

Originally, the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act provides that anyone involved in Sergei's imprisonment, torture, or death who has not been brought to justice in Russia would be denied access to our financial system or the ability to travel to our country. The bill also targets those who have abused their power in the country to violate the human rights of anyone in Russia who disagrees with Mr. Putin's corrupt regime.

Senator McCain and I wanted to send a signal to Mr. Putin and his co-conspirators that there will be consequences for their actions and their inactions. The Sergei Magnitsky Act was, is, and will continue to be an effective tool at doing just that.

Senator McCain and I agreed that the United States must lead the world by using the power of our financial and legal institutions to hold human rights abusers and corrupt individuals across the globe accountable for their crimes. That is why we continued to work together to author the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, which was signed into law in 2016. Senator McCain and I shared the critically important belief that the value of American leadership in enforcing human rights worldwide transcends party lines.

I might point out that following the U.S. example, other countries have enacted similar laws to make sure we have a blanket protection against those who commit these human rights violations.

In the past year, Global Magnitsky designations have targeted individuals around the world responsible for acts of genocide, violence, and significant corruption. My colleagues and I have called for numerous sanctions under this act, and I am pleased that the administration has acted, particularly issuing Executive order 13818, which expanded Global Magnitsky authorities. Freezing the financial assets of perpetrators and denying them visas to the United States sends a clear message: We will not stand by while individuals are stripped of their freedoms and their rights.

Unfortunately, while the Global Magnitsky legislation has proved hugely successful, we continue to witness human rights violations around the world and, more specifically, at the hands of Mr. Putin.

In recent reports, human rights groups have noted that the number of political prisoners in Russia has risen at a rapid rate over the past few years. Many of these groups are calling on the United States to impose sanctions on more Russian officials to hold them accountable for the inhumane treatment of over 250 reported political prisoners. Unfortunately, this issue of Russian political prisoners has not been the forefront of the U.S.-Russia discussions. That needs to change.

President Trump continues to treat Mr. Putin with the utmost respect, despite the Russian President's holding

almost 300 individuals hostage as political prisoners in Russia.

Most recently, the President has scheduled another formal meeting with Mr. Putin next month during the annual G20 Summit. Of course, Secretary Pompeo just met with Mr. Putin on Tuesday. Human rights must be on the agenda for such talks.

In 2016, a Russian human rights activist and a person who has dissented from Mr. Putin, Vladimir Kara-Murza, testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, expressing how the United States could help Russian defenders.

He stated:

Our friends in the West often ask how they can be helpful to the cause of human rights and democracy in Russia and the answer to this is very simple. Please stay true to your values. We are not asking for your support. It is our task to fight for democracy and rule of law in our country. The only thing we ask from Western leaders is that they stop supporting Mr. Putin by treating him as a respectable and worthy partner and by allowing Mr. Putin's cronies to use Western countries as havens for their looted wealth.

That is exactly what the Magnitsky Act is all about—to deny that legitimacy.

I ask that we take these words to heart. The threat that Russia poses to our global community has never been more evident. But we must remember the distinction between Mr. Putin's regime and the Russian people. The Russian people are good, freedom-seeking people who want economic security and stability for their families just as we do in the United States. This is an important distinction for us to keep in our minds and our hearts as we continue to pursue effective tools to counter Mr. Putin's threats to the international order and the values we hold so dear.

So as we work to shape U.S. policy and diplomatic strategies toward Russia, I urge my colleagues to keep in mind the aspirations of the Russian human rights defenders who risk their lives in order to advocate for a Russia free of authoritarian and abusive leaders.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

THE MIDDLE EAST

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, dominant in the news—on which I have expected there to be more coverage—is a matter that I think is of great urgency to the country, global security, and peace—that being the tensions that are rising in the Middle East.

