

that Ukraine and Georgia could join sometime in the future, but made clear that that membership would not be offered anytime soon.

Now, just 4 months later, Russia invaded and occupied parts of the Republic of Georgia. Now that happens to remind me of when Secretary of State Dean Acheson gave a major speech in 1950 outlining the U.S. defense perimeter in the Pacific. It very clearly did not include the Korean Peninsula. Less than 6 months later, North Korea invaded the south.

So signals you send as a nation or as leaders of a nation make a difference sometimes. And that statement by Acheson led to the Korean war.

So just like Acheson's speech in 1950 did to Korea, the weak statement at the 2008 Bucharest summit made it clear that Georgia and Ukraine were on their own. That was seen as a green light by Putin. The perception of weakness led to war.

How did the United States react to this aggression against the sovereign, pro-American Republic of Georgia? There happened to be some stern words that didn't accomplish much.

Then, 6 months later, the Obama-Biden administration announced the infamous reset to patch up relations with Russia. That reset sent a very dangerous message. The Obama policy was almost the opposite of peace through strength. No wonder that Putin felt emboldened, 6 years later, to invade neutral Ukraine in both the Crimean Peninsula and in Ukraine's east.

President Obama responded by refusing defensive weapons to Ukraine and, at the same time, urging negotiations. Now, you can't have fair negotiations when someone has invaded your home and has a gun at your head.

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas often cites former Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's rules for negotiations. This Russian says:

No. 1, demand the maximum. Do not meekly ask but demand that which has never been yours.

No. 2, present ultimatums. Do not hold back on threats, since you will always find people in the West who are willing to negotiate.

No. 3, do not give one inch of ground in negotiations. They themselves will offer you at least part of what you are asking for, but do not take it. Demand more because they will go along with it, and in the end, you will get a third or even half of that of which you had nothing previously.

Those are the rules of a Soviet Foreign Minister.

Now, we should remember all of that when we hear Putin's demands today. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, starting in February of 2022, was the result of a failure of deterrence. We could have avoided additional aggression had the West shown more strength.

What about the argument that it was provocative to let countries that Russia used to dominate join NATO?

Well, here are some key facts about NATO that ought to put those arguments to an end:

No. 1, NATO is a defensive alliance.

No. 2, NATO membership is open to sovereign democracies that want to join, but it does not seek expansion for its own sake.

No. 3, it is the right of all sovereign countries to choose their alliances. There is no neighbor veto to joining a defensive alliance.

Now, let's look at the Baltics. You remember that they were, at one time, called Soviet Republics. Actually, the United States never recognized the illegal Soviet occupation of the Baltic States that started in 1940. We maintained, during that next 50 years, uninterrupted diplomatic relations with all three countries throughout the Cold War.

Here is a little-known historical fact. Upon the founding of NATO, the U.S. Secretary of State received a letter from the acting consul general of Estonia welcoming the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty on behalf of his country.

Here is what the Estonian diplomat wrote:

Estonia is still under the illegal occupation and domination of the Soviet Union and is, therefore, prevented from manifesting openly its keen interest in this pact.

But I want to further quote this Ambassador.

I have the honor to offer my best wishes to the signatories of the North Atlantic Pact, and to express my confidence that they, inspired by the ideals of democracy, of individual liberty, and of the rule of law, will strive relentlessly for peace with justice, which excludes peace at any price.

Therefore, I express the belief that countries, which were forcibly deprived of self-government and independence will benefit by this noble endeavor.

That "noble endeavor" is the establishment of NATO.

The Estonian diplomat was right all those 75 years ago. His country, which is now free and a great NATO ally, has, in fact, benefited from the North Atlantic Treaty.

While the Baltic States have been officially NATO members for 20 years now, they would have signed the Washington Treaty in a second had they not been illegally occupied by the Soviet Union. So I consider the three Baltic countries honorary founding members of NATO.

I have explained that the United States learned after two World Wars that it is better to prevent World War III than to get dragged in once that future war could be raging.

But we ought to ask again: Why the NATO alliance?

The United States, with its powerful military and nuclear arsenal, would respond to defend an ally if article 3 were invoked. That has certainly played a big role in deterring the Soviets and now the Russians.

