

and after October 7, including women who were raped in captivity.

While some hostages have been reunited with their loved ones in the last few months, there are still families, including those of eight Americans held hostage by Hamas—still held hostage by Hamas—who have yet to be whole again—yet to be made whole again, and we will not forget them—291 days.

And there are families whose ability to see or hug their loved ones have been taken away forever—forever—by Hamas terrorists, their loved ones having died at the hands of those terrorists, like the family of Itay Chen.

I met with Itay's father, Ruby, just days after the October 7 terrorist attack. As a mother, as a Jew, and as a human being, my heart broke when hearing about Itay's story and the unimaginable pain his parents are carrying. They are with us here in the Capitol today.

I want to apologize. I am sorry I have to give this speech. I know how much you loved your son.

Itay was multitalented, fun-loving, a Boy Scout who played basketball. He was an American who served in the Israeli Defense Forces and was only 19 years old when Hamas launched its brutal terrorist attack on October 7, when Hamas murdered him.

For months, we didn't know about Itay's condition, whether he was held hostage or even if he was alive. We held out hope. We held out hope. But the unimaginable heartbreak of going through this nightmare, it didn't stop Ruby. It never stopped Ruby.

He has come to Congress multiple times to remind us of our responsibility to his son and to all of the hostages being held by Hamas. His strength—your strength, Itay's parents—and resilience is an inspiration to us all.

Earlier this year, we learned Itay was one of the many souls who Hamas brutally murdered—again, beyond imagination. And while it was reported that he was killed 291 days ago, his body—his body—is being held captive by the Hamas terrorists who murdered him, and this has denied Ruby, denied Itay's parents and his family, the right to bury him, to mourn him, and to sit shiva for him.

It matters to the family. He and his wife Hagit and Itay's siblings have just been forced to live in grief and in limbo, and it is a tragedy that no one should ever have to go through.

There is a proposed deal to free the hostages. And with reports of progress in these negotiations, now is the time to see it through to the end. We must free the hostages for Itay, for his family, for the seven other Americans held by Hamas, for the remaining 120 hostages from two dozen countries—hostages who are Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist; who are someone's sons or daughters, sisters or brothers, mothers, fathers, loved ones who Hamas refuses to release. These are someone's loved ones. Hamas refuses to release them.

And as we continue to pursue every viable path to bring them home, we will hold them in our hearts and hold Hamas's feet to the fire. We stand with the hostages and their families. They are not forgotten. Our work isn't done until we bring them home.

Thank you again, Senator ERNST, for bringing us all together today.

I yield the floor.

Ms. ERNST. Thank you, Senator ROSEN.

Joining our colloquy now is the senior Senator from Maryland, BEN CARDIN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. I want to thank Senator ERNST for arranging this time. This is a critical moment. We are close to having a deal where the hostages can be released. It is important that we all speak out. I want to thank Senator ERNST for arranging this time.

To Senator ROSEN, thank you for your incredible leadership on this issue. I thank you for your comments. I certainly concur in those comments.

We just left a meeting with the hostage families that are here. I have been meeting with the hostage families regularly since October 7. I first want to acknowledge their courage for putting a face on these issues and motivating us to do more.

I made a commitment when I was in Israel in October that I would do everything in my power to get the hostages released. And, every day, I look at opportunities and I ask my staff to look for opportunities so we can get the hostages released.

Let me make this clear. Hamas is responsible for the hostages. They have taken them. They never should have. Some died under their custody, and there are still hostages who haven't been released after 291 days.

I had the opportunity to be in Buenos Aires last week, representing the United States at the 30th commemoration of the AMIA bombing, the Jewish community center where 85 lost their lives. It was a very moving ceremony in which the families of the victims of the Jewish community center bombing spoke. They want to make sure we never forget the names of those 85.

And they demanded justice. It has been 30 years, and justice still has not been handed down to Hezbollah and Hamas and Iran, who are responsible for those attacks.

