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As I said earlier, this is not just a message to our friends and allies. This is a message to Israel's enemies and adversaries, because, if they sense a lack of commitment and resolve on the part of the United States to stand with our allies, they are going to continue to do what they started on October 7.

As I said, we need leaders who understand the importance of our alliances and who are willing to stand shoulder to shoulder with our friends. Any leader or would-be leader who fails to meet that bar does not deserve a seat in the Senate, much less in the Oval Office.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

#### ISRAEL

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today, as a strong supporter of the U.S.-Israel relationship, to talk about why it was such a big mistake to invite Prime Minister Netanyahu to address a joint session of Congress and why I will not attend his speech tomorrow. I do not take this decision lightly, and I want to explain my reasons.

At the outset, I want to underscore the importance of the longtime partnership between the people of the United States and the people of Israel. After the horrors of the Holocaust, the United States led the effort at the United Nations to advocate for the establishment of a homeland for the Jewish people. And then, in May 1948, the United States, under the leadership of President Harry Truman, became the first country to recognize the State of Israel. And that support—this solidarity—has held firm for 76 years, through many conflicts.

That was especially true in the immediate aftermath of the vicious Hamas terror attack on October 7. Ten days later, President Biden traveled to Jerusalem to embrace the people of Israel and let them know that we, the United States, stand with them after that brutal massacre that killed over 1,200 people and seized over 250 hostages.

Those bonds between the people of Israel and the people of the United States remain strong today. But the actions and words of Prime Minister Netanyahu and his ultra-right extremist coalition, both before and since the October 7 attacks, have weakened the ties between the United States and the Government of Israel.

All of us who care about our partnership, both in America and in Israel, should understand the enormous dam-

age that Prime Minister Netanyahu and his current extremist government coalition are doing to our relationship and to Israel's standing in the world.

So it sends a terrible message to bring him here now to address a joint session of Congress. While we warmly welcomed President Herzog's speech to Congress just over a year ago, Prime Minister Netanyahu remains the leader of the most extreme rightwing government coalition in the history of Israel. It is the coalition he personally assembled in a desperate bid to regain power and to prevent a possible prison sentence.

To do that, he formed a government with certain individuals who had previously been on the dangerous, most extreme fringes of Israeli politics and considered totally unfit to govern. They include the likes of Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, both unabashed racists and religious bigots. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak referred to them "as the racist messianic fanatics with whom Netanyahu has cast his lot."

That is former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

In fact, they are the ideological successors to the extremist Meir Kahane, who wanted to ban relations between Jews and non-Jews and expel all Palestinians. Kahane was banned by the Israeli Supreme Court from participating in Israeli politics decades ago, and his party was placed on the U.S. Terror Watchlist.

But in 2023, Prime Minister Netanyahu gave those ideological descendants of Meir Kahane—Ben-Gvir and Smotrich—key powerful government positions. These are the individuals who now control Prime Minister Netanyahu's political fate, who threatened to withdraw their support and bring down his government if he fails to do their bidding. And, in many ways, they are now calling the shots when it comes to the policy decisions of the Government of Israel—in Israel, in the West Bank, and in Gaza. They have also made it abundantly clear that, when it comes to the war in Gaza, they do not prioritize the safe return of all the hostages, including American citizens taken by Hamas.

President Biden has prioritized the safe return of all the hostages. Prime Minister Netanyahu has not. He continues to put his own political survival first, above the interests of the people of Israel and those American citizens.

I renew my call for an immediate cease-fire and the return of all the hostages.

Just last Friday, 4 days ago, during a visit to Israel, I met with Israeli families, including American citizens, whose loved ones had been brutally murdered by Hamas on October 7. Some of them lost parents; others lost siblings or children. All of them—all of them—have faced tremendous personal trauma and suffering.

So I was shocked to learn that none of the family members that I met with had heard from Prime Minister

Netanyahu or any member of his government since that horrific Hamas attack. That is hard to fathom. Neither the Prime Minister nor any member of his government had reached out to them to offer a helping hand.

So I say to Prime Minister Netanyahu: Before you come speak to Members of Congress, go meet with the families I saw whose loved ones were murdered on October 7.

