

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, the 116th Congress, so far, has just talked about the humanitarian crisis at the border. Most of our Democratic colleagues have claimed up to this point that there is no crisis or emergency at the border.

We will recall that we started out the year with a government shutdown because of the battle over border security, and our Democratic friends made one thing perfectly clear: They would oppose any effort to fund our security mission at the border. That resulted in the 35-day shutdown.

The Speaker of the House at the time called the situation “a fake crisis at the border,” and the minority leader here in the Senate referred it to as “a crisis that does not exist.” Well, they weren’t the only ones. Throughout the Halls of the Capitol, Democrats in Congress used terms like “phony,” “imaginary,” and “make-believe” to describe the challenges our frontline officers and agents were facing every day.

While our Democratic colleagues have reflexively denied the existence of a crisis at the border, the problems have grown only bigger each day. Of course, it was 2014, I will remind my friends across the aisle, when Barack Obama, then President of the United States, declared a humanitarian and security crisis at the border. So it seemed very odd to me that, in 2019, they decided—when the numbers kept getting bigger and bigger and conditions worse and worse—all of a sudden that the humanitarian and security crisis had gone away.

The fact is, over the last 3 months, the number of illegal crossings across the southwestern border have hit six figures, something we haven’t seen since 2006. We surpassed the number of unaccompanied children apprehended at the height of the 2014 crisis that President Obama was speaking about.

This mass migration has nearly depleted our Federal resources, causing the President to request \$4½ billion for humanitarian assistance and border operations. That request came almost 2 months ago—almost 2 months ago, and Congress has not acted.

Now, it seems, our Democratic colleagues have finally accepted the facts. There is a very real and very urgent humanitarian crisis on our southern border. The bill they passed earlier this week meets the dollar amount requested by the President, but the substance of the bill shows that House Democrats don’t want to send funding where it is actually needed the most.

Unlike the Senate’s bipartisan bill, the original House bill excluded funding for the Department of Defense, immigration judge teams, and underfunded both Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection. This morning, they made a last-ditch effort to inject some of their deeply partisan provisions back into our Senate bipartisan bill. While the House Democrats did increase needed

funding in some areas, the newly amended version still includes divisive provisions and reduces funding in areas that the Senate overwhelmingly rejected yesterday.

Here is just one example. Democrats in the House cut the Senate bill’s appropriation of \$21 million for ICE Homeland Security investigations to conduct—get this—human trafficking investigations. So the House wanted to cut \$21 million in the Senate appropriations bill that was dedicated to investigating human trafficking. This is just the latest example of their fundamental lack of interest in sending money where it is needed most—only where it is politically convenient.

It is unfortunately not much of a surprise. Our Democratic friends are trying to keep up with their candidates running for President, whose positions on immigration and border security get more extreme each day. Now, more than one Democrat running for the nomination for President actually supports making entering the country illegally legal—in other words, no orderly immigration system at all—a free-for-all, where it is easier for human traffickers and drug smugglers to come and go as they please. And, of course, there is this: no consideration given for those would-be immigrants who are trying to wait patiently in line and do things exactly the right way and no consideration of the unfairness of those who would jump ahead of the line and enter the country illegally before those who are trying to do it the right way.

The House bill stands in stark contrast to the bipartisan agreement we passed here in the Senate, which funds a range of programs at the Federal departments and agencies working to manage the crisis, and, importantly, it is the only bill in town that has the support of the President. It is, after all, important to get the President’s signature on legislation for it to become law.

The Senate Appropriations Committee overwhelmingly supported this bill, and it passed the committee by a vote of 30 to 1. When the full Senate voted on it yesterday, only eight Members of the Senate voted no.

We have simply waited long enough. We waited too long, in my view, for Democrats to acknowledge this real humanitarian crisis. The House bill is inadequate and mostly a partisan effort.

Our Democratic colleagues have resisted acting for far too long already, making this humanitarian crisis worse. They circulate the very tragic pictures of a father with his young child face down in the waters of the Rio Grande River, and they somehow fail to acknowledge their own complicity in failing to act to provide the sorts of fixes to our asylum laws that would deter, if not prevent, that sort of thing from occurring in the first place. They really do need to look in the mirror.

