

happened. The UN has said they are going to launch an investigation into this. But guess what. We know through previous investigations that this was the pattern of UNRWA.

The Trump administration knew this, and so they cut off funding for UNRWA. They knew that UNRWA previously had been supporting Hamas, had its employees also be agents of Hamas, that its textbooks glorified martyrdom, terrorism, and preached anti-Semitism. Its teachers talked about killing Jews. Its schools had stored weapons for Hamas.

UNRWA sites and facilities have been used to launch attacks on Israel. This was not new news. And yet, inexplicably, the Biden administration, as soon as they came into office, resumed our funding, our taxpayer dollars to UNRWA. Madam President, 730 million U.S. taxpayer dollars given to UNRWA.

And we have since found out now that one of the UNRWA teachers, an Arabic language teacher, was a Hamas commander who participated on an attack on a kibbutz that killed 97 people and in which 26 people were kidnapped.

We should not fund Hamas, and we should not fund Hamas through UNRWA. We need to cut off the funds to UNRWA. The Trump administration saw it. And the State Department saying they are going to temporarily pause their funding to UNRWA is simply not good enough.

The junior Senator from South Carolina and me have proposed the Stop Support For Hamas. This would end U.S. taxpayer funding to UNRWA and stop their support of Hamas.

This bill must pass, or we have other ways to do it. We can put it into any supplemental that we pass that is going to provide aid to Gaza. We are currently considering such a bill right now.

Before we provide another taxpayer dollar, we must pass this legislation so that UNRWA cannot continue to support terrorists like Hamas. We must stand with our ally Israel. They not only have the right to defend themselves, but it will be important for world peace to see Hamas destroyed.

Hamas is a brutal terroristic organization. It has no place in the world. We need to provide Israel the tools they need to be able to defend themselves and destroy this terrorist organization. And we should not act counter to that by providing UNRWA money.

We must permanently ban our funding to UNRWA so that our taxpayer dollars are not supporting the terrorist organization Hamas.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

IRAN

Ms. ERNST. Madam President, this weekend, three brave Americans gave their lives in service to our country. My heart goes out to the families of SGT William Jerome Rivers, SPC Kennedy Sanders, and SPC Breonna

Moffett, who were serving in the Army Reserves 718th Engineer Company—the same company I served in nearly 30 years ago as a platoon leader. I know the bravery of men and women who put themselves in harm's way, and my prayers are with their colleagues who are suffering from their injuries.

Our servicemembers continue to be on the frontlines of Iran-backed attacks. Earlier this month, two Navy SEALs went missing in action while interdicting lethal aid that Iran was resupplying to the Houthis. Navy Special Warfare Operator 1st Class Christopher Chambers and Navy Special Warfare Operator 2nd Class Nathan Ingram made the ultimate sacrifice working to prevent more Iranian-backed terror.

Iran's proxies who continue to attack our troops must know how seriously the United States takes American lives. Every American life is precious. Our adversaries need to understand that a single American loss is one too many and that they will pay dearly for spilling the blood of those who wear the uniform.

I have said it before, and I will say it again: American weakness on the world stage emboldens our adversaries and puts U.S. citizens at risk.

Right now, today, six Americans continue to be held hostage by Iran-backed Hamas. This terrorist organization thinks it can barter with American lives. Instead of fearing us, they seek to manipulate us. Instead of hiding in the shadows, they hold press conferences and entertain foreign officials openly in Doha.

For over 100 days, Hamas has held six of our citizens and has not paid a price. Instead, the opposite has occurred. What is President Biden doing to bring them home? Doubling down on the appeasement strategy.

By refusing to enforce existing sanctions on Iran's illicit oil sales, President Biden has fueled and funded Tehran's terrorist proxies and green-lit terrorism. For years, President Biden lined the coffers of the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism through his appeasement strategy, culminating in the October 7 assault on Israel.

Every day since these Iranian-backed attacks on Israel, we have seen the world erupt into chaos, and American lives have been in constant danger. Still, the Biden administration fears escalation more than anything else. What is the result? They are letting Tehran's terrorists off the hook for their illicit actions and attacks on American lives.

October 7 was not only a physical attack on Israel but also one of the largest losses of American lives from terrorism since 9/11. There were 32 unforgettable deaths.