But that could be accomplished simply by giving a one-way security guarantee to Europe. While that might still

serve our national interest in preventing World War III, it would put a burden on all of our shoulders.

So the real benefit of the NATO alliance is that it leverages American leadership to bolster the ability of our European allies to defend themselves. If every country had different defense plans and weapons that used different ammunition, an aggressor would be able to pick them off one by one, even if they tried to join forces.

In theory, the Europeans could do some of this on their own. In fact, some European leaders have suggested that the European Union ought to develop an independent military capacity.

Now, I would say: If they want to do that, more power to them. However, most Europeans accept that American leadership has been indispensable to date. It has been to our benefit that NATO militaries are interoperable with the U.S. military.

The only time article 3 of the NATO treaty has been invoked was after the United States was attacked on 9/11. Many of our NATO allies sent men and equipment to fight and die alongside the U.S. military in Afghanistan.

It is true that there is a minority of countries in NATO that are further from potential threats and do not spend enough on their own national defense or their contribution to NATO. Then there are countries like Poland and Estonia that take national defense seriously and spend more as a percentage of GDP than even we do in the United States.

Keep this in mind: It is the existence of NATO that sets the 2-percent spending expectation, makes common defense plans, and helps to determine what capabilities are needed for a credible defense.

Without NATO, Europe would be weaker, and the chances of the United States getting dragged into another war would be even greater. A strong national defense is an instrument of peace more than an instrument of war.

In fact, we could call our Defense Department the "Department of Peace." That is really what its main function is—being strong to prevent war.

We must make sure our military and our allies' militaries are strong enough to fight a war, precisely so we don't have to go to war.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF NANCY L. MALDONADO

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, in a few minutes, the Senate is going to vote on the confirmation of Judge Nancy Maldonado to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, which the Acting President pro tempore and I know very well.

Since the beginning of the Biden administration, the Senate has confirmed 201 highly qualified, independent, even-handed judges to the Federal bench. They represent the best of our legal system—demographically and professionally diverse; they respect the rule of law; they adhere to precedent; and they answer only to the Constitution. We should add another to that list today—Judge Maldonado, an accomplished litigator and distinguished jurist, who will be a great asset to the Seventh Circuit.

She graduated from Harvard College and Columbia Law School. She clerked for U.S. District Judge Ruben Castillo—a retired judge, my friend, and an esteemed jurist in the Northern District.

Following her clerkship, Judge Maldonado spent nearly 20 years at a firm specializing in employment, civil rights, and fraud matters. Throughout her career, she tried several cases to verdict, judgment, or final decision.

In addition, she was appointed by the Cook County State's Attorney's Office to serve as a special assistant, tasked with investigating fraud. From 2019 to 2022, she was appointed by the Illinois attorney general to serve as a consent decree monitor in two matters and as a special assistant AG to investigate consumer fraud. You can draw the conclusion from these appointments that she is trusted by her colleagues to be professional.

In 2022, the Senate confirmed Judge Maldonado on a bipartisan vote—supported by the Acting President pro tempore and myself—to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. Since her confirmation, she has presided over almost 1,000 cases—that is in a matter of just 2 years—plus has ruled on thousands of motions and has issued approximately 300 substantive decisions.

Notably, Judge Maldonado has never been reversed by a reviewing court in that period of time—nearly 1,000 cases. Despite what her critics have to say, her record is one of the best. It shows she carefully resolves cases in a way that ensures that litigants feel they have been treated fairly.

Once confirmed, Judge Maldonado will be the first Hispanic judge to ever serve on the Seventh Circuit. History will be made.

Judge Maldonado has my strong support and the support of my other home State Senator and good friend, the Acting President pro tempore, Senator TAMMY DUCKWORTH.

Judge Maldonado, incidentally, received a unanimous—unanimous—“well qualified” rating from the American Bar Association based on her integrity, professional competence, and judicial temperament. She has broad support across the legal community, from law enforcement to labor unions representing millions of members.

I urge my Senate colleagues to join me in confirming this highly qualified nominee.