We need to take action now, and I hope we don’t have to wait any longer

for our colleagues in the House to pass the Senate’s bipartisan bill.

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Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, on another note, I listened with great interest as the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Senator from Rhode Island, spoke about Iran and the challenges we face there. I agree with some and maybe even most of what he had to say.

The American people were appalled when, last week, Iran took down an unmanned American aircraft over international waters. As the Senator said, ordinarily, Iran operates by proxies or by third parties, whether it is the Shia militia in Iraq or Hezbollah or one of their other terrorist proxies like those operating in Yemen, the Houthis. But Iran escalated its attack against the United States by shooting an unmanned drone flying over international waters, so it was quite a shocking move from that standpoint, even from a nation as untethered as Iran.

Iran has been engaged in a 30-year conflict with the United States, one that has resulted in the death of U.S. servicemembers in Iraq and elsewhere—victims of explosively formed penetrators and other training that the IRGC, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, their Quds Force, their Special Operations force—the training they gave to terrorists operating in Iraq to kill Americans.

Then there is the periodic harassment of American and other international vessels operating in the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow strait through which a huge portion of the world’s energy supplies flow. So this is, in some ways, an escalation of what has been a 30-year conflict between Iran and the United States.

Tehran has waged acts of aggression against the United States and our allies. It has exported terrorism around the globe. It is the No. 1 state sponsor of international terrorism, and it has engaged in gross human rights violations against its own people.

As I indicated, Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC, is the loyal henchman responsible for leading these acts. It is a branch of Iran’s Armed Forces which tries to squash democracy movements at home and abroad by pushing its extreme ideology beyond Iran’s borders.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps wields vast power and influence and uses its capabilities to encourage turmoil and conflict and violence throughout the Middle East. It funds arms, training, and foot soldiers to the terrorist groups that spread their radical ideology.

While the terrorist activities alone are enough to cause concern, the IRGC is also in control of Iran’s ballistic missile program, which unfortunately has only accelerated under the previous administration’s deeply flawed nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the JCPOA. Once

we saw the details of that deal in 2015, it quickly became clear that it was not much of a deal at all. If the goal is to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon—well, it obviously failed in that goal.

As the majority leader said at the time, it “appears to fall well short of the goal we all thought was trying to be achieved, which was that Iran would not be a nuclear state.”

Despite the restrictions it would impose, the deal would leave Iran with a vast nuclear program and allow it to continue to conduct research and development on advanced centrifuges and building intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Perhaps worse, the nuclear deal would lift those restrictions in a decade. In other words, it was 2015 when the JCPOA was signed by the relevant parties. So by postponing Iran’s ability to develop a nuclear weapon, we are already half of the way there almost. It is no wonder that then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu delivered an address to Congress in March of 2015 and said the JCPOA “doesn’t block Iran’s path to the bomb; it paves Iran’s path to the bomb.” That certainly seems to be the case. We have seen Iran violate the nuclear deal and U.N. resolutions time after time, and it is clear that their resolve to create nuclear weapons remains their highest priority.

Just a year ago, President Trump announced the United States would pull out of the nuclear deal, a decision I strongly supported. Even at the time Secretary Kerry, the Secretary of State, admitted that the tens of billions of dollars the United States released to go to Iran would be used to fund their terrorist activities, he supported it nonetheless. He supported it even though it paved the way for Iran to get a nuclear weapon 10 years after the JCPOA was signed.

Since the Trump administration has withdrawn from the JCPOA, it has taken resolute action against Iran, including stronger sanctions on entities and individuals and the designation of the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization, which it clearly is. Somehow, though, despite the unprovoked attacks, flagrant violations of international agreements, and human rights violations, some of our friends on the left and the mainstream media have grossly mischaracterized the situation and have somehow managed to point the finger at the Trump administration for starting the fight in the first place. They want to blame America, and they want to blame this administration.

