

will use that fear because it believes it will drive us from the Middle East, just as we were driven from Afghanistan.

It was reasonable to hope that the eruption of proxy violence against American forces in the wake of the October 7 massacre in Israel would convince the Biden administration to start seriously exercising American strength. It was reasonable to hope that a global superpower might finally begin to act like one. That hasn't happened yet, but perhaps the gut-wrenching tragedy of American casualties will finally wake this administration from its delusional approach to Iran.

Yesterday, the Secretary of Defense echoed President Biden's hollow assurance from earlier this month, insisting that the administration "will not tolerate attacks on U.S. forces, and we will take all necessary action to defend the U.S. and our troops." Unfortunately, this sentiment isn't yet backed by any action. The fact that Iran's proxies have targeted Americans 166 times in the past 3 months demonstrates that the Biden administration is willing to tolerate attacks on U.S. forces. The question for the Commander in Chief is whether his actions in the coming days will convince Iran and its proxies that America's tolerance has been exhausted.

It is time for the administration to provide Senators with a briefing on the current situation in the Middle East.

As I have said before, the President has the necessary authorities to strike those responsible for killing and wounding Americans, targeting our interests, and threatening our allies in the region. He has the capacity to go after the Iranians who sponsor and direct this campaign. But his administration has an obligation to inform Congress of its objectives and strategy and to explain why their attempts to deter Iran and its proxies have as yet been unsuccessful.

Of course, the failures of their own approach to the region haven't stopped Washington Democrats from trying to police the internal politics of a close ally fighting for its security or from trying to tie Israel's hands as it works to eradicate Hamas terrorists.

Some of our colleagues have apparently mistaken themselves for members of the Knesset. They have started using the press to cast bizarre, unsolicited votes of no confidence in a sovereign democracy's duly elected Prime Minister. Talk about foreign political interference. And their Bibi derangement syndrome isn't just unseemly behavior for an ally; they want to compel Israel to pursue policies that even prominent leaders of the Israeli left have insisted they have no time for.

It is increasingly, glaringly clear that a headlong charge forward to a two-state solution puts the cart before the horse. Israel needs a partner in peace before it can be expected to make peace. Palestinians need leaders and a government worthy of the name before they can expect a state.

As I have said before, responsibility for the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, for the weaponization of hospitals and schools, and for the corruption of aid agencies charged with helping the Palestinian people—all of that belongs to Hamas.

Each time Hamas has faced a choice between improving Palestinian lives and taking Israeli lives, it has chosen the latter. And last week we learned the horrific degree to which international humanitarian agencies have been corrupted—corrupted—by Hamas's hate. No fewer than a dozen credentialed staff members of the U.N.'s Relief and Works Agency are linked directly—directly—to the slaughter of Israelis on October 7. So let me say that again. At least 12 paid staff of the U.N. agency that purports to lead humanitarian efforts in Gaza moonlit—moonlit—as Hamas terrorists on the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust.

According to news reports, Israeli intelligence indicates that a full 10 percent of UNRWA's staff have ties to the Iran-backed terrorist group that steals aid shipments to build terror tunnels. Yet, instead of reckoning with UNRWA's complicity, the head of the agency responded with a whining statement that emphasized just how few of the supposed relief workers under his authority had been caught killing Israelis on company time.

In fairness, UNRWA comes from the same anti-Israel family of organizations as the self-proclaimed "global champion" for the empowerment of women, a U.N. entity that took 57 days—57 days—to condemn Hamas's rape and brutalization of Israeli women and girls.

The United States and our allies need not search for moral authority in such a fallow field as the United Nations. Unfortunately, even the Biden administration's announced pause on additional funding to UNRWA may fail to carry sufficient weight. As one outside analysis points out, \$51 million already allocated by the State Department for use this year will be delivered as scheduled to an organization that clearly lacks the means to fulfill its most basic purpose.

So as I have said before, there is no room for the tired cast of corruption and terrorism in the future of the Palestinian people. As such, Senate Republicans will not accept any legislation that allows taxpayer dollars to fund UNRWA.

And America's ally Israel deserves the time, space, and support it needs to remove Hamas from the equation—root, stem, and branch.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority whip.

ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, tomorrow, our Senate Judiciary Committee will hold a landmark hearing. For the first time, the CEOs of five Big Tech companies will testify about the crisis of online child sexual exploitation.

This continues our committee's bipartisan work to combat the dangers children face online. This has been one of my top priorities as chair of the committee.

Last February, we held a hearing on kids' online safety. Six witnesses testified about online child sexual exploitation, cyber bullying, addictive online platforms, and the collection and sale of children's sensitive personal data. At the hearing, I noted there were no witnesses from the tech companies present. I promised they would have their chance.

Tomorrow, the CEOs of Discord, Meta, Snap, TikTok, and X will testify. I thank my friend and fellow colleague Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM, ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee, for his bipartisan cooperation in establishing this hearing. The CEOs of Discord, Snap, and X will testify pursuant to subpoenas issued by the committee. This follows their repeated refusal to testify voluntarily. I look forward to hearing from these companies about what they are doing to make their platforms inaccessible to child sex offenders.

As recently as last week, some have launched new child safety measures that are long overdue. If you were watching the playoff football games over the weekend, you heard some of these same companies advertising they have now discovered a new way to protect children. Could it have something to do with their appearance at the hearing? We will see.

But it shouldn't take a hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee to finally get these companies to prioritize child safety. Because these changes are half measures at best, I welcome the opportunity to question them about what more needs to be done.

There have been recent troubling reports about how each of these platforms is being used by offenders to target children or trade child sexual abuse material. Some reports even detail how the platforms promote exploitive behavior. Let's be really honest about this. Some of these algorithms are more powerful than any parent—that is for sure—and some of the techniques that are used by these platforms to encourage and lure children into situations where they are in danger are well-documented and researched.

There have been recent troubling reports about these platforms being used to target kids in the most heinous ways. Some details about this show that the companies are actually promoting this kind of behavior. The National Center on Sexual Exploitation has named each of these companies to their annual "Dirty Dozen List" for facilitating child sexual exploitation.

I am sure every Member of the Senate has heard from constituents, friends, and family members about the harm Big Tech is inflicting on our kids. Tomorrow, the Senate Judiciary Committee will demand answers.

Hearings are important, but it is clear that we need legislation, because the tech industry has failed, on its own, to protect our kids. They are protecting their profits, but they are not protecting our children. Last year, the committee unanimously reported five bills to combat the crisis of online child sexual exploitation. One of the bills I introduced is my bipartisan STOP CSAM Act, which will end Big Tech's free ride and allow victims to finally hold these companies accountable for their failure to stop online child sexual exploitation. CSAM is an acronym for "child sexual abuse material."

Since the earliest days of the internet, companies have been allowed to act with near impunity. American families harmed by Big Tech's decisions have no means of redress. To illustrate how dangerous this is, consider a change Meta made last month that carries grave consequences for children. Every year, Meta submits tens of millions of CyberTips to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, known as NCMEC, concerning CSAM found on its platforms. Each CyberTip involves a victim of exploitation, like a child being sexually abused in a photo that has been traded endlessly online or a child who is being coerced, extorted, groomed, or sold for sexual purposes.

In December, Meta announced it is rolling out end-to-end encryption by default on its Facebook and Messenger platforms. Because of this change, Meta will no longer be able to use certain tools to detect and report child exploitation. Encryption can be a valuable tool for protecting privacy, but it is alarming for a company to kneecap their own work to stop online child sexual exploitation.

According to press reports, Meta employees warned internally that this would greatly diminish the company's ability to identify online child exploitation, and child protection advocates and survivors immediately sounded the same alarm. NCMEC called Meta's adoption of end-to-end encryption "a devastating blow for child protection." NCMEC and other advocates are imploring Meta to pause the rollout until it demonstrates the encryption switch won't cause children harm. That is all they want: for Meta to be sure it won't hurt kids.

This highlights the unacceptable situation we find ourselves in. There are no tools to hold companies accountable. Instead, survivors and advocates are left to plead with these companies to choose safety over profit.

The Phoenix 11, a group of CSAM survivors, powerfully expressed their rage about this situation in a letter they recently sent to the committee. They wrote:

As survivors, we bear the consequences when decisions are made that prioritize profit over children . . . If Meta no longer reports these crimes against us, we alone suffer the consequences.