We are demanding the release of the hostages that were taken on October 7, and we will not forget their names—the eight Americans who have not yet been accounted for.

Omer—I just met his family—a 22-year-old born leader, grew up in Long Island. He was the regional president of the United Synagogue Youth and captain of many sports teams. He is being held by Hamas.

You heard about the others: Itay, Edan, Hersch, Sagui, Keith, Judith, and Gadi. They are just the eight Americans that are being held. All the hos-

tages need to be released, and they need to be released now. Two hundred ninety-one days—it is outrageous.

Mr. President, I wanted to join Senator ERNST today to make it clear that there is no justification for the holding of the hostages. We have an opportunity to reach an agreement. Let's do this. Let's get it done. Let's get the hostages home. Let's hold the perpetrators accountable for the atrocities that they have perpetrated. And let's find a path for real security and peace in the Middle East, for the Palestinians and the Israelis.

There is no room for peace in the Middle East with Hamas. They need to be held accountable for these atrocities, and the hostages need to be released today. Let us all join together in unity to get the hostages home.

I yield the floor.

Ms. ERNST. Thank you, Senator CARDIN. Thank you for your leadership.

Senator TED BUDD represents the great State of North Carolina. He is unable to join us, but he did want to make sure we read his constituent's bio.

Eight of these remaining hostages are Americans. Our final American hostage is a native of the State of North Carolina, and his name is Keith Siegel.

I have joined North Carolina Senator TED BUDD in meetings with the families of hostages, as well as former hostages, like Keith's wife, Aviva. Keith and Aviva have four children, alongside five grandchildren.

We have heard their stories, and I can attest that Senator BUDD and I look at their photos every single day. We have heard the stories, and these families must absolutely live with horrible pain, and they have an uncertainty that is absolutely unacceptable. The fact that we stand here after 291 days and the fate of these eight innocent souls is not the primary topic of conversation on our national media and from the current administration is shameful.

Now is the time for all nations to rally together and use all available pressure to force Hamas terrorists to release all of our hostages.

I do want to thank my colleagues—Senator ROSEN, Senator CARDIN, and Senator GRASSLEY—for coming to the floor and joining in this colloquy to ensure that the American people don't forget that we have eight Americans that are still being held. Let's bring them home now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for 15 minutes and Senator BLACKBURN for 15 minutes prior to the scheduled vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ISRAEL

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the state of the war

between Israel and Hamas. Tomorrow, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu will speak before a joint session of Congress. I hope he will propose a significant change in his approach to the war. I hope he will offer his resounding thanks to President Biden for his steadfast support of the defense of Israel. I hope he will thank this Democratically led Senate, the majority leader, and our Republican colleagues for our early support of the supplemental appropriations bill that provided billions of dollars to strengthen Israel's defenses and provide humanitarian support to Gaza.

It has been more than 9 months since Hamas carried out its horrific attack against the Israeli people. Hamas terrorists killed more than 1,200 men, women, and children, and took 250 hostages. Unspeakable acts of terror were committed on October 7, and they will never be forgotten.

In the wake of this attack, the United States has stood resolutely by Israel's side, providing billions of dollars of aid and intervening to shield Israel from attack by Iran and its proxies.

For more than 75 years, Israel has been one of our closest allies. Since its founding, Israel has relied on America's friendship, and we have been proud to give it. It is because of this friendship, not in spite of it, that we must insist the Israeli Government change course in its war against Hamas. Israel's leaders must refocus their efforts to peace, stability, and the core tenets of Israel's democracy.

Several months ago, I came to the Senate floor as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and as a friend and longtime supporter of the Israeli people to say that the war had veered off course. I urged Prime Minister Netanyahu to learn from the United States' lessons in Iraq and Afghanistan, and I urged him to develop a realistic long-term plan for Gaza, including a framework for a two-state solution. Instead, Prime Minister Netanyahu has not just ignored the guidance of Israel's friends and allies, he has doubled down on his worst instincts and the dangerous ambitions of the most extreme elements of his coalition government.

