

sort of tie it to impeachment proceedings is—I am just flabbergasted.

Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard. Is there objection to the original request?

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

I am disappointed that any Senator would come to the floor and find the Bill of Rights laughable. The Sixth Amendment is an important part of our Constitution, and the right to face your accuser is incredibly important. It is disappointing that an actual U.S. Senator would come to the floor and say that it was laughable to apply the Bill of Rights to the President. I am disappointed that it has come to this.

I will hope that Americans would look at this and say, absolutely, the President deserves the same protections that the rest of us deserve.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. I think the Senator from Kentucky should listen because I certainly did not find the Sixth Amendment laughable. I found his resolution, calling it the Whistleblower Protection Act, which in fact undermines whistleblower protections, appalling and laughable.

With that, I, once again, object to his request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

TESTIMONY OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL
ALEXANDER VINDMAN

Mr. CASEY. Thank you, Mr. President.

First, I want to briefly recognize this afternoon the brave public servants who have testified in the House in recent weeks in defense of national security, the rule of law, and our democratic institutions—most recently, LTC Alexander Vindman.

Despite Lieutenant Colonel Vindman's two decades of military service and a Purple Heart for his sacrifice to our country in Iraq, his character has faced brutal attacks from cable news and from some current and former Members of Congress. These comments about him are reprehensible attacks with no basis in fact.

Verbal abuse of Lieutenant Colonel Vindman not only disrespects his integrity and his service but undermines our institutions and ultimately makes our Nation less safe—less safe. So questioning the character, loyalty, or patriotism of Lieutenant Colonel Vindman is an attack on all veterans and is also an attack on our military.

Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul put it this way in a Washington Post column just last week, and I will quote part of the column:

Such smear tactics are revolting and un-American. Vindman has served our country with honor and distinction, both on and off the battlefield. . . . And he is a patriot—as you would expect from someone with his outstanding resume. . . . The idea that Vindman might have dual loyalties with another nation is preposterous. Vindman was born in the totalitarian Soviet Union, not “the Ukraine.” His family, which is Jewish, fled religious persecution. He is not Soviet or Ukrainian or Ukrainian American: He is simply an American. Using birthplaces or hyphenated adjectives to disparage fellow Americans is always wrong. It is especially so in the case of Lt. Col. Vindman.

That is the op-ed from a distinguished Ambassador.

When I reflect upon Lieutenant Colonel Vindman's service to our country and his integrity, I am reminded of one of the lines—we could use many—from “America the Beautiful”:

Oh, beautiful for patriot dream

That sees beyond the years

That is what he was doing when he testified, just like that was what he was doing when he was serving our Nation in Iraq and when he was wounded in Iraq, and what he has done as a member of our national security team as part of the work he has done in this administration—seeing beyond the years. Part of the dream of a patriot is thinking about the impact of your actions on future generations.

We need to make sure that we are very clear about where we stand on his character, on his commitment to the country, and on his courage in coming forward.

TURKEY AND SYRIA

Mr. President, I want to move to the grave question of Syria and what has happened over just the last couple of weeks. I know this is a position held by Senators in both parties, but I oppose President Trump's recent decision to withdraw U.S. Armed Forces from Syria.

Following a phone call with Turkish President Erdogan on October 6, President Trump announced that the United States would be withdrawing U.S. troops from northern Syria. This cleared the way for the Turkish Armed Forces to proceed with an operation—an effort to target Kurdish and Islamic State, or ISIS, fighters in northern Syria. The President's decision is already impacting U.S. national security, as many analysts have predicted.

We have abandoned our Kurdish allies, who have been instrumental in not only retaking territory from ISIS but also in detaining ISIS combatants. We learned last week that they made the most important contribution of critical intelligence, helping U.S. forces locate and eliminate ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

That leads me to the role that Russia plays, especially in the aftermath of the decision the President made about our troops in northern Syria. Following an initial U.S.-brokered ceasefire, Turkish and Russian authorities have agreed to a more permanent status, sharing control of Syria's northern border. Turkish and Russian forces are not only occupying Kurdish-

held areas but also further expanding Russia's role in Syria and committing war crimes against Kurdish civilians, according to the United Nations.

Russia has already occupied U.S. military camps in the region, and Turkish President Erdogan's deepening relationship with Vladimir Putin, as evidenced by Turkey's S-400 missile system, only undercuts U.S. influence in Syria, all but guaranteeing that U.S. interests will not be represented in a future Syrian political settlement.