I also met, in Tel Aviv, this past Friday, with families whose loved ones were kidnapped by Hamas on October 7, including American citizens. Some of them had their loved ones returned safely as a part of the agreement reached last November. Others said they have been told that their loved ones have died. Most held out hope that their loved ones were still alive. All of those that I met with expressed deep, deep disappointment in the fact that Prime Minister Netanyahu has not prioritized the safe and swift return of the remaining hostages.

Recent polls indicate that large swaths of the Israeli people—over 70 percent—want Prime Minister Netanyahu to resign now or when the war ends, and that is certainly what I heard from many Israelis during my visit to Israel last week. They saw the Prime Minister's invitation to address a joint session of Congress as a political stunt to help him in his efforts to escape legal and political accountability for his actions and inactions, including the massive intelligence failure that allowed the October 7 attack to have such devastating consequences.

That sentiment that I heard expressed directly was captured by a headline in the Jerusalem Post on the same day I met with those families. That headline reads:

Protesters call on Netanyahu to delay flight to US until hostage deal is closed.

The protesters stated that Prime Minister Netanyahu "is running away from the hostage families, running away from a deal, running away from decisions about the day after." I agree with those families.

What I heard directly from many Israelis was also described by a piece written by a well-known and well-regarded Israeli writer and journalist by the name of Amir Tibon. Amir Tibon's family survived October 7 by hiding for hours—hours—huddled in darkness inside a safe room of their family home until his father arrived at the kibbutz and heroically saved them.

Here is what Amir wrote in the Haaretz newspaper back on June 2:

There is nothing "pro-Israel" about this invitation. It is not "pro-Israel" to side with Netanyahu's party against the brave families of the hostages, who are fighting to secure a deal for their release.

"It is not 'pro-Israel,'" he wrote, "to help Netanyahu address Congress while knowing that since October 7th he has not found the time to speak with any of the Israeli communities invaded by Hamas under his watch."

Or take this June 26 op-ed in the New York Times, entitled "We Are Israelis

Calling on Congress to Disinvite Netanyahu.” It is written by five individuals, and I think it is worth the Senate knowing their backgrounds. They are David Harel, the president of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities; Tamir Pardo, the former director of Mossad, Israel’s foreign intelligence services; Talia Sasson, former director of the Special Tasks Department in Israel’s State Attorney’s Office; Ehud Barak, former Israeli Prime Minister; Aaron Ciechanover, Nobel Prize winner in chemistry; and David Grossman, renowned novelist and essayist.

Here is what they say:

Mr. Netanyahu’s appearance in Washington will not represent the State of Israel and its citizens, and it will reward his scandalous and destructive conduct toward our country.

They go on to say:

Giving Mr. Netanyahu this stage in Washington will all but dismiss the rage and pain of his people, as expressed in the demonstrations throughout the country. American lawmakers should not let that happen. They should ask Mr. Netanyahu to stay home.

Well, Mr. Netanyahu is not staying home—he is coming here—but I will respect those voices and stay away from the joint session and urge my colleagues to do the same.

I will also not attend Prime Minister Netanyahu’s speech for another reason—because his actions and those of his extremist coalition represent a terrible betrayal of our shared values and our shared interests. Successive Democratic and Republican administrations have underscored that our bilateral relationship—our special relationship—is based on shared values.

But make no mistake, Prime Minister Netanyahu and his ultra-right-wing government do not share those values. As others who have followed and written about the United States-Israel relationship for decades have noted, he has done more than anyone to damage the special relationship between the United States and Israel. The damage is being done, and the evidence is abundant.

I am going to spend a little time discussing these matters because I just returned from a trip to the UAE, to Saudi Arabia, to Israel, and to the West Bank, and I want to share with my colleagues in the Senate some of my findings.

I am not going to focus today on the war in Gaza. I have said many times, including on this Senate floor, that Israel not only has the right but it has the duty to defend itself in the aftermath of the Hamas massacres and the seizure of hostages on October 7.

I have also repeatedly said that how wars are conducted matters. They must be conducted according to the rules of war and ensure the required precautions are taken to protect the lives of innocent civilians.

They must also be conducted in a way that allows innocent civilians to receive desperately needed humani-

tarian assistance and medical care. As of today, more than 39,000 Palestinians have been killed, over half of them women and children. For those who doubt those numbers, you are right: Credible accounts like estimates from Johns Hopkins University in my State of Maryland and The Lancet medical journal project the overall death toll is likely much higher.