The situation in Gaza is catastrophic. Gaza is a tiny enclave, but it is home to more than 2 million people who have been living in a war zone for 9 months. Tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians have been killed. Nearly half a million Gazans are facing life-threatening food insecurity. Efforts to increase humanitarian assistance have fallen far short.

Mr. Netanyahu and his government have failed to develop an exit strategy for Gaza. They have no plan for a sustainable future for the Palestinians and no plan to establish security and rebuild Gaza's destroyed cities.

Even more alarming, Israel now faces the threat of a second front on its northern border with Lebanon.

Hezbollah—better trained and better armed than Hamas—continues to clash with the IDF, threatening all-out war. At the same time, violence in the West Bank could boil over at any moment, which could spark wider regional conflict.

As I said in March, I believe that good allies and good friends stand together, but great allies and great friends are willing to speak hard truths and hold each other to the highest standards, especially around the conduct of war.

With Prime Minister Netanyahu in Washington this week, I am again compelled to say that the Israeli Government must change its path. There are three specific issues that the Israeli Government must address if it hopes to secure lasting peace. First, it must change its strategy in Gaza from a counterterrorism operation to a counterinsurgency campaign. Second, Israel must wrest control of its government back from the far-right extremists who have seized power. Third, Israeli leaders have to recognize that a two-state solution is the only viable path for peace and stability for the Israeli people.

To start, we have to acknowledge that Prime Minister Netanyahu lost his way in leading Israel's war against Hamas. He appears unwilling or unable to understand that his military strategy cannot destroy a group like Hamas. He continues to drive a costly, high-tempo counterterrorism campaign when he should be pursuing a counterinsurgency campaign.

The differences between these two strategies are important. A counterterrorism operation, like the one the IDF is carrying out, is about applying military power to crush terrorist fighters and prevent attacks.

Certainly, Israel has degraded much of Hamas's military power. U.S. analysts have judged that Hamas no longer has the capabilities to carry out another attack like October 7. But Hamas is not just a terrorist group; it is an ideology and a political organization with deep roots. Political ideologies like Hamas cannot be bombed into submission.

Instead, Mr. Netanyahu must shift to a counterinsurgency strategy. Counterinsurgency campaigns seek to address the root cause of the insurgency and strive to win the support of the local population, while building legitimacy for a responsible government. Israel's objective should be to weaken Hamas's support among Palestinians and ultimately isolate it from political and military lifelines.

But in times of trauma, every nation's first reaction is fear and anger. Much like Israel's horror on October 7, the United States experienced a deep national trauma on September 11, 2001. We, too, responded militarily, but it took us far too long to learn that a sustainable peace cannot be won solely on the battlefield. The best armies in the world cannot defeat a terrorist ideology.

Nine months into Israel's war against Hamas, it is clear that there is no way to wipe out the Hamas ideology through military might alone. This is not just my opinion. Current and former Israeli political and military leaders, including members of Mr. Netanyahu's own Cabinet, have warned that Israel's current strategy is not viable for long-term victory.

Last month, the chief Israeli military spokesman, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, said:

Those who think they could make Hamas disappear are wrong. Hamas is a political party. It is rooted in people's hearts.

It was because of this strategic failure that Benny Gantz, a former Israeli army general, Defense Minister, and member of Netanyahu's war cabinet, announced his resignation last month. He argued for months that Israel needed to fundamentally change its approach to the war, but Netanyahu could not be reasoned with.

I agree with Mr. Gantz on this issue. Prime Minister Netanyahu's conduct of the war has backfired strategically. Hamas wants to keep Israel in a state of perpetual war, and Netanyahu has fallen into that trap. His government must shift from a counterterrorism strategy to a counterinsurgency strategy.

