

next is not predetermined. My fear—my belief—is that last week's killing of Qasem Soleimani will end up fitting into this pattern. But we have serious choices to make in this body, and we can choose to get off this path of escalation and make decisions that correct this President's recklessness and keep America safe. I hope we step up to that challenge.

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. BLUNT. 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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. BLUNT. Mr. President, Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force, was killed by U.S. forces last week. That has already been well discussed and well understood. The failing regime in Iran has done everything it could, between his death and right now, to make the most of it, to make him a martyr to the cause of terrorism.

I think we should all understand that the cause of terrorism was his cause. He is not a general in any traditional sense of what that would mean. He has been described a number of different ways. He has been referred to as Iran's top general. Don't think for a minute that means anything like almost any other country's top general.

One newspaper called him Iran's "most revered military leader." That might be true, but remember Iran's purpose as a State is to encourage terrorism all over the world.

I heard one news broadcast where he was referred to as "an irreplaceable figurehead," though they went on to explain that he was a significant person. There apparently are no editors anymore because the term "figurehead" doesn't mean what they were suggesting. If they meant he was an irreplaceable figure, I hope that he is. I think he is hard to replace, and I hope he is hard to replace. I would like to think that in many ways he will not be able to be replaced, but that doesn't mean he deserves our sympathy, respect, or our grief.

He was, in fact, a bad person. He spent his career largely outside the boundaries of what any civilized nation would consider a military context. He led Iran's terrorism agenda around the world.

Iran funded and provided weapons to the Shia militias in Iraq. They provided arms depots and military forces to the Assad regime in Syria. They supported Hezbollah terrorists in Lebanon. They provided advanced weapons to the Houthi rebels in Yemen. Hundreds of U.S. military personnel in Iraq were either killed or injured by the IED attacks encouraged and funded by Iran in Iraq. That is what the Soleimani agenda was all about.

Over this past year, Iran has continued its campaign of aggression against

the United States and our allies. In almost every report of these activities, Soleimani was one of the persons mentioned as, again, structuring, masterminding, encouraging, or taking credit for these things as they happened in some cases and denying responsibility in others for activities for which he and Iran were responsible.

Last June, Iran shot down a U.S. intelligence drone flying in international space. In July, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps captured a British-flagged commercial vessel in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran was behind the attack on Saudi oilfields last September using drones and cruise missiles. Iran was behind an earlier attack on a Saudi airport used by civilians. The Quds Force also launched a crackdown on Iranian citizens who protested oil prices and are vigorously seeking out others who are complaining about the failing economy in Iran's failing system.

Someone has already been named to replace Soleimani as the head of the Quds Force, but hopefully no one really can fully replace him.

I am not at all sympathetic to the idea that this action to eliminate this individual somehow came out of the blue. I think the President has been presented multiple times with this option as one of the things we could do if we wanted to send the clearest possible message to Iran. The President was criticized last year because when going down the list of things I mentioned, he was hesitant to act—until last week. The same exact critics in many cases decided, after a year of thinking what would be the best response, that when the President did act it was suddenly a hasty action. They went from calling his actions hesitant to calling this hasty, looking for a way to criticize the President.

The President took this action after an American contractor was killed by forces associated with Iran and Soleimani, after the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad was attacked and weapons were used to get into the building.

There have even been some suggestions that we shouldn't have done this because we should be afraid of how Iran will react. We do have to be thinking about how Iran would react. We need to be thinking about what their next aggressive act might be. It would not be their first aggressive act, and I have already gone down a pretty long list that others can expand upon of the aggressive acts Iran has done up until the last few days.

We do have to be thinking about what is an appropriate response, but maybe it is now time for Iran to be thinking about what our next response may be to their next aggression. The aggressive list is long, the response that the U.S. Government took was significant, but we can't fail to act decisively just because it might upset our terrorist enemies. We can't fail to act decisively just because it might upset the No. 1 state sponsor of terrorism, Iraq.