Ten months into this war, the humanitarian situation remains catastrophic. Access to basic humanitarian needs—water, food, medicine, shelter, and basic sanitation—is punishingly scarce. Open sewers are running through the streets, and polio was recently detected in the wastewater in Gaza. There is a real risk of the outbreak of cholera.

Gaza is a wasteland as anybody can see from the photographs. We must end this war, and we must bring all the hostages safely home. And in order to prevent any more October 7s, we must both end the military threat from Hamas and create hope for a better future for the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian people who have nothing to do with Hamas.

I was deeply moved by the humanity and strength of the Israeli families whom I met with just last Friday who lost loved ones on October 7. They—they—stress the importance of distinguishing between the Hamas terrorists and the vast majority of the Palestinian people in both Gaza and the West Bank who have nothing to do with Hamas; and in the midst of their ongoing, profound grief, they were determined to find a way forward to achieve peace, security, and dignity for all people, to find some light at the end of this very, very dark tunnel. In fact, the families I met with believe strongly that peace and long-term security for their families and for all Israelis and Palestinians can only be achieved by securing and ensuring dignity, freedom, justice, and self-determination for all.

I was inspired by their humanity. I have been similarly inspired by Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank who are determined to live in peace despite the terrible personal losses they have suffered.

I wish every American—every American—had the opportunity to hear directly from these Israelis and these Palestinians.

The United States and most of the world recognize that, in order to ensure the long-term security of Israelis and Palestinians, both peoples must enjoy equal measures of dignity and the right of self-determination. That is why it has long been the policy of the United States, both under Democratic and Republican administrations, to support a two-state solution that establishes a viable Palestinian State alongside the State of Israel, with clear security guarantees for all. That is the plan President Biden has laid out to light a little flicker of hope for long-term peace at this very dark time.

President Biden has coupled his call for a two-state solution with his push for the normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia and other Arab States that have yet to recognize the State of Israel. Those actions would also further strengthen Israel’s security and provide greater stability throughout the region.

But how was President Biden’s call for a two-state solution—even one accompanied by a normalization agreement with Saudi Arabia—greeted by Prime Minister Netanyahu? What did the Prime Minister say in response? He slapped it down; dismissed it entirely.

That was Prime Minister Netanyahu’s reaction to the plan presented by the American President, Joe Biden, who not only visited Jerusalem in the immediate aftermath of the Hamas attacks but immediately deployed U.S. carrier groups to the region to deter potential escalation by Hezbollah and others; the President of the United States who organized a \$14 billion supplemental military assistance package to Israel despite concerns about the conduct of the war; the President of the United States who has deployed the U.S. Navy to defend shipping lanes in the Red Sea from Houthi’s attacks; the President of the United States who, on April 13, deployed American air defenses and engaged partners in the region to help Israel successfully intercept Iranian missiles and drones.

Prime Minister Netanyahu and his rightwing coalition continue to rebuff calls from President Biden and the U.N. Security Council for a two-state solution.

It is very important to understand what—what—is driving Prime Minister Netanyahu’s opposition to the creation of a Palestinian State because it is not because it would create an unacceptable security risk; he knows full well those issues have been addressed on the West Bank through a demilitarized state. American and Israeli military experts, including organizations called Commanders for Israel’s Security, have demonstrated that over and over again. No, Prime Minister Netanyahu’s opposition is much more fundamental than that.

It is because he and his extremist allies, like Smotrich and Ben-Gvir, want the land of the West Bank to be fully incorporated into the State of Israel. They want to complete their messianic vision of a Greater Israel that includes all of the West Bank. Indeed, that goal is plainly written out for all to see in their coalition government platform. Take a look at it. By their telling, God gave the West Bank to Israel, and the Palestinians are interlopers there.

In fact, Smotrich has said:

There is no such thing as a Palestinian people.

As former Israeli Prime Minister Olmert has pointed out, the Israeli right’s messianic vision is driving opposition to its two-state solution and inciting violence against Palestinians on the West Bank.

And make no mistake about it, the Netanyahu government is working every day to implement this vision of a Greater Israel by enabling violent settlers on the West Bank to push Palestinians off their land, to steal their grazing areas, to destroy their olive groves, and to establish illegal outposts.

