

Bart and Cherry Starr for their exemplary lives. May their humble leadership, sacrifice, and love for others serve as an inspiration for all of us.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I rise to speak once again on the topic of religious liberty. This is the sixth in a series of addresses I have given on this critical subject. In my previous remarks, I have discussed why religious liberty matters and why it deserves special protection from government interference. I have also detailed the history of religious liberty in the United States and its centrality to our Nation's founding. Likewise, I have debunked the erroneous notion that religion is a purely private matter that has no place in the public domain.

Last week, I discussed the status of religious liberty in contemporary American life. I argued that, in ways that are both alarming and unprecedented, religious liberty is under attack here in the United States. Today, I turn my attention beyond our borders to examine the status of religious liberty abroad. Again, my argument is straightforward: across the world, religious liberty is under serious attack.

My observations are particularly relevant as we approach Thanksgiving. Our Nation commemorates this special holiday in remembrance of our pilgrim ancestors who fled persecution in search of religious freedom. These brave men and women sailed uncharted waters and settled strange lands in order to build a society where they could practice their religion free from state interference. Their earnest efforts precipitated not only the establishment of a new colony, but the birth of a nation committed to the principles of religious pluralism.

For America's earliest settlers, this land stood as a symbol of refuge—a haven from the storm of religious oppression that lingered over Europe. Centuries later, victims of religious persecution across the world still look to our shores for sanctuary. They see America as John Winthrop once described it: "As a city upon a hill"—a light that reaches across the oceans, giving hope to those still living in the shadows of religious intolerance.

Today our world needs that light more than ever. Nearly four centuries after the Pilgrims made landfall at Plymouth Rock, the state of religious liberty across the world is increasingly precarious. From brutal crackdowns on religious minorities in Central Asia to

a growing wave of anti-Semitism in Europe; from the violent campaigns of Boko Haram in Africa to the nefarious specter of ISIS in the Middle East—religious liberty is under attack like never before.

Despite the rapid advance of democracy over the last century, the blessings of religious freedom are still inaccessible to a majority of the world's population. In fact, a recent Pew study finds that three-quarters of the global population "lives in countries with high-government restrictions and significant hostilities surrounding religion."

Think about that. In spite of the substantial progress our own society has made in securing individual rights and enshrining religious liberty in law, there are still billions of people across the world who are unable to exercise their religion freely and fully. There are still billions of individuals living under despotic regimes that not only fail to protect people from persecution, but that actively constrain the conscience of citizens through law. There are still billions of people who understand religious liberty as little more than a philosophical concept, much less a reality.

I wish I could offer these people hope. I wish I could say that the gradual march of progress will part the waters of religious intolerance, paving a clear path forward for religious liberty, but reality restrains my optimism. Around the world, hostility to religion is increasing.

Religious liberty abroad faces opposition from two sources: states and nonstate actors. While I would like to relate an exhaustive account of the war being waged on both fronts, time permits me to highlight only the most grievous examples of persecution.

I begin with state-sponsored acts of religious oppression. Far from being a relic of the past, government persecution of religious minorities is alive and well. First, consider the state of religious liberty in Asia. China is perhaps the world's leading instigator of religious persecution. Last year, in a nearly unprecedented crackdown on religious expression, the Chinese Government bulldozed or removed crosses from more than 400 Protestant and Catholic Churches. According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, many experts have characterized this growing tide of oppression against Christians in China as "the most egregious and persistent since the Cultural Revolution."

And Christian denominations are not the only groups facing oppression. Members of all faiths, including Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists, "face arrests, fines, denials of justice, [and] lengthy prison sentences" because of their religious beliefs. Practitioners of Falun Gong experience the most intense persecution. Sixteen years ago, the Chinese Government imposed an outright ban on the practice of Falun Gong. Since that time, the government

has imprisoned believers in forced labor camps, subjecting them to psychiatric experiments and other heinous forms of torture. The government has even executed practitioners of Falun Gong, mutilating their bodies and harvesting their organs for profit. Our Nation can no longer turn a blind eye to these atrocities.

Nor can we ignore the plight of religious prisoners in North Korea, where Kim Jong-un has incarcerated thousands of his own citizens for their religious beliefs. These men and women are separated from their families and forced to work in concentration camps. While the government punishes followers of any faith, the country's Christians face the greatest persecution. If caught practicing their religion, Christians face imprisonment without trial. Many face execution.

In Southeast Asia, Myanmar is responsible for propagating religious bigotry, not so much by what it does but by what it doesn't do. Across the country, religious and ethnic minorities face increasing persecution at the hands of the Buddhist majority. Rather than intervene to protect these vulnerable groups from mistreatment, the Myanmar Government has stood idly by as an observer to the violence. As a result of the government's inaction, 140,000 Muslims and at least 100,000 Christians have been internally displaced.