President Trump's decision serves to benefit Vladimir Putin. Prior to the withdrawal, the United States was Russia's only military equal in Syria, but Russia is now the primary—and, according to some analysts, the sole—power broker in Syria.

In the vacuum left by the United States, Putin will be able to return control of the country to Bashar al-Assad. Also, he will be able to exercise increased control over Turkey, a NATO ally, and also return to its Cold War-era dominance—the Russians, that is—in the Middle East.

I am holding an article, which, from a distance, you can't see the headline. It is from the Washington Post, dated October 16 of this year. It says that in Ukraine and Syria, Trump's moves are helping Putin. It was written by Anne Gearan. Anne Gearan is a respected reporter on national security issues and foreign policy. This article—and I will not go through all of it—catalogs how the Trump administration has allowed Russia to assert dominance globally. I mentioned the headline, but here is some of the text of the article. The first few paragraphs of the article by Anne Gearan say as follows:

Whether by chance or by design, the foreign policy crises involving Syria and Ukraine that have enveloped the White House have a common element. In each case, President Trump has taken action that has had the effect of helping the authoritarian leader of Russia.

Russian forces are now operating between the Turkish and Syrian militaries, helping to fulfill Moscow's main aim of shoring up its alliance with Syria and the Russian military port housed there—an outcome Russian President Vladimir Putin has sought for years.

Trump's actions in Syria and Ukraine add to the list of policy moves and public statements that have boosted Russia during his presidency, whether that was their central purpose or not, confounding critics who have warned that he has taken—

She is referring to our President here—

too soft a stance toward a nation led by a strongman hostile to the United States.

Anne Gearan goes on to describe the long list of President Trump's actions that demonstrate the strange deference to Russia, which has ultimately compromised the furtherance of U.S. national security interests in Syria and beyond.

I also want to make reference to another recent news article. The headline at the top of this New York Times article, dated Sunday, October 13 of this

year, reads: “12 Hours. 4 Syrian Hospitals Bombed.” It reads: “12 Hours. 4 Syrian Hospitals Bombed.”

The next page, which is full of more detail and an illustration, gives you their conclusion: “Evidence Reveals One Culprit: Russia.” In pertinent part, here is what this article says: “The Russian Air Force has repeatedly bombed hospitals in Syria in order to crush the last pockets of resistance to President Bashar al-Assad.”

The New York Times published evidence that the Russians bombed four Syrian hospitals in a 12-hour period in May of this year. During the assault, the Kafr Nabl Surgical Hospital in Idlib Province was struck four times in 30 minutes. This is a hospital. Dozens of hospitals and clinics in Idlib have been struck since, and Syrian medical workers live in constant fear of the next strike.

I don’t think I even have to say what I am about to say, but it bears repeating for the record. Such atrocities go beyond the pale of violating the Geneva Conventions and the laws of war. They demonstrate just how ruthless and brutal Putin and his regime have been and the lengths to which they will go to assert Russia’s influence in the Middle East.

Under this administration, we have seen U.S. leadership erode and multilateral institutions deteriorate to the point where the United Nations is powerless in holding Russia accountable for these atrocities. As to holding Mr. Putin accountable, this administration has made us less safe.

Let me move to the Kurds. The Syrian Democratic Forces, led by the Kurdish YPG, have been steadfast U.S. partners in counterterrorism operations, as well as in other ways in the Middle East.

As the United States provided training, intelligence, and aerial support, some 11,000 Kurdish fighters died in the fight against ISIS—11,000 Kurdish fighters. Without their courage, sacrifice, partnership, and protection, the United States would have either lost the fight against ISIS—and the coalition would have lost—or won it at a major cost to the lives of U.S. service-members and their families.

The Trump administration has abandoned the Kurds. Since the President radically departed from a longstanding strategy in the fight against ISIS, we have seen mass displacement. We have also seen, of course, Russian incursion and the initial signs of an ISIS resurgence in the region.

According to the United Nations, 160,000 people have been displaced, including 70,000 children. Kurdish authorities state that at least 785 persons affiliated with ISIS have escaped.

I ask a couple of basic questions: How exactly does allowing the conditions for humanitarian catastrophe and the escape of sworn enemies of the United States make America safe? How does unilaterally making decisions without consulting U.S. national security lead-

ers and experts, or also our allies who have joined us in the global coalition to fight ISIS, build credibility for U.S. leadership around the world? How do we expect to protect the interests of our ally Israel from threats along the Syrian border? And, finally, how do we justify such a rapid departure in U.S. policy to promote and protect democracy in the Middle East?

