

warned the administration, repeatedly warned the National Security Council, repeatedly warned the State Department as early as the spring of 2021 that the security situation was deteriorating rapidly, that the Taliban was gaining ground rapidly, and that there needed to be an evacuation.

Yet what did the White House do? Well, according to the findings in this report, nothing. Did they plan? No. Did they take action necessary? No. And so on August 26, there was a terrorist explosion at Abbey Gate. We lose those 13 marines. Hundreds of American civilians are left behind in a botched evacuation. And here we are. Yet we are asked to act as if nothing has happened, as if we should just go on, business as usual. Keep the conveyor belt of nominees to this Pentagon running with no votes, no votes on this floor, no debate on this floor; just wave them through; waive regular order; move it right along; nothing to see here. I am not willing to do that. I haven't been willing to do it for over a year.

I hope my colleagues see now, a year on, that I was serious in August of 2021 when I said I would not consent to waiving the rules to send more nominees to this Pentagon until something is done to get answers and, frankly, to change the culture because the truth is, we have a cultural problem in the whole military-industrial complex.

This is an entity, an organization, that has lied to the American people repeatedly over the years. They lied about Vietnam for a decade. They lied about Iraq. They lied about the true state of the war in Afghanistan. And now we are getting the same lies again, to the point that we can't even hold a hearing in public because the White House won't consent to it.

I don't really blame Chairman REED. He can't get witnesses to come testify in public because this White House doesn't want to say another word about what happened at Abbey Gate. We have a word for that. It is called a coverup, and it is time for it to stop.

Listen, much has been said about my blocking nominees. The truth is, I can't block any nominee. All of these nominees can be brought to the floor. They can't even be filibustered. It is just a matter of what the Senate majority leader wants to do. Sadly my side is not in the majority, and we are not going to be for the next 2 years. So if the Senate majority leader sees fit to vote on these nominees, he can at any time. But as to whether or not I will consent to waiving the rules and allowing these nominees to the Pentagon in leadership positions to be confirmed without even a vote—I will not until something changes at the Pentagon, until something is done about what happened at Abbey Gate.

I know that my colleague the chairman is acting in good faith. It is a privilege to serve with him on the committee. I know he is in a tough spot here because he has a White House that doesn't want to give an inch and

doesn't want to say a word. I would just say that I hope, with real oversight coming soon in the House of Representatives, that the Senate will see fit and see its way to doing its part and holding open hearings on this report, on this tragedy, and making sure it does not happen again.

With that, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

Mr. REED. Retaining my time, Mr. President, I disagree, obviously, with the Senator from Missouri.

The Senate Armed Services Committee has had extensive oversight on Afghanistan. The committee actions include seven public and closed hearings regarding the Afghan war, lessons learned, and ongoing regional counterterrorism requirements since the withdrawal last August. Senator HAWLEY had the opportunity to participate in each of these hearings.

The fiscal year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act contained a provision that mandated that the Department of Defense deliver quarterly briefings in both unclassified and classified form on the security situation in Afghanistan and ongoing counterterrorism efforts. The classified briefings have taken place on January 20, April 14, and July 21. The unclassified briefings have taken place on February 14 and April 25. Most recently, on October 19, the committee held unclassified and classified briefings, and Senator HAWLEY has full access to these briefings.

The fiscal year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act also contained a provision, section 1069, which requires the yearly assessment of our "over the horizon" counterterrorism capabilities in Afghanistan. The committee has received the first installment, and this, too, is accessible to all members of the committee.

The fiscal year 2022 NDAA further mandated the establishment of the Afghanistan War Commission, which will spend several years examining all aspects of the 20-year war in depth. Let me emphasize—the 20-year war in depth. All the Commissioners have been appointed. We expect the Commission to commence work in the near term.

I note that Senator HAWLEY indicated that beginning in 2020 there were reports that military leaders were warning of possible complications. That was during the term of President Trump.

I think also one of the issues that has to be looked at is the release of 5,000 Taliban fighters at the direction of President Trump and over the objections of the Afghan Government. Were they at Abbey Gate? Were they the leading forces who were moving in and surrounding Kabul?

