

NATIONAL SECURITY

Madam President, now, on a related matter, the challenges facing an American-led order and American interests around the world are no less serious nor less connected than they were the last time the Senate convened.

Last week, Iran was expected to transfer ballistic missiles to Russia in a major expansion of its support for Putin's war in Ukraine. The PRC is ranking up its destabilizing provocations in the South China Sea, and Russia, for its part, continues to court the fealty of senior officials from a NATO ally, Hungary.

And our adversaries' advances have been compounded by the West's own inaction, distraction, and astonishing lapses in moral clarity.

In recent days, the head of UNRWA, whose employees participated in the slaughter of Jews on October 7, insisted that deserved criticism of his organization's complicity in terrorism was itself tantamount to "a weapon" in the world.

The Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom's new government announced that a suspension of some 30 licenses of military aid to Israel, just as the world's only Jewish State buried hostages—including a young American citizen—that were murdered in cold blood by Hamas.

This step—and calls for similar restriction on our own assistance—validate the terrorist strategy and broadcast the weakness of our resolve.

And in a bizarre public message, even by its own standards, the Biden-Harris administration urged the Houthi terrorists holding international commerce hostage in the Red Sea to think—think—about the consequences of their blockade for the environment.

Needless to say, with August behind us, Congress's own unfinished business has become even more glaring. The President's meager defense budget request is already an insufficient starting point for top line funding discussions when they began literally months ago.

Today, constraints on Congress's ability to provide for the common defense are even more dangerous and demands for parity with nondefense discretionary spending even more reckless.

Meanwhile, continued failure to process the must-pass National Defense Authorization Act puts the lie to any suggestion that the Senate Democratic majority is focused on urgent business.

The authoritarians conspiring to supplant American-led peace and prosperity did not ease up while the Senate was in recess. Our adversaries are resolved to exploit American weakness and hesitate. And we have given them quite enough.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

MUHAMMAD YUNUS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, it was over 20 years ago when I was a Member of the House of Representa-

tives that one of my colleagues Mike Synar, then a Congressman from Oklahoma, asked me if I would like to join him on a trip.

I said: Where do you want to go, Mike? I'm not all that popular back home in my district, so you better pick a place that we can explain. He said: I am going to take you to a place that no one will ever complain about. I would like you to go with me to Bangladesh.

I said: Where is that? He said: I will show you. And off we went to Bangladesh halfway around the world. It was a great trip. It is a poor country that has been through a lot of political turmoil. It has had more than its share of natural disasters, and they are a remarkable people.

During the course of that trip, I was introduced to an economics professor at the university. He was an interesting character. He would come up with a theory that he thought would help the poorest people on earth. It was known as microcredit, and he created something called the Grameen Bank, the people's bank.

And, basically, what he set out to do was to prove that you could loan a small amount of money to the poorest people on earth and dramatically change their lives.

They would pay it back, and they would start to be more constructive, more profitable in what they were doing. It was just a theory at the time, but he is starting to prove it. We kept in touch after leaving that visit, and I watched over the years as he expanded the concept.

Pretty soon, there were cell phones in these tiny little villages in Bangladesh. One person would own a cell phone and sell minutes on the phone for people to call in to the nearest city to see if this was the right time to bring their produce to market.

His name was Muhammad Yunus, and he caught the attention not just of this Congressman—now a Senator—but he caught the attention of the world. When it was all said and done, he received the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in economics.

I thought he was extraordinary and should be recognized here as well, so I led the effort with the late Senator Mike Enzi and Congressman RUSH Holt to award the Congressional Gold Medal to this remarkable economics professor—Dr. Muhammad Yunus. He was sometimes known as the "Banker to the Poor" after he received the Nobel Prize.

He pioneered microlending as a groundbreaking method of helping some of the world's poorest people. He recognized that, just with a little bit of money in hand, many people could lift themselves out of poverty, but traditional banks wouldn't lend small sums to the poor, particularly the women who were poor. Banks saw such loans as too risky, not profitable, and unworthy.

Dr. Yunus never gave up. He saw things differently, with incredible re-

sults. Through his Grameen Bank, he proved that microlending could be done collateral-free and investing in poor women actually paid off. In fact, most of Grameen Bank's loans have gone to poor women who rise from terrible poverty to become small business people.

I have seen the results of that innovative approach all over the world now, including a visit to a ramshackle hut in Uganda, where I met three mothers who were working in a local market. I asked them, through an interpreter, how microcredit had changed their lives. One woman said: "My knees have gone soft." I didn't understand what she meant. I asked her to explain.

She said: Before I got my microcredit loan, which gave me a chance to go to the market and make a little money, I used to have to crawl on my knees to beg my husband for money to feed the children. I don't have to crawl anymore. My knees have gone soft.

I will never forget that exchange.

In recent decades, more than 140 million people on 5 continents have received microloans with incredible repayment rates and success. Quite simply, Dr. Muhammad Yunus's ideas changed the World and helped to earn him that Nobel Peace Prize.

Tragically, his ideas also earned him the wrath of the Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, whose government harassed Dr. Yunus for years with questionable legal charges and threatened jail time.

So imagine my surprise last month—just a few weeks ago, during this break. Hasina finally resigned as Prime Minister of Bangladesh amidst massive public protest, and the students who were leading the protest demanded that the leader of their country be none other than Dr. Muhammad Yunus, the same economics professor I met more than 20 years ago. They asked him to create a caretaker government and hold new elections, which he is in the process of doing.