I have heard a few of my colleagues speak on the floor about it today, and I have seen a lot of press report on it,

some of it absurd and some of it on point. I understand some of it. I thought there should have been more information provided to all of the Members. I am pleased to see that more will be available next week when we return. This is an item I have been talking about for a couple of weeks—of the urgent threat, potentially, that now exists from Iran against the United States, particularly in Iraq but throughout the Persian Gulf region.

First, let me talk about the threat. To understand the threat, it is important to understand how Iran operates.

Iran is an Islamic republic, meaning it has a political branch of its government—a President, a Foreign Minister, and a parliamentary body. Then it has a Supreme Leader, who ultimately governs the country. In essence, his commands overrule the political branches. That is why they call him the Supreme Leader. He is a religious figure. As part of that, it has an armed services—an army, a navy, and an air force—that protects the country, theoretically. Then it has an armed forces that is independent of the army, the navy, and the air force, and that is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, IRGC. First of all, it doesn't answer to the President; it doesn't answer to the Foreign Minister; and it doesn't answer to regular army forces. It answers directly to the Supreme Leader. A lot of times, people don't understand this. They ascribe to other countries the attributes of our own.

The President of Iran is not the commander in chief, in reality, of the IRGC. It operates completely separately. By the way, that means that the IRGC—the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—can oftentimes operate and do things that the Foreign Minister, who is the spokesperson for the Iranian Government, may not even know about. Sometimes it does.

The point is that we have to understand that dynamic. It is not the United States. Our attributes should not be assigned to them.

The IRGC has an organization within it. It has a unit called the Quds Force. The Quds Force, led by General Soleimani, is made up of experts and has developed expertise in unconventional warfare and in intelligence activities, primarily abroad. This is the organization, for example, that helped to build all of the IEDs that killed and maimed American servicemen in Iraq. This is the organization behind the Shia militias in Iraq today. This is the organization behind a lot of the efforts that support Hezbollah in Syria and in other parts of the world.

The IRGC's Quds Force is designed to do things that have some level of deniability. The IRGC Quds Force has developed an ability, in the case of conflict with the United States—and we have known this now for the better part of a decade—to attack us using proxies, meaning other groups, in order to escape and have some level of deniability. It will get some group that

it has stood up, that it has equipped, and that it has trained to attack us in retaliation for something America has done, but it can deny it. It can say: That wasn't our army. That wasn't our air force. That was this other group that did it on its own.

This is a capability we know it has built not just in the Middle East, by the way, but all over the world. We have been aware of it for a long time. It is not a secret to anyone, and it is a capability that it has increasingly perfected.

What has happened here very recently is there has been a persistent and clear stream of information—a clear indication—that has arrived to American policymakers that the IRGC, the Quds Force, and their proxies in the region pose a serious and potentially imminent threat to U.S. forces and U.S. civilians in Iraq and in the broader Middle East.

The President of the United States and the administration are confronted with this information. What is the wholly appropriate thing for them to do? The appropriate thing for them to do is to reposition military assets to the region, No. 1, to protect the Americans who are there in case they come under attack and, No. 2, to be in a position to retaliate.

The reason this is important is you hope to deter this sort of attack. What you are hoping to do is to show them that we have military capabilities in the region so that if we are attacked by their proxies at the direction of the Quds Force, we are going to respond to that forcefully. What you hope that will do, along with public messaging, is get into their heads and make them decide “We are not going to do this.” That is what has happened here, and it is wholly appropriate.

For a moment, I want you to imagine. If, in fact, an attack such as this occurred and if, God forbid, hundreds of Americans were killed, the first question everybody would have is, Why didn't we have military assets in the region to protect them? Why couldn't we get them out? That is the first question everyone around here is going to ask.

What the administration has done to pre-position military assets in the region for this potential contingency is entirely appropriate. Also appropriate is the notion that we are not going to start a war, but if we are attacked by Iran's proxies, we are going to respond against those proxies, and we are going to hold Iran responsible. It is going to pay a price for this as well. Who could disagree with the notion that if we are attacked, we have a right to defend ourselves and respond? That is the only thing that is happening here.