This situation requires a long, detailed study. To focus on one event will create headlines but not information or knowledge that we can bring forward. The factors contributing to Abbey Gate

were long in the making, and unless we look at those factors over time, unless we look at the whole operation, I don't think we are going to get the kinds of insights we need.

So I respectfully disagree with Senator HAWLEY's objection, and I hope we can find a way to confirm Ms. JOHNSON.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, if I could just briefly build on the remarks of Chairman REED, never before has such a small number of Senators stood in the way of this large a number of nominees. The impact of this constant effort to hold up nominees to the State Department and the Department of Defense is to compromise the national security of this Nation; to try to rob from this administration, from this President, the ability to govern and to protect this Nation.

I would just remind my colleagues that what comes around goes around. I know right now some Republicans may delight in the President not having any personnel necessary to run Agencies because of this record number of holds that have been put on nominees by the Republican minority. But there will be a Republican President someday. There will be a Republican majority someday. And a handful of Democratic Senators will use the same tactics that are being used today to essentially rob from this administration its right to do the job it was elected to do by the American people, at great risk to American national security.

So my prerogative on this is that we should just change the rules and make it less easy for one Senator to hold up nominees who are supported by 90 to 95 percent of us and make it easier to proceed to a vote on nominees.

The Senator from Missouri wants to vote no on this nominee or others. That is his right, but we should come up with a process by which the entire administration is not ground to a halt by 1 or 2 of 100. We should just decide to do that because today this is hamstringing a Democratic President. But let me guarantee you, it will hamstring a Republican President someday as well.

YEMEN

Mr. President, I come to the floor today to provide remarks in support of Senator SANDERS' resolution that we will consider later today.

I have come to the floor many times to talk about the war in Yemen. I think I first came to the floor during the Obama administration, when very few people even knew there was a civil war in Yemen that the United States was participating in.

But let me just say again what I hope is common knowledge. The war in Yemen has been a national security disaster for the United States. It has now been ongoing for 8 years, and by no metric has this war accrued to the benefit of U.S. national security. Let me just give you a few windows into why this is true.

First and foremost, this is a humanitarian nightmare. The world's worst humanitarian disaster is in Yemen today.

The U.N. says that 66 percent of the country's population—and, by the way, this is not a small country, right; this is a country of 30-plus million people—right now, survive only because of emergency aid. Twenty-three thousand airstrikes have been launched just from 2015 to 2021, killing or injuring 18,000 civilians. Eighteen thousand civilians—10,000 of them children—have been hit, killed, or maimed by airstrikes.

There is a humanitarian nightmare inside Yemen today. That does not accrue to the benefit of the United States' security. Why? Because al-Qaida and ISIS operate inside Yemen; and when there is this kind of misery, when there is this kind of devastation, that is a breeding ground, that is fertile recruitment ground for the terrorist groups that are organizing against the United States and seeking to recruit those who are looking for answers. Al-Qaida, ISIS are growing stronger, and the misery in Yemen is growing deeper. And, at the same time, Iran is growing more influential.

This was not, at the outset, a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia supports the old regime in Yemen, and Iran, which has been partners with the rebel group, the Houthis, that controls the capital, Sana'a, has become more embedded, as time goes on, with the Houthis. As the war lingers, as it persists year to year, Iran becomes more influential, has more power inside Yemen.

So if our interest in the region is to decrease Iran's power, then every year that this war persists, Iran gets more powerful inside Yemen. So if we care about the growth of Sunni terrorist groups, if we care about the growing influence of Iran, if we care about saving people from misery, destitution, and death, then we have to do everything in our power to wind down this war. What benefit is there to us, to the Yemeni people, to the Middle East region for this war to persist year after year after year?

Now, in 2019, we considered a similar resolution. It passed both the House and the Senate, a resolution to end U.S. participation in the Yemen war. It was vetoed by President Trump. We didn't have enough votes to override the veto.

Let's be honest. This is a very different moment than 2019. Why? Because President Biden has pursued a very different policy than President Trump. President Trump backed the Saudis. He, for a long time, refueled Saudi planes that were dropping bombs in Yemen. He sold them massive amounts of weapon. He embedded American forces with Saudi forces to help pick targets.