This is all happening in plain sight. I invite my colleagues to go and see it for themselves. We are all witnessing ongoing settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, including Palestinian Americans. The consequences of this violence are dire.

Last week, I also visited Ramallah, and I met with Palestinian-American families whose 17-year-old sons, in separate incidents, were murdered on the West Bank—each of them shot in the back of the head. The United States has not been able to obtain from Israeli authorities information on the status of any investigations, if there are any, into the killings of these American citizens.

During my trip, I also met in Jerusalem with our U.S. Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority. He is a three-star general. His name is General Fenzel, and he has helped document the alarming rise in extremist settler violence and land seizures. He has repeatedly warned that these actions will further inflame an already explosive situation on the West Bank.

Earlier this month, Israel's top IDF official in the West Bank, Major General Yehuda Fuchs, in his retirement statement, echoed these warnings about unchecked extremist settler violence—this very recently retired Israeli major general—saying:

Unfortunately, in recent months, nationalist crime has reared its ugly head, and under the auspices of war and the desire for revenge, it has sown chaos and fear among the Palestinian residents who did not pose any threat.

The Israeli newspaper, Haaretz, summarized the retiring general's full remarks in their headline, which read:

In His Retirement Speech, Israel's Top Officer in West Bank Revealed the Hidden Truth.

General Fuchs' statement is a powerful admission that, while international attention has been focused in the war in Gaza, the extremist Netanyahu government, led by Smotrich—who, by the way, in March 2023, said that Israel should erase the Palestinian village of Hawara—has accelerated its use of settlers and other mechanisms to assault Palestinians in the West Bank and seize their lands.

Indeed, according to Israeli human rights groups, the Netanyahu government has poured gasoline on the fire by approving the largest land seizure in the West Bank in over three decades, allowing the proliferation of settlements and connecting illegal outposts with essential infrastructure.

In June of last year, I raised some of these issues in a meeting in Jerusalem

with Prime Minister Netanyahu. Specifically, Senators MERKLEY, Luján, and I raised the issue of Palestinians in the South Hebron Hills, who we had met with, who had been attacked by armed settlers, pushed off their lands, and denied access to their water wells.

Prime Minister Netanyahu at the time suggested he was unaware of these incidents, even though they had been already widespread and reported. He said he would look into the situation and get back to us. He never did.

I want to applaud the Biden administration for issuing an Executive order to address the actions by these extremist settlers that, under the cover of the Netanyahu government, clearly are undermining peace and stability in the West Bank. I once again call upon the administration to take urgent action to expand the scope of those sanctions to cover all entities and individuals who are directly or indirectly orchestrating these attacks, seizing Palestinian lands, and breeding a culture of impunity, including Smotrich.

Time is of the essence to prevent the situation from spiraling even further out of control. These seizures of Palestinian lands in what is called Area C of the West Bank has been accompanied by a calculated campaign by this Netanyahu government to undermine the Palestinian Authority's ability to administer those areas over which it exercises greater control, the areas known as A and B.

The Netanyahu government, with Smotrich wielding his power as minister of finance, is financially squeezing the Palestinian Authority by withholding ever-increasing amounts of their own funds. These are funds that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority in the form of customs duties. It belongs to the Palestinians, and it is needed to pay for all of the individuals involved in the Palestinian civil administration on the West Bank, from teachers to healthcare workers to police to the Palestinian Authority's security forces that, by the way, the United States helps to train and whose salaries have now been cut dramatically.

These actions, plus the steep rise in the number of security checkpoints in the West Bank and the big drop in the number of work permits for Palestinians in the West Bank to work in Israel, have significantly constrained movement and are strangling the economy in the West Bank and contributing to an even more volatile situation. Secretary Treasurer Yellen has spoken to these issues.

The Netanyahu government knows full well that Smotrich seeks to use this power to deliberately collapse the Palestinian Authority. He has expressly stated that goal. He makes no secret about it.

In his retirement speech, General Fuchs also warned about how reckless that would be, stating that "the ability of the Central Command to fulfill its missions also depends on the existence

of a functioning and strong Palestinian Authority, with effective security mechanisms that maintain law and order."