This is a profoundly disturbing situation. In no other sector of society would we permit one company to make an unreviewable decision that puts millions of American kids at risk. But for almost 30 years, section 230 of the Communications Decency Act has protected the tech industry from accountability for the damage it has done.

You have to look far and wide to find companies or industries that are exempt from liability under the law, civilly or criminally. This is one of those. The law was enacted to allow a fledgling industry to grow, but now it has become an entitlement for the most profitable industry in the history of capitalism to line their profits at the expense of kids.

Every available metric suggests that online child exploitation is getting worse. In the year 2013, NCMEC received approximately 1,380 CyberTips per day. Ten years later, in 2023, this skyrocketed to 100,000 CyberTips per day. Think about that for a second: 100,000 reports of sexual abuse per day.

There has also been a dramatic increase in the number of victims per offender, who can use technology to ensnare a shocking number of children without even leaving their homes. A single defendant prosecuted in Minnesota sextorted over 1,100 children—one person, over 1,000 kids.

What does that consist of? They lure these kids and groom them to the point where they send photographs of themselves that are way too candid and expose things they shouldn't. Then the person says: If you don't want me to put this on the internet, you have to pay me.

This fellow had extorted in that kind of situation over 1,000 kids before he was finally brought to justice. That is the status quo that Congress protects if we do nothing.

Everyone needs to do their part to stop this gross injustice. That includes Congress finally enacting legislation that holds the tech industry accountable when it fails to protect children. That is why the Judiciary Committee will hold its landmark hearing tomorrow. That is why I will continue to work to bring the Stop CSAM Act and other critical bills to protect kids to the Senate floor.

Mr. President, back in the day, before I was elected to office, I was a trial lawyer in small-town America. I made a nice living. I took cases to trial of a different stripe. I am not saying that I was part of the system of justice in this country, but it turns out I was. The fact that people face accountability for their wrongdoing and could end up losing in court is another incentive to do the right thing in your life. Here we have a situation that is clearly, clearly out of control. What is happening is beyond the reach of the most conscientious parents in America.

I am lucky to have some wonderful grandkids. I have two who live in New York. They are 12 years old. I am really proud of them. Their mom worries

about them—and their dad as well—every single day, as they spend way too much time, by their estimation, on screens. They try to encourage them to do the right thing and make sure that they never communicate with people they don't know or provide information or anything else that they shouldn't. But the parents can't be sure that always works—nobody can. They want to do the right thing for their kids.

I told my daughter I was having this hearing. She said: Dad, when you get these execs in front of you, ask them what they do to protect their own kids—their own kids who could be exploited and they wouldn't even know about it.

It is a legitimate question. I don't know if I will be asking it tomorrow. It depends on the circumstances. But it is something that every family across America would like to know: What are you doing, Senator, to protect our kids? It is getting worse instead of better. Can you change the law to help us?

It is up to us to decide. I hope tomorrow's hearing is the beginning of a conversation on a bipartisan basis.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas.

ENERGY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, the Biden administration, in the last few days, has made another reckless attempt to try to appease its more radical aspects of its political base—in this case, leftwing climate activists.

Last week, the administration halted new liquefied natural gas projects, effectively chilling new investments in the industry that powers the United States and many of our closest allies. Had the administration announced this decision 3 years ago, it would have been dangerous and shortsighted. But given the state of the world today, this step is almost unthinkable.

Russia's unprovoked war in Ukraine is nearing the 2-year mark. Iran's terrorist proxies are unleashing chaos on the Middle East, and China is responsible for growing tensions in the Indo-Pacific. This is an extremely fraught time—I think we would all have to agree—given that the instigators of each of these conflicts are three of the world's largest natural gas producers.

This is an extremely risky time for energy security. Fortunately, the United States is in a uniquely strong position to temper those risks. We are the world's largest natural gas producer, and, last year, we became the largest LNG exporter. That means energy produced in America, creating American jobs, helping to grow our economy, is being exported to countries all around the world that don't have access to those natural resources.

Around the globe, American LNG supports the energy security of our friends and allies. If they are importing American energy, they don't have to worry about some rogue dictator cutting off the gas with a moment's notice.