In Africa and the Middle East, the situation is just as bleak. In Iran, despite President Rouhani's promise to extend greater protections to religious minorities, the number of individuals detained because of their religious beliefs has actually increased during his term. Baha'is, Christians, Jews, and Sunni Muslims throughout the country face perpetual persecution, arrest, beating, and imprisonment. Some are even executed for their beliefs. And of course, there is perhaps no government on earth more vocal in its anti-Semitism than Iran.

Meanwhile, in Saudi Arabia, the state prohibits all non-Muslim public places of worship. Any citizen who dares question the government's repressive policies is likely to face charges of apostasy, blasphemy, and even sorcery—a crime punishable by death.

In Syria, Bashar al Assad has abandoned all appearances of religious liberty by deliberately targeting Sunni Muslim civilians in a bloody civil war. As he massacres his own people, he does so on the basis of their religious affiliation.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to finish my remarks.

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

Mr. HATCH. In Pakistan the government consistently fails to protect its own citizens from religiously motivated violence, and the courts exploit repressive anti-blasphemy laws to prosecute religious minorities. Egypt's

courts convict and imprison citizens under the same pretext.

In Sudan the government harasses its minority Christian population and subjects Muslims and non-Muslims alike to the punishments of Sharia law. The state even executes citizens who convert from Islam to another religion.

Even in Europe, religious liberty is under attack, albeit in more subtle ways; take, for example, Switzerland, where a constitutional amendment placed a countrywide ban on the construction of minarets—a widely recognized symbol of Muslim prayer and devotion.

In another blow to Europe's Islamic population, France recently outlawed the wearing of burqas and niqabs in public. When a Muslim woman appealed the ban to the European Court of Human Rights, the court upheld the law.

What I have related here is only a small sampling of the manifold abuses taking place around the world. If I were to relate every instance of state-sponsored religious bigotry abroad, I would be speaking here for days.

And none of this is to mention the war against freedom being waged by non-state actors. In the past decade, we have witnessed an unprecedented rise of terrorist groups and other criminal organizations seeking to eradicate religious liberty altogether.

Take, for example, the rise of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region of Africa. This Islamic terrorist organization made headlines last year after kidnapping over 276 Nigerian schoolgirls. According to the Human Rights Watch, Boko Haram has since forced these young girls to convert to Islam and undergo severe physical and psychological torture. Many of these young women have been subject to forced labor, and others have been raped while in captivity.

Boko Haram's central mission is to annihilate all Western social and political activities, including any religion that isn't Islam. In its fight against religious freedom and other Western values, the group has conducted indiscriminate attacks on civilians and has even used children as suicide bombers.

The brutality of Boko Haram is only surpassed by the barbarism of ISIS. Far from being the "jayvee team" President Obama once described, ISIS has proven to be perhaps the most formidable terrorist network in operation today. I fear that too many underestimate the threat ISIS poses to religious freedom. This is an organization whose very raison d'être is to establish a global Islamic caliphate and usher in the apocalypse.

As Islamic State militants carry out their mission, religious liberty is often the first casualty. In the barren world ISIS envisions, there is no room for dissent: either convert or be killed. Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims throughout the Middle East have been confronted with this impossible ultimatum. Refusal to give in to the Is-

lamic State's demands has resulted in mass executions, extrajudicial killings, kidnapping of civilians, forced displacement, the killing and maiming of children, rape, and other forms of sexual violence. The savagery of ISIS has even gone viral as the group posts videos of grisly beheadings on the Internet. In almost every case, captors target their victims on the basis of religion.

As we are all too aware, the cruelty of ISIS is not confined to the Middle East. Just last week, three teams of ISIS militants carried out terrorist assaults throughout Paris, detonating suicide bombs at a soccer stadium and opening fire on innocent civilians at a concert hall. The violence injured more than 350 innocent bystanders and claimed at least 129 lives in what is considered the worst terrorist attack on French soil in the nation's history.

We could call these attacks "senseless acts of violence" because that is exactly what they appear to be, both in the scope of their brutality and in the scale of their indiscriminate. But I fear that dismissing these attacks as "senseless" too often hides from our view the radical rationale that motivates such violence. ISIS does not kill merely to feed an insatiable bloodlust; it kills because it wants to terrorize, shock, and intimidate other civilizations into submission. It kills because it wants to impose on all people a narrow-minded, medieval ideology of Islam—one that would rob us of our religious freedom and other fundamental rights.