Soleimani was not a high-ranking military official in any acceptable military structure. If your idea of a leading general is a general who leads in terrorist efforts, I think you have the wrong idea of what a military leader is supposed to do.

Soleimani was not a high-ranking government official in any job that a responsible government would have. Soleimani was the mastermind of terrorist activities of the No. 1 state sponsor of terrorism in the world today. Soleimani has been eliminated and hopefully will be impossible to fully replace.

I would say, in response to that decision, good job to the U.S. forces that executed the strike, and good job, Mr. President, in being willing to make the call. A bad person and a determined enemy of freedom and democracy in the United States of America has been eliminated. It is time for the Iranians to be thinking about what our next action might be instead of quietly and vigorously planning on what their next action might be.

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

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

IMPEACHMENT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, many of us here in the Senate thought we would be opening the new year with an impeachment trial, but that is not what is happening this week because the Senate is still waiting—waiting for Speaker PELOSI to actually send over the Articles of Impeachment.

Democrats rushed impeachment through the House, throwing fairness and due process to the winds in their haste to impeach the President, but now they are apparently content to just sit on the Articles of Impeachment for the foreseeable future. If Democrats really believe that this impeachment is a serious matter, that there is literally a crime spree in progress, as they have claimed, they would have already sent over the articles. The truth is, Democrats' impeachment efforts, which basically started before the President had even taken the oath of office, have been politically motivated from the start. Democrats thought they could damage the President politically by rushing to impeach him, and now they think they can damage the President politically by stalling a trial.

Speaker PELOSI is also attempting to force the Senate to conduct the trial she would like it to conduct in hopes of getting the outcome she would prefer—demonstrating once again the fundamentally political nature of the Democrats' impeachment quest. Here in the Senate, we will continue working on the business of governing until

the Speaker decides she is ready to stop playing games.

IRAN

Mr. President, on Friday, we learned that Iranian General Qasem Soleimani had been killed in a U.S. airstrike. Iran's terrorist activities throughout the Middle East are well known. Iran is a key backer of Hamas and Hezbollah and has fomented conflict throughout the entire Middle East—escalating sectarian conflict in Iraq, fueling civil war in Yemen, and supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's brutal regime.

At the end of December, the Iran-backed militia Kataib Hezbollah, or KH, as they are called, fired more than 30 rockets at an Iraqi military base, killing an American contractor and wounding 4 U.S. troops. Days later, Iran-backed protesters stormed the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, conducting a 2-day siege of the Embassy before withdrawing—although not without setting fire to parts of the Embassy's exterior.

The list of Iranian terror activities is long, and at the center of all these activities has been General Qasem Soleimani. As head of the Quds Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, General Soleimani has been masterminding Iran's terrorist activities for two decades. Iran has been linked to one in six military deaths in Iraq, notably through the IEDs that have become so emblematic of the War on Terror. This was Soleimani's work. He is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Americans and thousands of innocent civilians throughout the Middle East. It is a good thing that his reign of terror is over.

While I hope we can all agree that Soleimani was a just target, there are naturally questions about the timing of the strike and what options were laid before President Trump. The Senate will be briefed tomorrow, and I hope my colleagues and I will be given a clear intelligence picture of the imminent and significant threat Secretary of State Pompeo and other administration officials have described.

Soleimani's death provides Iran with an opportunity to change course and to rethink its participation in terrorist activities throughout the Middle East and its aggression against the United States. Unfortunately, Iran doesn't seem ready to take that opportunity, and there are rightfully concerns about how Iran might retaliate for Soleimani's death.

Iran has vowed severe revenge, but I hope Iran's leaders recognize that the United States will not tolerate Iran's aggressions. The United States is obviously closely monitoring any Iranian response or escalation, from attempted cyber attacks to threats against U.S. troops or citizens or our allies. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Milley, has cautioned that there remains a significant risk, and we have seen the Department of Defense and the State Department adjust their postures accordingly.