I am pleased that in the last day, more Members of the Senate have been made privy to this stream of information so that people can begin to see that the actions the administration has taken up to this point are not just wholly justified but are appropriate.

Yet I am concerned about some of the reactions I have seen with regard to this because I think they bode ill both for this case and for the future.

One of the first reactions I have seen is that this is not true, that they are literally making it up, that there is no such intelligence, and that it is being exaggerated. There are even some leakers—I don't know who these people are—who are lying to media outlets about the contents of this intelligence because they have axes to grind against somebody else in the administration, and they want to create embarrassment.

Look, I get this bureaucratic infighting, but I don't understand it when it comes to issues of national security. Even if this information is 50 percent accurate, we have an obligation to err on the side of caution, especially when American lives are on the line.

I encourage all Senators to read this information or access it through their offices and, obviously, when we have a briefing with the appropriate officials, to attend that as well, and I believe you will agree with me.

The second thing I am hearing is “Oh, this is just a path to war”—equating this to the Iraq war of over a decade ago. This is nothing like that. That was an offensive operation. That was an invasion of another country. This is not posturing for a military attack; this is military posturing for the purposes of defensive operations. As I have said repeatedly, it is very straightforward: If Iran attacks, there will be a war. If Iran does not attack, there will not be a war.

I think the most disappointing is some insinuation, including by Members of this body—publicly and privately—that somehow, we are going to provoke an attack; that elements of the American Government are going to go out and do something to get Iran to hit us so that we will have an excuse to go to war. I don't know how you prove a negative, but I find that to be wholly unsubstantiated and dangerous.

Let me tell you why this is problematic. What encourages Iran to believe it can get away with this is that it believes if one of these groups—one of the Shia militias in Iraq—attacks us, it is going to be able to say that it is “not us,” that it is some rogue group that did it. “Don't hold us responsible for it.” The more Iran thinks it can get away with that, the more likely it is to do it. So it is important that this be exposed for what it is.

The second reason Iran thinks it can get away with it is I think it believes it can exploit our political divisions. I think Iran reads these newspapers and watches the news and realizes that some percentage of Americans and, certainly, a significant percentage of Americans in politics is going to, in some way, take Iran's side on this. People are going to say that we provoked it—that this is our fault, that we did something that made Iran mad, that we created the tensions that led

to this—or that the intelligence was flawed or that it wasn't Iran but one of these other groups.

By the way, the more of that Iran reads, the likelier it is to do this. That doesn't mean I don't believe we can have a legitimate debate. I support designating the IRGC as a terrorist organization. We can have a legitimate debate about whether that should have been done but not right now. Right now, Americans potentially stand in harm's way, and they need the United States of America to be supporting efforts to defend and to protect them.

Here is what I know none of us can disagree with, I hope: No. 1, that if there is any serious indication that Americans anywhere are threatened, we must position ourselves to protect them, defend them, extract them, and retaliate if they are attacked. The second thing we should all be able to agree on is that if Americans come under attack, even if it is from a proxy force that is directed by a foreign agent like the IRGC, not only must we defend against that attack, but we must punish it with swift retaliation. That should unite us on a matter of incredible importance.

I hope all of the misinformation will stop because this matter is too important with which to play political games.

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

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

HEALTHCARE

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, across America, there are 130 million individuals who have a preexisting condition. This means individuals have a diagnosis, an illness, a medical condition that without the Affordable Care Act would likely mean they were priced out of insurance because the costs associated with their illness are so high that no insurer would provide them coverage or the cost of insurance is much higher than those who don't have that illness or that condition.

These preexisting conditions don't discriminate. They affect Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, people who watch FOX News, people who watch MSNBC. This isn't a partisan issue; preexisting conditions affect everybody.

In my State, give or take, 522,000 people have preexisting conditions, and I talk to them every time I go back to Connecticut. I remember 2 years ago when I was walking across the State—something I do every year. I take about a week in the summer, and I walk from one end of the State to the other end—there were families who would find out on social media where I was going to be walking that day and pre-position