Make no mistake, this chaos is exactly what Iran wants. It pays for it, and it plans for it.

When I was in the region during the attacks, many leaders shared their concerns with me that Iran would cap-

italize on the chaos by using proxies to escalate the conflict. I knew that it was essential to stand with Israel not only to protect our partnership with our greatest ally in the region but also to protect American lives.

Unfortunately, we are seeing those fears come to fruition. Since October 7, Iran-backed proxies have ramped up their aggression, with over 160 attacks on our servicemembers. The Houthis are unleashing drone attacks on our troops in the Red Sea, disrupting commerce, and wreaking havoc on innocent civilians.

We struggle to defend our ships from incoming rockets and drones and hesitate to find, fix, and finish the very source of these attacks. We know it is Iranian proxies. Folks, we know that. There is no doubt about it. We know they are trained by the IRGC. It is time to strike the source of the problem. Why? Because American lives continue to be on the line every single day. Self-defense is not escalation; it is the most basic and moral action we can take as a nation. We owe it to our troops. We owe it to our citizens.

For nearly 4 months—4 months, folks—Hamas has held U.S. citizens hostage as political prisoners. Our fellow Americans are being used as human shields, without consistent access to food, to water, to medical treatment, or to sleep. Right now, American hostage families live in agony, uncertain if their loved ones are alive or dead. No parent should ever have to endure this, and terrorists should not be able to hold this power over Americans. We must do everything in our power to stop Hamas from torturing our families.

To end Hamas's reign of terror, we must cut off their IRGC funding. These terrorist groups have one thing in common: As long as they are sponsored by Tehran, they are committed to chaos in the world, and they pose a threat to Americans at home and abroad.

Now is the time for strong U.S. leadership. I have been calling for President Biden to hit Iran where it hurts—the pocketbooks funneling illicit oil funds to its terrorist proxies.

The choice, folks, is clear: To stand with Israel, we must target Iran's terrorist arm and end its ability to target Americans so we can bring American hostages home safely and quickly. Folks, every second counts.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, I want to talk today about deterrence and escalation.

In 1988, the American frigate USS Samuel B. Roberts struck an Iranian mine in international waters. Thankfully, no Americans were killed. But, wisely, President Reagan didn't wait for tragedy to occur before acting. Just 4 days later, the United States destroyed two Iranian oil platforms, three warships, two fighter jets, and multiple other vessels.

The message was clear: If you put American lives in danger, you will be destroyed. There was no escalation. The conflict did not spiral into an uncontained war. Deterrence was restored.

Compare that powerful and effective example of deterrence to where we are today. Another Iran-backed group, Hamas, attacked our ally Israel on October 7. The President said that the United States would stand with Israel and that he would not tell Israel how to conduct its war against this terror. Since then, his administration has all but folded to the demands of those in his party who want to condition aid and support to our ally.

Since October 7, Iran-backed militias have attacked U.S. troops not once, not twice, but more than 150 times. President Biden has allowed not days, not weeks, but months of unanswered attacks by Iran-backed Houthis on U.S. ships and civilian cargo vessels in the Red Sea. What was the inevitable result of the President's hesitation? The tragic deaths of three American troops at the hands of an Iran-backed militia, with dozens more seriously injured in that attack. And let's not forget that two Navy SEALs gave their lives just days before. They died trying to stop Iran from supplying weapons to similar militia groups across the region.

This administration likes to say that it doesn't want to escalate the situation. President Biden doesn't want Israel to escalate its justifiable war, and he doesn't want the United States to escalate our defense of Americans. His administration has said it wants to avoid escalation so much that it is beginning to seem like he is more afraid of being blamed for escalation than he is afraid of Americans being killed. But we should be clear: The only attacks President Biden is deterring are our own.

It is time to realize that our enemies have already escalated. Our response must be strong enough so that we can restore deterrence. Militants, they have attacked Israel, targeted civilian ships, and now they have killed Americans—all funded and supported by Iran. To stand up for our country, to stand against the murder of Americans and to stand with Israel, we must clearly demonstrate to Iran that they will pay a price for their continued support of terrorism.