As I said, with Soleimani's removal, Iran has the opportunity to change

course. In both Iran and Iraq, we have seen protests bravely displaying the desire for a new way forward and, in the case of Iraq, for freedom from Iran's malign influence. The path to that new day is a difficult one. Soleimani's decades of work building terrorist networks will not easily be undone, and his replacement has already been named and has vowed revenge.

In addition, under pressure from Iran, Iraq's Parliament advanced a nonbinding resolution calling for the removal of U.S. troops from Iraq. I hope that cooler heads will prevail in Iraq and that we can come to an agreement that upholds our mutual security interests and is beneficial to both the United States and to the people of Iraq. We have invested a lot in regional security efforts that we should see through. As we know all too well from the rise of ISIS, the consequences of leaving a power vacuum can be dire. I hope that power vacuum will not be resurrected as the United States suspends counter-ISIS operations in order to defend our installations.

The world may enjoy a degree of closure with the killing of Qasem Soleimani. Citizens of the Middle East who suffered at the hand of Soleimani's terror may have hope for a safer future, but this will require the Iranian regime to recognize the opportunity it now has to rid itself of Soleimani's agenda and chart a new course.

Iran's leadership knows full well the consequences of maintaining its vendetta against America, our allies, and those who seek to live in peace and freedom. It got a preview of our military and intelligence capabilities last week. This is not a call for escalation but a frank acknowledgment that the United States will stand resolutely against those who threaten American lives.

While the initial reaction from Iran has not been promising, I hope General Soleimani's death will encourage Iran to think carefully before it proceeds any further on its path of terror. I look forward to talking with the Defense Secretary, the CIA Director, and others tomorrow about what we need to do to minimize the threat of retaliation and to keep Americans and our allies safe. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The 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. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF JOVITA CARRANZA

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I am very happy that our first votes, not only of the session but of this decade, are going to be focused on supporting small businesses.

In America, we tend to speak about businesses with a sense of reverence that I think is absent in other coun-

tries, and there is good reason for that. So many of the great companies in this Nation started out as small businesses, and some of the greatest companies in America today are small businesses. We also have just under 60 million individuals who are employed by over 30 million small businesses throughout the country.

The Small Business Administration can play a very important role in our success and in the success of these businesses by providing entrepreneurs and firms with technical assistance and access to capital, so it is critically important for the country.

Today, as we consider the nomination of Jovita Carranza to serve as the SBA Administrator, I thought it was an important point to make. There are some additional points I would like to make.

First of all, the position of Administrator is really crucial to ensuring that the agency is functioning well and is successful. It is also important that the Administrator be someone who is open to and supportive of the need to modernize the Small Business Administration and its many programs.

As we move into this new decade, it is really important that the agency evolve to meet the unique and special needs of the entrepreneurs of today at a time in which we have ever-changing and increasing global and business climate adjustments that are occurring.

I think we sometimes forget that businesses today face a very different environment than we saw 10, 20, or 30 years ago. So as we are aware of these changes, it is important that, as policymakers, we have an obligation to identify the goals that achieve our national interests and that provide for our national defense, that create good jobs for American workers, and then that organize the laws that we propose and the reforms that we propose around those important items of national interest and how to achieve furthering them.

The last time the Small Business Administration was fully reauthorized was 20 years ago, in the year 2000, when just 42 percent of households, for example, had internet access. Nearly everyone was still using dial-up phones for access. It would be another 6 years before the iPhone even existed. Back in 2000, Americans bought fewer than 10,000 hybrid electric cars. From 2000 to 2020, those are the changes we have undergone, and that was the last time the SBA was reauthorized.

By the way, it also happens to be the year when China became a member of the World Trade Organization. I say that because, today, American small businesses—if you think our big businesses face unfair competition, imagine the unprecedented threat in competing against the Chinese Government and its Communist Party's systematic industrial espionage and coercion, its large-scale subsidies for their own industries, and its sweeping obstruction of market access to its own country.