

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An analysis of previously unpublished Russian Air Force radio recordings, plane spotter logs and witness accounts allowed The Times to trace bombings of four hospitals in just 12 hours in May and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

Nabad 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 Nabad 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 Nabad 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 Nabad 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 Nabad 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

linked, and we must apply an integrated approach to ensuring that global food supply keeps pace with population growth amidst a continuing trend of climate change in a way that promotes stable, transparent democratic societies around the world.

The late Senator Dick Lugar from the State of Indiana asked me to work with him to introduce the Global Food Security Act way back in the 2007–2008 time period. At that time, Senator Lugar wanted to try to pass legislation that would authorize USAID's Feed the Future Program. Senator JOHNNY ISAKSON was a steadfast partner in actually passing the Global Food Security Act. We passed that legislation years after Senator Lugar and I were starting the work.

The Global Food Security Act is empowering the USAID to develop a more integrated, interagency approach to food security across agricultural value chains and expanding farmers' access to local and international markets through the Feed the Future Program.

We, as a body, must continue to advocate for the next generation of agricultural policy: Promote sustainable agriculture that will be able to keep pace with growing global demand, population growth, and climate change.

As a member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, I am increasingly concerned about our ability to keep pace with agricultural production as global population grows. The global population is expected to grow from 7.7 billion to 10 billion by 2050, and with that, demand for meat and dairy could increase between 59 and 98 percent, according to Columbia University's Earth Institute.

The impact of climate change on food systems across the globe will be almost incomprehensible, but perhaps nowhere larger than Sub-Saharan Africa. Now, 90 percent of the region's cropland, meaning Sub-Saharan Africa—90 percent of that region's cropland is expected to see yield losses of up to 40 percent—90 percent seeing yield losses of up to 40 percent.

We face some of the same challenges here at home, and we are working to help farmers adapt to these pressures while also being part of the solution through climate-friendly agricultural policies.

While we have made advances in recent decades, we still have high rates of undernourishment and child stunting around the world. The number of chronically hungry people around the world has increased today to 821 million people, representing one out of every nine people on the planet, many of whom are women and children. I will say that again. The number of chronically hungry people around the world has increased to one in every nine people on the planet.

The number of children under 5 affected by stunting has decreased by 10 percent in the past 6 years. That is a little bit of good news, but 149 million children are still stunted. This pace is

too slow to meet our United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to cut stunting in half by 2030—just 11 years away.

Our own intelligence community has linked global food insecurity to instability, which can lead to a rise in violent extremism and international crime that will affect the United States. In January 2014, the worldwide threat assessment of the U.S. intelligence community reported that “lack of adequate food will be a destabilizing factor in countries important to [U.S.] national security.”

The “2010 Quadrennial Defense Review” marked a turning point in how the United States grappled with the issue of climate change. For the first time, in 2010, climate change was cited as a “threat multiplier” by the Department of Defense, noting “the impacts of climate change may increase the frequency, scale, and complexity of future missions.”

From Syria to Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, but also in urban upheaval in Sudan, we see the impacts of environmental stress and high food prices on political stability in regions vital to U.S. national security interests.

This brings me to political stability. According to the U.S. Global Food Security Strategy, food insecurity exacerbated by climate change will contribute to “social disruptions and political instability. . . . Projections indicate that more than two-thirds of the world's poor could be living in fragile countries, where state-society relations are already strained, by 2030.”

When societies break down because governments are unable to provide resilient infrastructure against climate events, as well as protect local markets from vulnerabilities due to climate events, trust in institutions erodes and nations are ripe for conflict. If we permit climate change to proceed without aggressive action, investment, and coordination with partners around the world, we are not only allowing millions around the world to suffer extreme hunger resulting from climate-related disasters, but we are also allowing conditions for the rise of extremism and the breakdown of democratic institutions to foment unchecked.

For millions of people across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, climate change means more frequent and intense floods, droughts, and storms, accounting each year for up to 90 percent of all natural disasters. These disasters can quickly spiral into full-blown food and nutrition crises.

I will wrap up with this: As we look to the hard work of congressional oversight over the Feed the Future Program, I am pleased that USAID has already begun to bridge its emergency humanitarian programming with its longer term development efforts to build resilience for communities affected by conflict and climate change.

The United States cannot do this alone. We need to work together on a global scale not only to reduce green-

house gas emissions but also to mitigate economic risk and ensure that agricultural and food supply chains can withstand climate events. This administration's decision to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement was a huge blow to U.S. leadership in climate policy. I and many Members of Congress and individuals throughout the U.S. Government, along with our State and local government partners, as well as leaders in the business community across the United States, will continue to fight for policies that bring the United States in line with its Paris goals, ensuring we are doing our part to address this global threat to human life.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

JUDICIAL CONFIRMATIONS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor to talk about the work we have been doing in the Senate this week and the work we have been doing in the Senate the last 3 years, and that is the work of confirming a record number of judicial nominees.

I want to specifically focus on our record on circuit court judges. As you know, these are the courts just one layer below the Supreme Court, and their decisions have enormous consequences for the country. We have confirmed 45 highly qualified circuit court judges. We have done it across all 12 appeals courts nationwide. These judges will decide 99 percent of the Federal cases in America.

President Trump has nominated each of these judges. Senate Republicans confirmed each of these judges. These judges now hold a full one-quarter—one out of every four—circuit court seats in America. All of these judges have lifetime appointments. These circuit court judges are ruling right now, and they are doing it on major cases all across the country.

How are they making a difference in people's lives? No. 1, by protecting Americans' constitutional rights, by upholding our individual freedoms, by putting a check on government power, and above all, these judges are applying the law as written, not legislating from the bench.

Based on the 45 circuit court judges we have seated and the judges we will continue to seat, Senate Republicans have delivered conservative judges who will serve our Nation for decades to come.

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

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

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