Sadly, ISIS is not alone in its animus toward religious freedom. Nearly every terrorist organization that has vowed our destruction—be it Al Qaeda, Hamas or Hezbollah—seeks to strip us not only of our sense of security but also of the fundamental freedoms that make religious pluralism possible.

If we are committed to defending religious liberty overseas, we must confront the growing menace of Islamic extremism, and we must challenge those nations that engender religious intolerance through law. Today, by calling attention to the suffering of religious peoples throughout the world, I have demonstrated clearly and without question that religious liberty faces growing hostility abroad from both state and non-state actors alike. From the heavy hand of government to the violent campaigns of terrorist organizations around the globe, the right to worship according to the dictates of one's own conscience is under relentless attack.

With a fuller understanding of the threats facing religious liberty, the question now becomes: What is to be done? If religious liberty is under attack abroad, what can our Nation do to protect this precious freedom now and in the future?

First, we must recognize that protecting religious freedom abroad is not just a question of moral principle; it is a matter of national security. Often,

violations of religious liberty abroad threaten our own safety at home. As a case in point, consider the role of religious intolerance in the Syrian civil war. Bashar al-Assad quickly disposed of religious freedom when he began deliberately targeting Sunni Muslims, murdering thousands of citizens on the basis of their religion. His brutal actions precipitated the formation of ISIS—an organization hell-bent on destroying other religions and entire civilizations in the name of Islam.

As ISIS gained in strength, it began to export its extreme ideology abroad, triggering several attacks throughout the world, including last week's coordinated assaults in Paris. Now, ISIS poses a formidable threat to the United States and all of our allies. Assad's blatant disregard for religious liberty not only escalated violence in the region but also catalyzed the formation of ISIS. As a result, the world is less safe.

Given the obvious nexus between protecting religious liberty and strengthening global security, I agree with the following assessment from the U.S. Commission on International Freedom:

In the long run, there is only one permanent guarantor of the safety, security, and survival of the persecuted and the vulnerable. It is the full recognition of religious freedom as a sacred human right which every nation, government, and individual must fully support and no nation, government, or individual must ever violate.

If we are committed to bolstering the security of other nations, then we must be equally devoted to strengthening religious liberty abroad. At the forefront of foreign policy should be a commitment to defend and advance religious liberty in countries where it is under attack. We should also be prepared to reevaluate our relationship with governments that fail to make religious liberty protections a priority.

Congress took concrete steps to prioritize religious freedom as a foreign policy objective when it passed the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. This law established the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. The Ambassador oversees the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, which monitors discrimination against people of faith and publishes an annual country-by-country report on the status of religious freedom abroad.

This historic legislation also created the U.S. Commission on International Freedom—an independent, bipartisan organization that closely follows religious persecution in other countries and offers recommendations to the executive branch and Congress on how best to promote religious freedom overseas.

As one of the only countries in the world to make religious liberty an explicit foreign policy objective, our nation is unique in its commitment to this preeminent freedom. As a legislative body, Congress can renew that commitment by continuing to support

the provisions of the International Religious Freedom Act. The future of religious liberty overseas depends on our willingness to strengthen it here in Congress.

Lastly, if we are committed to protecting religious liberty abroad, we must be ready to defend it here at home.

At the beginning of my remarks, I recalled the imagery of John Winthrop's "City on a Hill." Throughout our Nation's history, several public figures have invoked Winthrop's allusion to capture a simple truth: America's special freedoms make her a light to other nations.

Through our robust exercise of religious liberty, we offer hope to people beyond our borders—men and women suffering under the yoke of oppression who look to our country for sanctuary. As our nation strives to be an example of religious freedom, we can offer greater hope to those persecuted for their religious beliefs, and by addressing threats to freedom of conscience here at home—including the attacks on religious liberty that I detailed in previous remarks—we can strengthen and beautify our City on a Hill, building upon the foundation laid for us by our Pilgrim forbears, so that the light of our Nation might shine before all mankind.

With this call to action, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate in morning business for such time as I may consume.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—
S. 2303

Mr. MCCAIN. Madam President, over the last month, in a series of terrorist attacks around the globe that have killed hundreds of people, ISIL has commenced a new phase in its war on the civilized world. We have seen attacks in Ankara, Beirut, and Baghdad, the bombing of a Russian airliner over Egypt, and, of course, the horrific scenes last Friday in Paris, where ISIL gunmen wearing suicide belts attacked innocent civilians at restaurants, bars, a soccer stadium, and a concert hall, killing, as we know, 129 people and wounding 352 others.

This evolution in ISIL operations further highlights the threat that they pose to countries beyond the Middle East, including the United States of America. We cannot and should not wait for ISIL to attack the United States before we finally, finally, finally acknowledge that we are a nation at war and that we must adopt a new strategy to destroy ISIL.

