President Bush had succeeded in fielding a missile defense system capable of defending all 50 States. One of the things he did that was most significant—and this is in the final years of his administration—was to recognize the fact that we have had ground-based interceptors in our country for a number of years. In fact, there are 44 ground-based interceptor systems. Unfortunately, they are all on the west coast because that is where we thought the threat would be. We discovered at that time, during the Bush administration, that the threat was from both sides because we recognized that Iran was developing the capabilities, as well as North Korea and others. So in order to protect Eastern United States as well as Central Europe, we had the system that was set

up. It was kind of funny because I remember being there with one of our strongest allies. The system they set up was one where they had a radar system in the Czech Republic, and they had a rocket system—a ground-based interceptor—in Poland, right next door. I remember when Vaclav Klaus was the President of the Czech Republic, one of our strongest supporters, and he said to me at that time: Now, if we go ahead and put our system in the Czech Republic and in Poland, can you assure me that if we incur the wrath of Russia, we are not going to end up being embarrassed and have the rug pulled out from under us?

I said: There is not a chance in the world that would happen.

Well, that did happen. In fact, it was a total of 44 ground-based interceptors that were fielded. That was in Alaska and California, on the west coast. We went through this where they pulled the rug out from under Poland, as well as the Czech Republic. Then, in April, came our first Obama defense cuts, which began disarming America and dismantling our layered missile defense system. This is critical because we put this in for the reason that we perceived the threat to be coming in from the east as opposed to the west coast, and the very system that would have protected us was taken down by President Obama.

I would say, due to his overall reduced budget requests in defense, there were not enough Aegis ships. I already mentioned how we are using those today in defense of many of our allies, including Japan. Since Kim Jong Un took power in 2009, he has already conducted more than 80 ballistic missile tests. That is far more than his father and his grandfather conducted.

North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests of increasingly powerful weapons. The latest test was in September of last year. The major test actually came after that, and that was on November 28. On November 28, he demonstrated that he had the range of the United States and the central part of our country. In other words, it was stated by others who observed that he now has the capability of reaching any target in mainland United States.

There were some scientists who did an analysis of what they did on November 28. They made it very clear. David Wright, an analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists, wrote that—this is something that happened on November 29—that yesterday’s test indicates that North Korea can now hold the United States well within missile range. He said: “Such a missile would have been more than enough range to reach Washington, DC, and in fact any other part of the continental United States.”

Here is the scary part of this. Those who are not wanting to believe that the threat is real and the threat is there are saying: Well, we don’t know that the missile he demonstrated on November 28 could have reached that

range if it had a full payload, a load of a nuclear warhead.

We don’t know if they had one or not, but that doesn’t give me much comfort. They also questioned whether or not it could sustain the reentry back into the atmosphere.

The point is that they now have that capability, and that is something we have to keep in mind as we are making decisions, because we have decisions to make, and that is what we are doing right now in trying to decide how we are going to keep the government from shutting down and develop some kind of a budget plan that is going to serve us well.

TAX REFORM

Mr. President, let me mention something else that I think is very significant because I heard today a lot of people criticizing and not really understanding what happened with the tax plan that was passed. We are already getting the results of it. It is kind of exciting. I don’t recall anything in my career where we got the results as quickly as we got and we are getting right now. We heard Minority Leader SCHUMER call the tax plan “a punch in the gut to the middle class.” In an op-ed piece in the New York Times, Senator ELIZABETH WARREN and Senator BERNIE SANDERS said: “The Republican agenda on health care and taxes is . . . widely disliked by the American people” and a “tax giveaway to the wealthy.”

I think it is important that people understand that not only is middle-class America going to benefit from this, but they already have. One million Americans are counting on receiving raises and bonuses from this tax reform. In my State of Oklahoma, thousands of employees will be receiving and have already received large compensation increases, bonuses—Express Employment Professionals in Oklahoma City, American Airlines, Southwest Airlines, and AT&T. In fact, Senator ROY BLUNT was coming back on a plane, the same one I was on, and the flight attendant was talking about how she had already received a \$1,000 bonus. Then, the rest of them chimed in and said: We have too.

That is already happening. Right now we have a list of 123 major corporations that have already given an average of \$1,000 for every employee they have, predicated on the assumption that the tax plan is going to increase the economy, and that is exactly what is going to happen.

I am confident that this is actually happening today. I have to say this, though, because more people still try to say: Well, we can’t give tax reductions to people and still increase revenue to do all of these things we need to do with our national defense and with our infrastructure programs.

That is not true.

I am going to repeat one that I have done before on this, but people seem to not understand. It is easy to say: Well, if you reduce taxes, you are going to reduce revenue.