Much of Mr. Netanyahu's intransigence may be attributed to the political allies he surrounds himself with. As a way to cling to power, Netanyahu has made common cause with far-right extremists who pursue their own agendas at the expense of Israel's security. These extremists have been elevated to some of the highest Cabinet positions of the government and have encouraged Netanyahu's most misguided policies, including his attempts at changes to the Israeli judicial system.

One of these figures is Itamar Ben-Gvir. As a convicted terrorist, Ben-Gvir was deemed too extreme to serve in the Israeli military. Nonetheless, in order to secure his coalition, Prime Minister Netanyahu placed Ben-Gvir in charge of the Ministry of National Security, which oversees the Israeli National Police.

Ben-Gvir has openly advanced his desire for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, including in Gaza. He has advocated for the settlement of Israelis in Gaza after the war and has organized a campaign to hand out assault rifles to Jewish settlers in the West Bank.

Importantly, Ben-Gvir has threatened to topple the governing coalition if his radical demands are not met. In particular, he has pressured Mr. Netanyahu to reject a hostage deal or cease-fire with Hamas that would include the release of Palestinian prisoners. Ben-Gvir's extreme agenda is eroding Israel's stability and adherence to the rule of law.

Another Cabinet Minister is Minister Smotrich, a notorious, radical settler activist with a troubling record. As Netanyahu's Minister of Finance and Adjunct Minister in the Ministry of Defense, Smotrich leverages his official

power to advance his agenda of annexing the West Bank for Jewish settlers and evicting Palestinians from the area. With Prime Minister Netanyahu's implicit support, Smotrich has steadily shifted control of administering the West Bank to his handpicked cronies in the Defense Ministry.

The Israeli activist group Peace Now has assessed that 2024 has been the "peak year" for Israeli land seizures in the West Bank.

As Finance Minister, Smotrich has abused his power by freezing distribution of Palestinian tax revenues as leverage to force the annexation of Jewish settlements. These tax revenues constitute almost all of the Palestinian Authority's budget, including its police and security personnel.

Earlier this month, Smotrich released some funding back to the Palestinian Authority in exchange for the authorization of five Israeli settlements that had been built illegally. This is extortion, plain and simple, and it has been condemned by U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan.

I highlight these far-right Cabinet leaders because their extreme personal and political agendas are impacting the government's military decisions in Gaza, whether through threats or cajoling. Ben-Gvir, Smotrich, and others have pushed the government into prosecuting the war and governing Israel the way they see fit.

In announcing his resignation last month, Mr. Gantz told the press that he had "become exasperated with Netanyahu for agreeing on one thing in the wartime cabinet and then doing the opposite because of pressure from his far-right coalition partners." In his resignation speech, Gantz lamented that "faithful, faithful strategic decisions are met with hesitation and procrastination due to political considerations. Unfortunately, Netanyahu prevents us from progressing to real victory."

These dynamics caused former Prime Minister and Defense Minister Ehud Barak to publicly warn that "[this war] appears to be the least successful war in history due to the strategic paralysis in the country's leadership."

Prime Minister Netanyahu is beholden to the far right. He needs his rightwing partners to stay in his coalition, and in turn, they cannot abandon him because he is their best chance to accomplish the objectives of their nationalist agenda.

Until there is a change in the direction of Israel's leadership, the far right will continue to drive Israel's security and the war in Gaza into the ground.

The failings of the Netanyahu government are not just a matter of bad strategy or the Prime Minister's willingness to rely on radical political partners to stay in power, it is also his own opposition to a two-state solution. As has been clear for decades, Prime Minister Netanyahu is unwilling to recognize that a two-state solution is

the only viable path to peace and security for Israel. He has been thwarting this option since his first term as Prime Minister in 1996.

One of Mr. Netanyahu's most reliable assets for preventing a two-state solution has been Hamas. As far back as 2012, Netanyahu told Israeli press that "it was important to keep Hamas strong, as a counterweight to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank." He knew that by empowering Hamas in Gaza, a two-state solution would never be possible. In fact, between 2012 and 2018 alone, Netanyahu allowed an estimated \$1 billion to flow into Gaza, at least half of which reached Hamas.