What we must also acknowledge is that while the threat posed by ISIL and our other adversaries is growing,

our national security budgets are increasingly disconnected from our national security requirements. Regardless of what ISIL will do next or how the United States will decide to act, our national security budgets through fiscal year 2021 have been arbitrarily—I emphasize "arbitrarily"—capped by the Budget Control Act.

To be sure, the recently passed Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 provides important relief from the sequester-level budget caps for fiscal year 2016 and 2017, and I am grateful to the Republican majority leader for leading that effort. Our national defense would be in far worse shape without that legislation. At the same time, that agreement is less optimal for next year and obviously does not seek to address the budget caps that continue for the next 4 years. Indeed, under the revised Budget Control Act, in constant dollars, we are actually on track to spend less on defense next year than this year. It has not taken long for world events, yet again, to show the inadequacy of this exercise. At roughly the same time we were locking in next year's defense budget caps, ISIL began demonstrating its capability to strike targets outside of Iraq and Syria and now at the very center of the western world.

Indeed, since the Budget Control Act of 2011 capped defense and other discretionary spending for the subsequent 10 years, absent any consideration of changing global threats or national requirements, let's consider what has transpired since 2011. Any semblance of order in the Middle East has collapsed. We are all tragically familiar with the carnage in Syria and Iraq, but Libya has also deteriorated into anarchy and safe havens for ISIL and its affiliates. Yemen has become the scene of a proxy war between Iran and the gulf Arab nations. General David Petraeus testified to the Armed Services Committee: "Almost every Middle Eastern country is now a battleground or a combatant in one or more wars."

From the outset, the Obama administration's policy was to withdraw from the Middle East. The President pulled all U.S. troops out of Iraq and put us on the path to do the same in Afghanistan, but as we expected, and as I predicted, evil forces have moved in to fill the vacuums that we have left behind. ISIL has captured large swaths of territories in Syria and Iraq and has spread across the region to Afghanistan, Libya, Egypt, and other countries.

As a result, we now have thousands of troops back in Iraq. The U.S. military has conducted over 6,000 airstrikes in Syria and Iraq to combat ISIL. We are increasing counterterrorism operations in North Africa and providing military assistance to Saudi Arabia and our gulf partners fighting in Yemen. The situation in Afghanistan has driven the President to further delay the drawdown of U.S. troops. The effectiveness of these policies is questionable, but their cost is not.

In Europe, we have seen Russian forces invade Crimea and intervene militarily in Ukraine. This is the first time since World War II that one government has invaded and sought to annex the territory of another sovereign territory in Europe. Since then, Vladimir Putin has grown bolder. He continues to modernize Russia's military. And most recently, of course, he has deployed Russian forces into Syria to prop up the Assad regime, even firing cruise missiles into the region from outside of it, as far away as nearly 1,000 miles.

Russia's actions have now forced the administration to bring back to Europe on a rotational basis one of the two brigade combat teams that it withdrew. As Russia continues its aggression in Europe and increases its involvement in the Middle East, the Secretary of Defense acknowledges that we need an entirely new strategy to counter Russia. All of this requires proper funding—all of it. All of it requires proper funding levels, but our defense agencies have not gotten that, even as they have been asked to do more to counter Russia.

The situation isn't limited to Russia and Europe. China is growing more assertive as well. It has built several land features in the South China Sea, equipped with military buildings, fort facilities, and even runways, all in an effort to expand Chinese territorial claims in the area. In addition to harassing other regional states, five Chinese navy ships were spotted in the Bering Sea off of Alaska during President Obama's recent trip to Alaska. Meanwhile, hackers in China continue to conduct cyber espionage and cyber attacks against our government and critical sectors of our economy. Russia, Iran, and North Korea are doing so as well, all in the past year.

Again and again, national security requirements have materialized after the Budget Control Act was passed, but we forced our military to tackle a growing set of missions with arbitrary and insufficient budget levels, revised periodically with whatever additional resources the Congress is able to scare up. The results speak for themselves. Since 2011, as worldwide threats have been increasing, we have cut our defense spending by almost 25 percent in annual spending. Not only has annual spending decreased, but so have the long-term budget plans of the Department of Defense. Each year the Department releases a 5-year budget. However, each year it has reduced its 5-year plan in an effort to closer align its spending to the Budget Control Act. As a result, while the short-term effects of these arbitrary budget caps are bad enough, the long-term harm they are doing is arguably worse. Our military is raiding its own future readiness, modernization, and research and development spending to pay its present bills and meet present needs. We are not making the kinds of investments in