You know, the great irony here—the great irony—is that Prime Minister Netanyahu and his allies are targeting the Palestinian Authority which has, for over 30 years now, recognized Israel's right to exist and, with some American assistance, cooperates with Israel in providing security in parts of the West Bank. Indeed, that cooperation has been so close that the PA has often been seen by many Palestinians as collaborating with Israel to maintain the occupation on the West Bank.

Look, there is no doubt that the Palestinian Authority has many shortcomings and needs to implement significant reforms to improve governance, to root out cronyism, and to end the current prisoner payment system.

During my visit, I met with the newly appointed Palestinian Prime Minister and the newly appointed Minister of Justice, as well as the re-appointed Ministry of Interior. And under pressure from the United States and many of their Arab neighbors, they have started to make some modest but important steps, including progress on a plan to end the current prisoner payment system.

Still, as you know, the PA continues to suffer from very low levels of public support. It has not held a presidential or national legislative election since 2006, and it has been unable to demonstrate real progress on Palestinian aspirations to end the occupation of the West Bank.

But importantly—importantly—through all this, it has never abandoned its recognition of Israel's right to exist. And in stark contrast to Hamas, the PA seeks to accomplish its goals through nonviolent means. That is why the United States has said that the PA, with a lot of support from the United States, the EU, and the Arab States, should form the nucleus of the governance structure in Gaza when the war ends there.

But Prime Minister Netanyahu has systematically undermined the Palestinian Authority, despite its longtime recognition of Israel's right to exist. And he took, at the same time, steps prior to October 7 that had the effect of helping Hamas sustain control in Gaza, despite the fact that Hamas, of course, has been dedicated to the destruction of Israel.

This has been well-documented. We don't have to go over this again on the Senate floor. But Prime Minister Netanyahu told his fellow Likud Party members years ago that he facilitated Qatar's payments of financial support to Hamas in order to foil a two-state solution.

According to Haaretz, he said:

Anyone who wants to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state needs to support strengthening Hamas. This is part of our strategy, to divide the Palestinians between those in Gaza and those in Judea and Samaria.

He believed that so long as Hamas was a going concern, he could slow momentum toward a two-state solution.

Yet now Prime Minister Netanyahu wants to claim that implementing a plan for a two-state solution with the Palestinian Authority would be a “reward” or “gift” for Hamas.

This is a con game. Everybody knows that Hamas’s aim has been to destroy Israel in order to establish an Islamic State in its place. Indeed, the split between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority has been over the PA’s recognition of Israel’s right to exist and its commitment to peaceful means to achieve a two-state solution versus Hamas’s goal of one state and its use of violence to pursue those goals.

So Prime Minister Netanyahu has it exactly backward. A real two-state solution, especially coupled with a normalization agreement with Saudi Arabia, as President Biden has proposed, would be a strategic defeat for Hamas; it would be a victory for Israel’s long-term security; and it would be an important signal to the overwhelming majority of Palestinians who have nothing to do with Hamas and who have pursued a peaceful but still unfulfilled path toward self-determination.

It is true that a two-state solution would not only be a defeat for Hamas, it would also be a defeat for Ben Gvir, Smotrich, and Netanyahu—all of those who pursue maximalist one-state positions. It would be a defeat for all those who seek to claim all the land between the river and the sea for themselves.

Let’s be clear: Prime Minister Netanyahu may use different language and tactics, but he has shown that his goal is no different than the extremist allies he brought into his coalition. In fact, he recently boasted about his strong opposition to former Prime Minister Rabin’s decision to enter into the Oslo Accords, which were designed to lead to a two-state solution.

We should remember that Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated by a rightwing Israeli who saw peace as a threat because he wanted Israel to have all of the land and opposed Rabin’s decision.

Given Prime Minister Netanyahu’s misplaced belief that he was successfully managing Hamas prior to October 7, it is no wonder he doesn’t want to meet face-to-face with the Israeli families who lost loved ones, whom I spoke to on Friday. Instead, he wants to come to the United States to convince Israelis that the United States stands with him personally and supports his words and actions. He repeatedly tells his fellow Israelis that he knows best how to handle America in an attempt to boost his very low popularity ratings in Israel.

But the reality is that the actions, words, and policies of Prime Minister Netanyahu and his extremist partners have weakened the U.S.-Israel relationship, and we in the U.S. Congress should not be complicit in his ongoing political deception.