DEATH OF ABU BAKR AL-BAGHDADI

Mr. President, let me move to the al-Baghdadi killing.

We know that on October 27, just weeks after the U.S. withdrawal, the President announced that U.S. Special Forces, those brave fighters who are the best in the world, with support from the U.S. intelligence forces, conducted a raid and confirmed the death of ISIS leader al-Baghdadi.

The President’s failure to credit our Kurdish allies, who provided critical intelligence that led to a successful U.S. operation, is further evidence of his total abandonment of the Kurds and the lack of appreciation for the critical role the Kurds have played in promoting U.S. interests in Syria.

Let us also not forget that the President credited Russia’s cooperation in opening Russian-controlled airspace to U.S. aircraft conducting the raid. He credited them before—before—he credited the U.S. Special Forces who laid down their lives for the mission. I think he could have at least, at a minimum, switched the order there, and he should also have credited the Kurds, as I have stated.

While al-Baghdadi’s death is certainly a major victory for our counterterrorism efforts, the fight against ISIS is far from over. I am deeply troubled—and I know a lot of Members of the Senate in both parties are deeply troubled—by the President’s and, frankly, some of my colleagues’ assertions that our withdrawal from Syria was justified.

The U.S. Defense Department estimates that 10,000 to 15,000 ISIS fighters are working to reconstitute themselves as a major terrorist threat after U.S. withdrawal from Syria.

Let us be clear. Killing al-Baghdadi is not the end of ISIS and certainly not the end of the U.S. commitment to eliminating ISIS.

The decision-making process leading up to U.S. withdrawal carried the hallmarks of chaos and recklessness that are so indicative of how this administration operates when it comes to these issues. Two weeks ago, the U.S. Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, Jim Jeffrey, testified that he was neither consulted nor made aware of the President’s intent to green-light Turkey’s planned offensive but was, rather, briefed afterward.

Special Envoy Jeffrey has decades of experience in the region, and the lack of consultation ahead of this major foreign policy decision shows the lack of deference this administration gives to seasoned career national security officials. Weeks after the withdrawal, Sec-

retary of Defense Esper; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Milley; Special Envoy Jeffrey; the CENTCOM commander, General McKenzie; and the intel community briefed the Senate regarding the events of the last several weeks. It is unacceptable that it took over 3 weeks for Congress to receive a briefing on such a critical change in U.S. foreign policy.

I will speak for myself, but I left that briefing with genuine concern. There is still, in my judgment, no definitive consensus strategy—weeks after withdrawal—to prevent the resurgence of ISIS and ensure the promotion of U.S. national security interests in the region.

This is why Congress must reclaim its authority to conduct oversight over this administration’s unilateral policy-making, which only makes America less safe. The administration’s failure to consult with Congress on its plans in Syria, its support for Saudi Arabia’s campaign in Yemen, and its incendiary actions toward Iran over the last year alone—all of that raises the need for Congress to debate and to vote on an updated authorization for the use of military force, and I will say authorizations, plural. We likely need more than one.

If the President is truly serious about ending U.S. involvement in “endless wars,” he should work with the Congress to repeal the 2001 AUMF, which is out of date, and pass an updated authorization that addresses the threats we face today. We must not only ensure that Congress asserts its constitutionally enabled war-making authority but also that we thoroughly consider the consequences before sending brave men and women into harm’s way.

The President’s plan to secure oilfields in northeastern Syria is misguided and obtuse. Experts agree that many of these oilfields are already under Kurdish control, and the Kurds have not asked for U.S. support in protecting them. Leaving behind a “small” U.S. force would likely be an ineffective and insufficient gesture after our radical betrayal of Kurdish allies.

This administration must formulate a coherent strategy for a path forward in Syria that goes beyond oilfields and encompasses civilian protection, humanitarian support, and the prevention of the resurgence of ISIS.

Looking ahead, the U.S. goals must focus on three elements: No. 1, preventing the resurgence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria; No. 2, holding Turkey accountable for its war crimes and human rights violations against the Kurds; and No. 3, accomplishing both by keeping the 64-nation Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS intact.

Our allies are the keys to any hope of success here. However, working with allies and coalition partners is exceedingly more difficult due to the President’s reckless actions of late and his constant denigration of U.S. allies.