According to the Jerusalem Post, in a private meeting with members of the Likud Party in 2019, Netanyahu explained his rationale as this:

The money transfer is part of the strategy to divide the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. . . . In that way, we will foil the establishment of a Palestinian state.

This open hostility to a two-state solution has only hardened in the aftermath of October 7. In February, Netanyahu bragged:

Everyone knows that I am the one who for decades blocked the establishment of a Palestinian State that would endanger our existence.

And in just the last week, he led the Knesset in passing resolution that rejects a two-state solution.

Mr. Netanyahu has never been shy about his desire to prevent a two-state solution. His record is now clear beyond a shadow of a doubt. We should not be surprised that he continues to stand in the way of peace.

With this troubling record laid out, I feel compelled again, as a friend of Israel, to say that Prime Minister Netanyahu has put Israel on a disastrous path. His leadership is eroding Israel's security, health, and democracy.

In March, I came to the floor to call for new leadership for both the Israeli and Palestinian people. I stand by that call. Ultimately, these are decisions for the Israelis and the Palestinian people.

But while Prime Minister Netanyahu continues to lead his nation, I urge him to return to the cease-fire framework he agreed to in May with the Biden administration. This plan includes a sensible and phased approach to bring the hostages home, increasing lifesaving humanitarian assistance to Gaza, and a realistic approach to day-to-day security and governance in Gaza.

Israel will not find the long-term security and peace it wants by indefinitely reoccupying the Gaza Strip. In addition, the Prime Minister, working with the United States and other regional allies and partners, must achieve a diplomatic solution on the Israeli-Lebanon border. Now is not the time to risk opening a second, potentially more dangerous, confrontation with Hezbollah that could spill over into a larger regional war.

Further, Mr. Netanyahu should immediately disavow the far-right mem-

bers of his Cabinet and stop their efforts to inflame violence in Gaza and the West Bank that is making a two-state solution all but impossible.

Finally, President Netanyahu must accept the legitimacy of a two-state solution, where the State of Israel and a demilitarized Palestinian State can exist side by side in peace and security. This plan is difficult and will require a buy-in from Israel, the Palestinian people, Arab neighbors, and the international community, but it is necessary and essential. The inability to embrace a two-state solution has profound consequences for the State of Israel, its security, its standing in the world, and its ability to remain a democracy.

As I prepare to join my colleagues in listening to Prime Minister Netanyahu's address tomorrow, I remain deeply skeptical of his leadership and willingness to change course, but I hope he will finally listen to his friends and allies who only want the best for Israel.

The United States is Israel's oldest friend. But as a friend, we must insist that Prime Minister Netanyahu fundamentally change the path he has put his country on. The eyes of the world and history are upon it.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

KOSA-COPPA

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, this week the Senate is taking a historic step in the fight to protect children online by bringing the bipartisan Kids Online Safety Act to the floor.

Last Congress, Senator BLUMENTHAL and I introduced KOSA following disturbing reports that Meta leadership knew its platform Instagram is toxic to teenage girls, causing rising rates of eating disorders and mental health issues, but Meta downplayed these harms in public.

During a series of five subcommittee hearings, we heard testimony from social media companies, advocates, and parents on the repeated failures of tech giants to protect kids, to protect them from pro-suicide content, from drug dealers, from sexual predators, from eating disorder content, from human traffickers, and so much more.

For years, the Big Tech giants refused to meaningfully address these problems, but that changes with KOSA, which will finally hold them accountable.

Congress has not passed a major law to protect children online since 1998, and a lot has changed in the last 25 years. But this moment would have been impossible without the hundreds of parents, including many who have tragically lost their children to social media harms. They have traveled to Washington over the past several years to share their heartbreaking stories and to demand action to protect our children. Senator BLUMENTHAL and I could not have accomplished this without their voices, and I want to thank