#### TRIBUTE TO MUHAMMAD YUNUS

Madam President, on a separate, unrelated subject, 14 years ago, the late Senator Mike Enzi, a Republican from the State of Wyoming, joined me in honoring the Congressional Gold Medal to an amazing man, a pioneer in alleviating global poverty. The recipient was Bangladeshi Professor Muhammad Yunus—shown here in this photo—the founder of Grameen Bank.

I have been fortunate to visit Bangladesh several times and many times with Professor Yunus.

What he came up with as an idea of making small loans to the poorest people on Earth literally changed the world. He changed Bangladesh and the families there who were struggling to feed their children to the point where they could buy a sewing machine and finally make a living with a few dollars and with the promise that they would pay it back.

This idea of Grameen Bank—the people's bank—was Professor Yunus's idea. It revolutionized something called microlending, which hadn't been heard of before this time. It provided easy access to small loans to more than 7 million borrowers—95 percent of them were women or groups of women—and changed poverty reduction in the process. Such efforts eventually earned Professor Yunus the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

Tragically, despite the achievements of this great professor, despite the recognition which he has had on an international basis, he has been harassed by the Bangladeshi Government almost nonstop. They pursued an inexplicable, petty vendetta against Professor Yunus, levying over 100—over 100—unsubstantiated criminal and civil charges. In fact, he will soon go on trial again—another trial—this time facing possible life in prison on a non-sense charge.

Last year, because of the frustration of his friends around the world over the way he has been treated by the local government in Bangladesh, 170 global leaders, including more than 100 Nobel laureates, wrote to Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urging an end to these judicial proceedings and harassment. I have made similar calls and will do so again here on the floor today.

Quite simply, what is happening to Professor Muhammad Yunus is a travesty that will seriously harm our relationship with Bangladesh. It must stop immediately. Enough.

#### NATO

Madam President, on a separate topic, this will be a week of great global importance. World leaders from some of our closest and aspiring allies will gather this week in Washington for a momentous anniversary.

Seventy-five years ago, out of the ashes of World War II, 12 nations signed an agreement to establish the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, known as NATO. This historic alliance was bound together by a commitment to

collective defense enshrined under article 5. Quite simply, an attack on one of the allies is an attack on all.

This simple but powerful commitment after World War II to share defense has helped to keep peace in Europe for generations. It has deterred and protected member nations from Soviet threats in the past and now Russian threats in the present.

It has been so successful in its mission that additional members have regularly sought to join the alliance. It now includes 32 nations, the most recent being Sweden and Finland, two formidable allies that bring considerable capacity to the organization. We in the Senate voted 95 to 1, on a bipartisan basis, to ratify their entry.

Many nations previously under Soviet domination have joined, vowing that they will never live under Russian tyranny again.

I know one in particular. My mother's homeland of Lithuania is a country that I have been lucky enough to visit before I was elected to Congress and since. I saw Soviet repression at its worst in 1978 and now see democracy at its best in this current situation.

Under the leadership of my friend and former President, Valdas Adamkus, Lithuania joined NATO, along with its Baltic neighbors, Latvia and Estonia, in 2004. Two years ago, President Adamkus was honored by the Lithuanian Parliament for his contribution to the nation's integration into NATO and the European Union.

Today, Lithuania is one of the alliance's most outspoken voices. I am so proud of Lithuania, a nation small in population and size but large in terms of its impact on the world with the courage they have shown over and over again.

They have vocally supported Ukraine. They have welcomed Belarusian and Russian democratic voices. And they hosted last year's NATO summit, which I was honored to attend.

My mother would be proud of her birth country.

This week, the Senate Baltic Caucus cochairs, Senator GRASSLEY and I, will introduce a resolution recognizing the strong U.S.-Baltic relationship and the important contributions these nations have made to NATO.

In recent years, I have had the honor of joining several of my colleagues, led by Senators SHAHEEN and TILLIS, to attend the annual NATO summit. What struck me at these summit meetings was the sustained resolve and common purpose in defeating Russia in the war against Ukraine. Our NATO allies, many former captives of the Soviet Union, have enduring memories of that experience. They are determined to not allow Russia's imperial actions in Ukraine prevail.

I want to recognize President Joe Biden's clear-eyed leadership in galvanizing and reinvigorating the critical NATO alliance and its support for Ukraine.