

Over the last 12 months, though, we have witnessed heroic strength and fortitude by the Ukrainian forces and civilians. We have seen a series of setbacks by the Russian Army which was once thought to be among the most capable in the world.

As we marked the 1-year anniversary of this war, the big question in everyone's mind is, What comes next? GEN David Petraeus once said the most important question to ask in any conflict is: How does this end? And in this case, we don't have a clear answer. There is no resolution on the horizon, which has caused many people to doubt America's involvement.

Over the last year, our country has made serious investments in a Ukrainian victory in the form of weapons, equipment, training, and humanitarian aid. These contributions have been integral to Ukraine's success so far, but they have not come without cost. There is the financial cost, which is always a big concern—particularly with a \$30-trillion debt—as well as the prospect of a recession as a result of the Federal Reserve's tightening interest rates in order to stave off the impact of inflation.

There is also the impact on our own military readiness. Our weapons stockpiles have dwindled, and the timeline for replenishment is far too lengthy.

I have heard from my constituents back home in Texas who are deeply concerned about what these costs will mean here at home, and I understand exactly where they are coming from.

This is a tough time for American families due to the ravages of inflation and the uncertainty about their economic future. Our own interests must always come first.

The point that keeps getting lost in this war is that a Ukrainian victory is in our national interest. It is important to our security here at home. America's assistance is not a handout. It is not a charity project. And as much as we want to see Ukraine prevail in this war, our financial support is not entirely altruistic.

The United States isn't just investing in Ukrainian victory, we are also putting our resources toward the defeat of Russian aggression. If history has taught us anything, it has taught us that power-hungry dictators do not accept small gains and call it a day. They just keep on pushing. You don't have to go back very far in our history books to find a good example.

In 2005, President Vladimir Putin said that the collapse of the Soviet Empire "was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century." Clearly, he is doing everything he can to try to reconstitute the former Soviet Union.

President Putin has used his time in power to rebuild Russia's military and try to redraw the map of Europe. In 2008, Russia invaded the Nation of Georgia. In 2014, it invaded Ukraine for the first time since the end of the Cold War, taking the Crimea region. Of course, true to form, Putin's appetite

for conquest is not satisfied. If anything, it made him more hungry for power. And the message that we sent by doing nothing in 2005 and 2014 was he could take all he wanted and there would be no consequence. This time, we can't make the same mistake. Putin must understand that Russian aggression will not be tolerated.

The outcome of this war will determine how Putin's quest proceeds in the future. Will he continue to intimidate neighbors in Europe and invade sovereign nations, or will he crawl back to Moscow, tailed tucked between his legs?

The answer to those questions are very important. Despite the fact that American troops are not engaged in this war, that could change in an instant.

If the next chapter of Putin's war includes the invasion of a NATO partner, the United States and our allies will no longer be on the sidelines; we will be part of the starting lineup. Collective defense is at the heart of NATO's founding. Article 5 of that founding treaty makes clear that an attack against one member nation is an attack against all. Suffice it to say, I hope and pray we will never reach the point where the collective defense clause is invoked.

The most effective way to keep American troops out of the line of fire is to help the Ukrainians stop Putin now before his conquest moves even further west.

As though the stakes weren't high enough already, we know it is not just the scope of Putin's power that is at stake here. The rest of the world is watching as well to see how the United States and our NATO allies respond to this power-hungry dictator. If we fail to support the Ukrainians in this pivotal moment, other authoritarian governments will take note. Today, the problem is Russia. Tomorrow, the problem could be the People's Republic of China.

President Xi Jinping has made no secret of his desire to capture Taiwan. He has called it "unification," and he has even offered details about what sort of timeline we might expect. Of course, we found, as with Mr. Putin, when one person is making that decision, that person can make a decision to go at any time. But President Xi says he wants to be ready to unify the People's Republic of China with Taiwan by 2027, just 4 years from now.

There is no question that President Xi is paying close attention to the world's response to Russian aggression. If the United States and its allies respond with passivity, the Chinese Communist Party will expect to be met with the same level of weakness. As a matter of fact, I believe that President Putin was shocked to see the Ukrainians demonstrate their will to resist Russian aggression and that the other democracies in the world have come to its aid, particularly after the embarrassing precipitous withdrawal from

Afghanistan by the Biden administration without even notifying our NATO allies. Of course, we know what happened—the leadership of the Afghan Government was spirited off in an airplane to another country, and the Taliban walked in without a shot being fired. I think after Mr. Putin saw that in Afghanistan, he thought: Well, maybe I could do the same thing in Ukraine.

