

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.

Ambassador Jeffrey and former Special Envoy Brett McGurk's efforts to build and maintain the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS are the primary reason we were able to convene allies, build and leverage relationships on the ground, and mobilize resources to reclaim territory from ISIS through Iraq and Syria.

Finally, I reiterate my call on the majority leader to allow for a debate and a vote on an updated authorization for the use of military force—and I would say that again, plural—for Iraq and also for Afghanistan. I also call upon the administration to present a clear path forward for U.S. engagement with Syria and Iran.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an article from the New York Times International, dated October 13, 2019.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the New York Times, Oct. 13, 2019]
12 HOURS. 4 SYRIAN HOSPITALS BOMBED. ONE CULPRIT: RUSSIA.

(By Evan Hill and Christiaan Triebert)

The Russian Air Force has repeatedly bombed hospitals in Syria in order to crush the last pockets of resistance to President Bashar al-Assad, according to an investigation by The New York Times.

An analysis of previously unpublished Russian Air Force radio recordings, plane spotter logs and witness accounts allowed The Times to trace bombings of four hospitals in just 12 hours in May and tie Russian pilots to each one.

The 12-hour period beginning on May 5 represents a small slice of the air war in Syria, but it is a microcosm of Russia's four-year military intervention in Syria's civil war. A new front in the conflict opened this week, when Turkish forces crossed the border as part of a campaign against a Kurdish-led militia.

Russia has long been accused of carrying out systematic attacks against hospitals and clinics in rebel-held areas as part of a strategy to help Mr. Assad secure victory in the eight-year-old war.

Physicians for Human Rights, an advocacy group that tracks attacks on medical workers in Syria, has documented at least 583 such attacks since 2011, 266 of them since Russia intervened in September 2015. At least 916 medical workers have been killed since 2011.

The Times assembled a large body of evidence to analyze the hospital bombings on May 5 and 6.

Social media posts from Syria, interviews with witnesses, and records from charities that supported the four hospitals provided the approximate time of each strike. The Times obtained logs kept by flight spotters on the ground who warn civilians about incoming airstrikes and crosschecked the time of each strike to confirm that Russian warplanes were overhead. We then listened to and deciphered thousands of Russian Air Force radio transmissions, which recorded months' worth of pilot activities in the skies above northwestern Syria. The recordings were provided to The Times by a network of observers who insisted on anonymity for their safety.

The spotter logs from May 5 and 6 put Russian pilots above each hospital at the time they were struck, and the Air Force audio recordings from that day feature Russian pilots confirming each bombing. Videos ob-

tained from witnesses and verified by The Times confirmed three of the strikes.

Recklessly or intentionally bombing hospitals is a war crime, but proving culpability amid a complex civil war is extremely difficult, and until now, Syrian medical workers and human rights groups lacked proof.

Russia's position as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council has shielded it from scrutiny and made United Nations agencies reluctant to accuse the Russian Air Force of responsibility.

"The attacks on health in Syria, as well as the indiscriminate bombing of civilian facilities, are definitely war crimes, and they should be prosecuted at the level of the International Criminal Court in The Hague," said Susannah Sirkin, director of policy at Physicians for Human Rights. But Russia and China "shamefully" vetoed a Security Council resolution that would have referred those and other crimes in Syria to the court, she said.

The Russian government did not directly respond to questions about the four hospital bombings. Instead, a Foreign Ministry spokesman pointed to past statements saying that the Russian Air Force carries out precision strikes only on "accurately researched targets."

The United Nations secretary general, António Guterres, opened an investigation into the hospital bombings in August. The investigation, still going on, is meant in part to determine why hospitals that voluntarily added their locations to a United Nations-sponsored deconfliction list, which was provided to Russia and other combatants to prevent them from being attacked, nevertheless came under attack.

Syrian health care workers said they believed that the United Nations list actually became a target menu for the Russian and Syrian air forces.