Let me just say that much of Prime Minister Netanyahu’s speech here will likely focus on the very real dangers posed by Iran and its proxies to Israel and others in the region.

President Biden and the United States understand full well Iran’s malevolent role in the region. We have been working for years to contain Iranian proxy militias in Iraq.

President Biden deployed our naval vessels to secure shipping lanes in the Red Sea as the Houthis have launched attacks since the start of the war in Gaza.

President Biden has deployed aircraft carriers in the early days of the war to deter escalation by Hezbollah. The Biden administration is, right now, working around the clock to get Hezbollah to redeploy its forces north of the Litani River.

And the United States, along with our partners in the region, provided Israel with substantial help in intercepting Iranian missiles and drones on April 13.

We understand the existential threat that Iran poses to Israel. President Biden has made clear—and I agree—that Iran must not be allowed to develop nuclear weapons.

Anyone who understands the region also understands that certain groups, like the Houthis and Hamas, while they welcome the support they receive from Iran—or anyone else for that matter—they are not the puppets of Iran. They are not controlled by Iran. That is the view of U.S. intelligence and other officials. They are indigenous movements that Iran has supported with weapons because of their mutual antagonism toward Israel. But those two groups would be carrying out attacks with or without Iranian encouragement. They benefit from Iran’s supply of weapons.

We also understand that Iran supports these groups by opportunistically exploiting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But to say that Iran exploits those wounds is not to say they are not real. One way to help bind those wounds, rather than allowing Iran to exacerbate them, is to work with those who have long recognized Israel’s right to exist and seek peaceful coexistence, like the Palestinian Authority, and to address the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

That is why President Biden and Egypt and Jordan and Saudi Arabia and the UAE and others in the Arab world work to establish a framework that ensures the long-term security of Israel by also addressing those aspirations.

During my recent visit to Saudi Arabia, I met with Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman and senior members of his government. They are interested in reaching a bilateral agreement with the United States on security and other measures.

Once the war in Gaza ends, they are also willing to support reconstruction

efforts and work toward advancing a normalization agreement with Israel, so long as Israel is willing to implement an irreversible plan to achieve a two-state solution. That would significantly enhance security for Israel in the region.

Unfortunately, Prime Minister Netanyahu has consistently rejected that approach in favor of the rightwing extremists in his coalition who want Israel to have all the land from the river to the sea.

We need leaders who are willing to make tough decisions for peace and security, not those who always put their own political ambitions first. As former Israeli Prime Minister Barak has stated, instead of urging Israelis to overcome their fears, Netanyahu is exploiting them, playing into the hands of his extreme rightwing allies. As Majority Leader SCHUMER has said on this Senate floor, there are many obstacles to peace in the Middle East. One of them is Mr. Netanyahu.

In my recent visit to Israel, I met with many Israelis who believe that Prime Minister Netanyahu and his dangerous, extremist partners are leading Israel down a very dangerous path, one that is weakening the bonds between the United States and the Government of Israel and will lead to Israel’s further isolation. I agree with their assessment.

I will not be party to a spectacle that will inevitably be used to create the illusion that Prime Minister Netanyahu is the protector of the U.S.-Israel relationship. He is not. As many hostages’ families have said, it would be better for him to stay at home and prioritize the release of their loved ones.

Those who really care about the relationship will work to ensure that it is based on our shared values, and, as the points I made today reveal, that is not happening right now. The Prime Minister and his extremist partners are undermining those shared values.

So, Mr. President, while I will continue to fight for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship based on shared values, I will not attend the joint session with Prime Minister Netanyahu tomorrow.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

#### GAZA

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, over 290 days ago, Iran-backed Hamas brutally murdered more than 30 Americans and took a dozen more hostage. Today, eight of those kidnapped on October 7 remain in the Gaza Strip, held captive by an inhumane terrorist group that wants nothing more than the death and destruction of Israel and the United States: Edan Alexander, Itay Chen, Sagui Dekel-Chen, Hersh Goldberg-Polin, Gadi Haggai, Judith Weinstein Haggai, Omer Neutra, Keith Siegel.

Eight of our fellow Americans, five of whom we believe to still be alive, are being held hostage right now—today—and yet too many people are seemingly unaware of this reality. It is shameful.