Well, a passive response to this sort of aggression would risk further instability and hurt the cause of peace, to say the least. And it would inevitably diminish America's leadership position in the global order. That is why the tyrants and the madmen of the world must see the United States and our allies respond with strength. That is the only way to ensure long-term security and stability.

Last spring, like many of our colleagues, I had the opportunity to travel to Ukraine. This time, last May, was with Senator MCCONNELL, the Republican leader; Senator COLLINS; and Senator BARRASSO. We had the pleasure of meeting with President Zelenskyy and affirming America's commitment to a Ukrainian victory.

One year into this war, my resolve has not softened. Our resolve cannot soften either. The United States and our allies must remain steadfast in our support of the Ukrainian people, not just for their sake but for our sake as well.

Through strategic investments, with ample oversight and accountability—those were important—we will continue to shape the outcome of this war by giving the Ukrainian people everything they need in order to prevail. In doing so, we will send a clear message to Russia and China and any other authoritarian dictator that aggression against the sovereign nation will not be ignored.

Again, it is our own national interest that is at stake here. This war cannot end with a Russian victory.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, let me first thank my colleague from Texas. We disagree from time to time, but when we agree, I feel good about it. And today, we do agree, certainly, on the Ukrainian war and the role and responsibility of the United States.

MUNICH SECURITY CONFERENCE

Madam President, the Senator from Texas was in Munich at the security conference. It was such an inspiring get-together. Leaders from all over Europe and from many parts of the world all came together and were virtually unanimous in their opinion that this aggression by Vladimir Putin needed to be stopped and we needed to do everything in our power, either through NATO or other alliances and friendships, to show our solidarity.

I thank the Senator from Texas for his statements.

What a sharp contrast in leadership last week. First, Presidents Biden and

Zelenskyy, together in Kyiv, standing resolutely in the face of Russian aggression.

President Biden went to neighboring Poland, where he told an enthusiastic crowd of thousands:

One year ago, the world was bracing for the fall of Kyiv. . . . I can report: Kyiv stands strong. Kyiv stands proud. It stands tall, and most important, it stands free.

That was a statement by President Biden visiting Poland. He vowed the United States and its allies will never waiver in their support of Ukraine and that NATO will not be divided, and we will not tire. I couldn't agree more with President Biden.

The same sentiments were on display at this Munich security summit that I referenced. Nearly 30 of my Senate colleagues joined us in this international conference. It was a bipartisan show of unity and resolve, with both Senator SCHUMER—the Democrat leader of the Senate—and Senator MCCONNELL—the Republican leader of the Senate—urging sustained determined support for Ukraine against Russian tyranny.

Compare these messages of transatlantic and bipartisan unity to the rambling set of manufactured grievances delivered at nearly the same time by the Russian war criminal, Vladimir Putin. The contrast could not have been starker.

Many Russian officials in attendance at Putin's speech sat stone-faced. Some even dozed off. They may have wondered what kind of nightmare had befallen the Russian people in the pursuit of one man's murderous folly.

Following the Munich Security Conference, Senator JEANNE SHAHEEN, of New Hampshire, and I had the opportunity to visit the former Soviet-dominated countries of Georgia and Romania. Both nations remember Russian tyranny all too well and have spent their decades of independence working to be part of the transatlantic community of democracies.

Georgia suffered most recently at the hands of Russian imperialism when Putin militarily seized 20 percent of the land mass of Georgia, territory still occupied illegally by the Russians today.

Georgia has so much talent and so much potential. The overwhelming majority of the people in that country see their future in Europe and the West. The Georgia military has worked closely with the United States, and we have strong cooperative relations on a wide range of issues.

It is my hope that Georgia will continue its path toward the European Union and eventual NATO membership. That is for the Georgians to decide, but I believe they would be valuable allies of the NATO alliance.

It has some serious issues to resolve, incidentally. Georgia is still facing some political questions, which the world is watching closely, and a few potentially self-inflicted setbacks to avoid, such as the proposed law on disclosure by nongovernmental organiza-

tions—a step, I am afraid, that is backward for a nation aspiring to freedom. But with the right political will and vision, these issues can be overcome in a way that ensures a better and more secure future for the Georgian people.