Stéphane Dujarric, a spokesman for the secretary general, said in September that the investigation—an internal board of inquiry—would not produce a public report or identify "legal responsibility." Vassily Nebenzia, the Russian permanent representative to the United Nations, cast doubt on the process shortly after it was announced, saying he hoped the inquiry would not investigate perpetrators but rather what he said was the United Nations' use of false information in its deconfliction process.

From April 29 to mid-September, as Russian and Syrian government forces assaulted the last rebel pocket in the northwest, 54 hospitals and clinics in opposition territory were attacked, the United Nations human rights office said. At least seven had tried to protect themselves by adding their location to the deconfliction list, according to the World Health Organization.

On May 5 and 6, Russia attacked four. All were on the list.

The first was Nabab al Hayat Surgical Hospital, a major underground trauma center in southern Idlib Province serving about 200,000 people. The hospital performed on average around 500 operations and saw more than 5,000 patients a month, according to Syria Relief and Development, the United States-based charity that supported it.

Nabab al Hayat had been attacked three times since it opened in 2013 and had recently relocated to an underground complex on agricultural land, hoping to be protected from airstrikes.

At 2:32 p.m. on May 5, a Russian ground control officer can be heard in an Air Force transmission providing a pilot with a longitude and latitude that correspond to Nabab al Hayat's exact location.

At 2:38 p.m., the pilot reports that he can see the target and has the "correction," code for locking the target on a screen in his

cockpit. Ground control responds with the green light for the strike, saying, "Three sevens."

At the same moment, a flight spotter on the ground logs a Russian jet circling in the area.

At 2:40 p.m., the same time the charity said that Nabab al Hayat was struck, the pilot confirms the release of his weapons, saying, "Worked it." Seconds later, local journalists filming the hospital in anticipation of an attack record three precision bombs penetrating the roof of the hospital and blowing it out from the inside in geysers of dirt and concrete.

The staff of Nabab al Hayat had evacuated three days earlier after receiving warnings and anticipating a bombing, but Kafr Nabl Surgical Hospital, three miles northwest, was not as lucky.

A doctor who worked there said that the hospital was struck four times, beginning at 5:30 p.m. The strikes landed about five minutes apart, without warning, he said, killing a man who was standing outside and forcing patients and members of the medical staff to use oxygen tanks to breathe through the choking dust.

A spotter logged a Russian jet circling above at the time of the strike, and in another Russian Air Force transmission, a pilot reports that he has "worked" his target at 5:30 p.m., the time of the strike. He then reports three more strikes, each about five minutes apart, matching the doctor's chronology.

Russian pilots bombed two other hospitals in the same 12-hour span: Kafr Zita Cave Hospital and Al Amal Orthopedic Hospital. In both cases, spotters recorded Russian Air Force jets in the skies at the time of the strike, and Russian pilots can be heard in radio transmissions "working" their targets at the times the strikes were reported.

Since May 5, at least two dozen hospitals and clinics in the rebel-held northwest have been hit by airstrikes. Syrian medical workers said they expected hospital bombings to continue, given the inability of the United Nations and other countries to find a way to hold Russia to account.

"The argument by the Russians or the regime is always that hospitals are run by terrorists," said Nabab al Hayat's head nurse, who asked to remain anonymous because he feared being targeted. "Is it really possible that all the people are terrorists?"

"The truth is that after hospitals are hit, and in areas like this where there is just one hospital, our houses have become hospitals."

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I am going to turn to another matter of importance for U.S. national security, and that is climate change. Climate change is the most significant challenge our world faces right now, transcending borders and affecting every aspect of our lives.

Climate change is a threat to human life. It is caused by human activity, and we must confront it. Our Nation has a moral imperative to protect the Earth, God's creation, and the people living on that Earth, particularly children whose health and well-being will be affected—I would say adversely affected—by climate change in incomprehensible ways.

For far too long we have discussed climate change, food insecurity, and political stability in separate silos. However, these issues are inextricably