Let me be clear. Iran is the aggressor. Their history as the chief mischief-maker in the Middle East began long before President Trump took office, so don’t lay this at his feet. From the Iran hostage crisis to their outright support of terrorist groups in the Middle East, to this latest strike at a U.S. aircraft, something they admitted—they said: We did it—their actions at

every turn have demonstrated a desire not only to escalate the conflict with the United States and our interests and allies but to spread their violent extremism without regard for anyone else.

I have to say it has been 74 years since a nuclear weapon was exploded during World War II, and I hope and pray there is never again a nuclear weapon exploded on our planet, but can you imagine Iran, the No. 1 state sponsor of international terrorism, getting a nuclear weapon? We can never ever allow that to happen.

This last week marked the 23rd anniversary of a notable episode in Iran’s sad history of terrorism. That was the 23rd anniversary of the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia. In 1996, a truck bomb was detonated adjacent to a building housing members of the U.S. Air Force’s 4404th Wing, killing 19 U.S. Air Force personnel and a Saudi local and wounding 498 others.

If Tehran expects to continue exporting terrorism and violence around the world without a response from the United States and our allies, they are sorely mistaken.

If Iran can continue to escalate with no response from the United States or our allies, they are going to continue to escalate as much as they can, which I think is more dangerous than a proportional U.S. response to what happened in the Strait of Hormuz.

The President has opted for hard-hitting sanctions, which I think are a good start. Those sanctions announced by the administration earlier this week represent an appropriate response to the Iranian escalation consistent with President Trump’s maximum pressure strategy on Iran. These sanctions will deny the Supreme Leader, the Supreme Leader’s office, and close affiliates access to resources they need to finance their rogue regime. There is no benefit—in the interest of peace—to applying anything less than maximum pressure on Iran to change their behavior. The tentacles of the IRGC run deep into their economy, and these sanctions will prevent them from amassing even greater power to develop sophisticated weapons.

We have seen reports that the economic challenges they are encountering as a result of the sanctions already in place are making it harder for them to finance their terrorist operations through their proxy.

The actions taken by Iran show that they are feeling the squeeze of these sanctions, and they know exactly what they need to do before they can get relief. As Secretary of State Pompeo said, “When the Iranian regime decides to forgo violence and meet our diplomacy with diplomacy, it knows how to reach us.”

I sincerely hope to see the day when the Iranian people can live without fear, when their government respects its own citizens and international allies and lives by international norms and finally decides to forgo its nuclear weapons. Until that day comes, I hope

our allies will stand with us in confronting the tyrants in Iran and doing everything in our power to push back against the world’s largest state sponsor of terror.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

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Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, tomorrow this body faces an opportunity, in fact, an obligation to reassert its proper constitutional role in warmaking.

I urge my colleagues to support the Udall-Kaine amendment, a provision to prohibit funding for unauthorized and unapproved military operations against Iran. No vote will be more important during this session than the one we cast tomorrow. It is not only the imminence of potential conflict, it is the reality that we would be surrendering our proper constitutional responsibility and our right if we fail to adopt this amendment. The American people already believe we have ceded too much authority to the executive branch; that we are implicitly, if not directly and explicitly, approving an imperial presence. This amendment puts us to the test before the American people.

The Congress has a job to do. We should do that job tomorrow. We should insist that we have the authority and we have the obligation to consider whether there are military operations against Iran.

We can talk about policy. There is no question that Iran is a malign and treacherously bad actor in that part of the world. There is no doubt that it poses a clear and present jeopardy to the world community. Iran may well have installed mines on the two tankers that were severely damaged recently and may well be the culprit in shooting down an American drone in the past week, but the United States is on a perilous course. We are on a dangerous course toward continued escalation and possible miscalculation that may create a spiral of uncontrollable military responses.

It isn’t that we have a dangerous policy, it is that we have no policy, no strategy, no endgame articulated by the President of the United States or anyone in this administration. To resort to military action rather than reliance on diplomatic approaches is a recipe for potential disaster.

This unintended escalation could result from more miscalculation or it could result from purposeful desire on one side or both sides among a small number of advisers or military leaders that there be a resort to kinetic activity, but we have, in the meantime, an opportunity to resort to diplomacy, to enlist our allies and partners. This situation is the result of our putting those allies, in part, in an extraordinarily difficult position.

The current tensions with Iran today are the direct result of President