In the same Black Sea region, Senator SHAHEEN and I visited Romania—my first time—the Eastern European nation already firmly in the EU and NATO. What a NATO ally it is. We stopped at MK Air Base in eastern Romania, where thousands of U.S. soldiers from the legendary 101st Airborne are stationed. They are the U.S. military forces closest to the fight in Ukraine.

Nearby, we could see rows of grain ships departing Ukraine and occupied Crimea only a short distance away. That vital commerce in such a strategic area is a reminder of the importance of advancing Senators SHAHEEN and ROMNEY's bipartisan legislation to establish a U.S.-Black Sea regional strategy, legislation which I have co-sponsored.

Senator SHAHEEN and I had a chance to speak to the brave Americans serving in Romania in defense of NATO. I am proud to say—and I hope my colleague hears this too, and I am sure she will—from the home State of Illinois, we had soldiers from Danville, Forest Park, Chicago Ridge, and even Red Bud, IL—downstate—and many more. But we got to meet and have lunch with those soldiers.

We also had the chance to speak with Romanian Prime Minister Ciuca, who was clear-eyed both on the threat of Russian aggression and Romania's proud role in the larger battle. He also understood the threat Russia poses to the neighboring democracy of Moldova, where Russia already occupies some of their territory. Because of this, President Biden also met with Moldovan President Sandu while in Poland and reaffirmed strong U.S. support for her country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which I also want to reiterate here on the Senate floor.

Many of my colleagues here today know that my mother left as a little girl from Russian-occupied Lithuania many years ago. She barely would recognize today's vibrant and free member of the EU and NATO from the country she left behind. Later this year, Lithuania will host a historic NATO summit, by which time I hope we have added Finland and Sweden to the alliance.

That thriving, peaceful, democratic future is what the Ukrainian people are still fighting for and what we must continue to support to make sure that Ukraine is secure in the future.

MOBILITY LEGISLATION

Madam President, I would like to start today by sharing a story about the value of U.S. foreign assistance.

As my colleagues in the Senate know, U.S. foreign assistance makes up less than 1 percent of the Federal budget. And yet, it can yield millions in returns—both financially and in lives

saved—by making our world safer, healthier, and more stable. It also reflects our values as Americans. Just look at the immediate offer of assistance to Turkey following its recent catastrophic earthquake. That was the right thing to do.

Sometimes, even the simplest of tools can make all the difference: mosquito nets, paste made from peanuts, and even bicycles. One NGO based in Chicago, IL, World Bicycle Relief, has distributed more than 600,000 bicycles around the world as of last year. These bicycles have helped girls in Malawi get to and from school safely, aid workers in Colombia distribute food and clean water during the COVID-19 pandemic, and farmers in Zambia make milk deliveries.

Stories like these are common around the world, showing the value of a simple, relatively inexpensive, "green," and easy-to-repair means of mobility that helps meet important development objectives. I have seen myself how a bicycle ambulance in rural Tanzania can change lives, and not long ago my staff saw World Bicycle Relief's efforts in Kenya, where nearly 50,000 sustainable rugged bicycles have been provided. These bikes are uniquely designed for their local environments. Community members are trained to maintain them with minimal and locally sourced parts, keeping them sustainable and creating jobs.

Since 2019, I have worked through the Appropriations Committee to push USAID to invest in bicycles and study how to make the programs locally sustainable. USAID has used these lessons and opportunities with increasing success, thanks to the work of so many dedicated groups around the world, including World Bicycle Relief.

This month, I introduced legislation with Representative BLUMENAUER in the House that will codify these important efforts and formalize the creation of a mobility program within USAID's Office of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. I look forward to seeing this bill enacted one day, to help lock in the incredible progress that can be made with even small investments and the simplest of tools, such as a bicycle.

I yield the floor.
The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). The Senator from Illinois.

REMEMBERING JOSEPH LEMENS II

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Madam President, I come to the floor today to honor my friend CWO5 Joseph Lemens II, who we lost suddenly in November.

Joe worked as hard as he laughed. He was full of energy and empty of ego. In many ways, he was the epitome of what a "Soldier," with a capital "S," should be.

He was dedicated to service—service to his most beloved and to those with whom he was barely acquainted, service to his dearest neighbors in Illinois and to total strangers throughout his four deployments to the Middle East.

Joe first enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves when he was just 17 years old