President Biden ran on a promise to end U.S. support for the war in Yemen, and, by and large, he made good on

that promise. The Biden administration does not sell Saudi Arabia weapons to be used in the Yemen war. They don't refuel the planes midair. They don't help with targeting. They don't help with intelligence.

But Senator SANDERS has correctly identified some lingering lines of cooperation between the United States and the Saudi-led coalition that do continue to help them perpetuate this war, including the work that we do to help maintain the Saudi Air Force.

This is a different moment than 2019, and we should give President Biden credit for pursuing a very different policy. The facts on the ground are different as well. There have been, for long stretches during the Biden administration, ceasefires in Yemen—ceasefires that we did not see during the Trump administration.

The Saudis, to their credit, have been more interested in peace during the Biden administration than they ever were during the Trump administration. That is, I believe, in part because they don't have a blank check from the U.S. regime any longer. In fact, as we stand here today, it is the Houthis that are the primary impediment to peace, not the Saudis. Now, the Saudis' interest in peace and deescalation, it comes and it goes. But today, as we speak, it is, in fact, the Houthis who need to make the commitments necessary to sit at the table and find a path to permanently end the fighting in Yemen and find a way for everyone in Yemen—Houthis included—to be able to live in peace, to have a government that everyone can call their own.

So why support this resolution if President Biden has pulled most all of our support for the war, if the primary barrier to a peaceful solution today is the Houthis? Well, I think it is pretty simple. I think we have seen the impact that we have when we withdraw our blank check. And, I think, so long as there are any lines of effort that the United States is involved in that continue this war, we are weaker as a nation. Practically, we are weaker because, every day this war persists, Iran gets stronger and the potential for Sunni extremist organizing becomes stronger. But we are also just morally weaker because, for us to be a participant in any way, shape, or form in a war with this kind of misery, it really shapes the way that people think about us in the region and around the world.

So I am here to support Senator SANDERS' resolution and urge my colleagues to vote for it, not because I believe that this is the same moment as 2019. It is a different moment. But I think it commands the United States to send a very clear message, and our message is that this war has to end.

The United States should not be involved in this war—not a little, not a lot. This war, every day it persists, makes us less safe and harms our credibility, and the Senate, I would argue, should pass this resolution.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 5244

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, this Friday at midnight, the government will run out of funding. That leaves us with just a few options.

One, we could pass the massive, yet-to-be-drafted, Pelosi-Schumer omnibus spending package, leaving the outgoing Democratic House majority in charge of drafting the bill to fund the Federal Government for the balance of fiscal year 2023, despite the fact that voters sent a clear message this November disapproving of the fiscal direction of our Federal Government.

Two, we could, yet again, pass another short-term stopgap measure that just kicks the can down the road for one more week to allow more backroom negotiations to take place, in secret. To be clear, this accomplishes nothing. It is simply a way to whip up support for another inflated spending package.

So when I say it accomplishes nothing, that is not really true. It is very effective at doing some things.

It marshals very effectively the angst of hundreds of millions of Americans who don't want a government shutdown. A lot of these people depend on the Federal Government remaining open to process—whether it is the paychecks for soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines, or others who have contract with the government or receive payments from the government of one sort or another or otherwise impacted by the Federal Government's inability to operate during a shutdown. They all have something to worry about. They all have reasons to fear a shutdown. And those anxieties end up being transferred onto their elected representatives in the House of Representatives and in the Senate who in turn fear a shutdown for the same reasons and feel the collective weight of those concerns bearing down on them.

But there is a dual threat that takes place here. You see, those who may be coming to the Senate floor in the next day or two to propose exactly this, option 2—that is, to just kick the can down the road for another week, for another 1-week spending measure—will be coming down here, predictably, foreseeably, in the name of avoiding a shutdown.

But make no mistake, when saying that they want to delay spending, they want to delay any shutdown by another week, they are not really saying we don't want the threat of a shutdown. They are saying we want to move the threat of a shutdown, the possibility of a shutdown, closer to Christmas.

Why Christmas? Well, that is when the anxiety of the American people and