Public reports say that President Biden is considering options for a retaliatory strike against Iranian forces. Whatever he decides to do, it must not follow his now well-established pattern of too little, too late. President Biden must finally restore credible deterrence, which is the only way that we will prevent escalation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BUDD. Madam President, over the weekend, our Nation lost three servicemembers in a drone attack in Jordan. Responsibility for this attack

rests with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Sadly, what happened over the weekend, it is not a surprise. It has been happening for months.

Iran and their proxies have launched more than 165 attacks against U.S. troops across the Middle East and countless more against commercial and military vessels in the Red Sea.

There has been a consistent drumbeat of Iranian-backed proxy attacks since the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel.

A few things are clear about this situation. First, Iran and its proxies, they do not currently fear the United States.

Second, Iran is intent on harming the United States, our servicemembers, and our interests.

Third, Iran is aiming to push the United States out of the Middle East in a bid for complete regional power. We can't let this takeover happen.

Iranian dominance in the Middle East would jeopardize the free flow of international trade; it would endanger important energy resources as well as damage America's counterterrorism efforts. And in the shadow of October 7, if we were to abandon our Middle East allies, it would be open season on Israel and the Jewish people.

I have heard the views of many in this Chamber, ranging from those who favor an immediate military offensive inside Iran to those who want the United States to leave the region altogether. Instead of beginning another "forever war" or succumbing to isolationism, I would submit that there is a better way. And we don't have to go back very far in history to find it.

After a single American contractor was killed at the hands of Iran in 2019, President Trump ordered a strike that eliminated the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force, Qasem Soleimani. We didn't start a war, and we didn't withdraw. We simply sent Iran's leaders a very clear message; that is, if you kill Americans, you will forfeit your life. And Iran pulled back.

That is deterrence, when all nations know for certain that we are willing to act in defense of our people. It is that clear understanding that actually prevents a wider conflict, and it is a breakdown in clarity that is provoking the Iranians to continue taking more dangerous—and ultimately deadly—shots at U.S. forces abroad.

We must end the failed Biden policy of appeasement toward Iran. We must also stop telegraphing U.S. responses so Iran and its proxies can move personnel, weapons, and equipment out of the target area. Weakness only invites further aggression.

We must reestablish deterrence, and we must respond with the strength that this moment requires. No more half measures, hesitation, or muddled messages. Iran and their proxies must know that when the United States of America tells them to stop, we mean it, and we are willing to do something

about it. Without a strong response, the risk of escalation only increases and, with it, the danger to America.

One other note before I yield the floor, all of my colleagues and I are here today to stand shoulder to shoulder with the nation of Israel. They are one of our closest friends and allies. That is why it is highly disturbing to read reports that the Biden administration is reviewing options to reward the extremism and barbarism of Hamas by unilaterally recognizing a Palestinian state. This would represent a major reversal of longstanding U.S. policy and would be a betrayal of our friend and ally Israel. The Biden administration must abandon any consideration of such a dangerous and foolish proposal.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

ISRAEL

Mrs. CAPITO. Madam President, I rise today to once again stand in strong support of our friend and ally Israel and to highlight the continued fallout that we are witnessing as a result of the October 7 terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas.

It is really difficult to describe those 116 days that we have had since October 7 as anything other than shocking, as we have seen the senseless murder of over 1,200 people in Israel, widespread violence across the Middle East, and alarming rise of anti-Semitism right here in the United States.

Just this past weekend, on January 27, we recognized International Holocaust Remembrance Day and honored the 6 million Jewish victims of the Holocaust—the largest genocide in human history with unspeakable horror inflicted on the Jewish people. This commemoration serves as a reminder of why the State of Israel must exist and our continual commitment to stand against the persecution of the Jewish people.

But now, nearly 80 years later, the safety of the Jewish people is once again under siege. I never thought I would make that statement.

The terrorist attacks on October 7 killed the most Jews in 1 day since the Holocaust. Hundreds of women and children were taken hostage, including our very own Americans who still remain in captivity today. And, shamefully, some of the most prominent organizations that claim to support women were silent when it came to Hamas's use of sexual violence against women and girls on October 7.

We must continue to universally denounce the barbaric tactics of Hamas and do all that is in our power to free the hostages and bring those American hostages home.

It remains clear that Israel has the right to defend themselves, as any country would, in the face of this unprovoked terror. There isn't another country in the world that would be expected to sit back and allow this to