I called him on the phone when I heard of his good fortune and the fact that he is now the leader of that nation. I asked him what I could do to help, and he said: We need so much help to stabilize the economy and move forward with this poor nation. I will be coming to the United Nations in the next few weeks.

I hope to get the chance to see him. I hope he can make it down here to Washington.

He was upbeat. He believes the people of that country are prepared now to rise to this historic opportunity.

I am going to offer my full support to him today. I believe in him. I did 20 years ago, and I do today. I urge President Biden to support him as well. I know Dr. Yunus has the best interest of the Bangladeshi people at heart and will do his utmost in this challenging time.

ISRAEL

Madam President, on another topic, last weekend we learned of even more

heartbreak in the Middle East—specifically, that six innocent Israeli hostages had been executed by Hamas, even as the talks were ongoing for their release.

One of them was a young man in the prime of his life. We met his parents. He had ties to our State of Illinois—Hersh Goldberg-Polin. He was one of the young people at the music festival on October 7, in Israel, during the heinous Hamas attack that sparked so much death and destruction. He lost part of his arm trying to protect the others who were taken hostage from a grenade, only to find himself being taken as a hostage.

His parents, Rachel and Jon, spent the next 329 days of his captivity crisscrossing the globe on a desperate effort to save their son and end this ghastly war. Can there be a crueler fate for a parent than suffering the daily plea and waiting for a horribly injured child's release?

Hersh is no longer with us, but the heroic lengths his mom and dad made to save him touched many of us deeply, including me.

The fate of these six hostages and the ongoing suffering and violence of the region are reminders of something that I said early in the conflict: Israel would be wise to learn from the United States' mistakes after 9/11 in responding amid unimaginable rage and pain.

I believe this lesson has been lost on the current Israeli Prime Minister, who, with each passing day, seems to step deeper into the pernicious and ruthless trap set by Hamas. He seems to have no long-term plan for stability. He has failed to secure the release of the hostages. He has created a terrible, terrible humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and appears more concerned with his far-right coalition's survival than a viable path forward.

Let me be clear. There are those in the region who want to destroy Israel, and that nation has a right to exist and a right to defend itself. But I worry its current Prime Minister is pursuing a highly counterproductive strategy. He is alienating allies in the region and abroad who want to help with a path forward. He is creating even more suffering and animosity among the Palestinian people and pursuing political survival above all else.

Or as Middle East expert Tom Friedman recently wrote:

Netanyahu has one interest: his own immediate political survival, even if it undermines Israel's long-term survival.

Or the former Mossad chief, Meir Dagan, who, before his death some years ago, concluded that Israel, over the decades "achieved a long string of impressive tactical successes but disastrous strategic failure."

It is long overdue that both sides reach an agreement on a cease-fire that leads to the release of the remaining hostages, greater humanitarian access, and a long-term, two-state vision that allows for both Israelis and Palestinians to live safely and in dignity.

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. SCHUMER. 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

SENATE WORK PERIOD

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, welcome back.

The Senate gavels back into session after a busy and productive August work period. I wish to extend a "welcome back" to all my colleagues. I hope everyone's time back home was well spent.

Last week, I traveled across Upstate New York and New York City listening to New Yorkers from all walks of life and holding events about lowering prescription drug costs, implementing the infrastructure law, and all the ways Democrats are delivering for the American people.

WELCOMING SENATE-DESIGNATE GEORGE HELMY

Madam President, now that we are back, our first order of business will be to swear in the newest Member of this body, George Helmy, selected to represent the people of New Jersey until they choose a new Senator this November.

New Jersey couldn't have a better caretaker for the next few months. Senator-designate Helmy's career has been wholly dedicated to service. He was a longtime Senate staffer for both the late Senator Frank Lautenberg and Senator CORY BOOKER and served as chief of staff to the Governor of New Jersey. George Helmy knows New Jersey like the back of his hand.

When he is sworn in later today, he will be escorted by none other than his former boss, Senator CORY BOOKER. It is a proud moment for them as well as for all of George's family.

Finally, Senator-designate Helmy's brief tenure will be historic. He will be the first-ever member of the Coptic Orthodox Church to serve in the Senate. The Coptic Church is one of the oldest institutions in all of Christianity, dating back to the first century, when the Apostle Mark evangelized in Egypt.

Today, there are at least half a million Coptic Americans living in the United States, with large communities in New Jersey and in my home State of New York. Today, one of them will join this great body.

I thank George for answering the call of service. We wish him nothing but success and are ready to assist him however necessary in the weeks and months to come.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Madam President, now on the CR, the Senate is back in session for what will be three very busy, fast-paced, and consequential few weeks.

This afternoon, we will hold our first vote on cloture on the nomination of Adam Abelson to be a district judge for the District of Maryland.

For the information of Senators, I have also filed cloture on the nomination of Jeannette Vargas to be a district judge for the Southern District of New York.

For the rest of the week and for the rest of the work period, we will be confirming more of President Biden's outstanding judicial nominees.

And now, as everyone knows, one of the most important things we must do this work period is avoid a government shutdown. Today is September 9. Funding for the Federal Government will expire in 21 days unless Republicans work with Democrats on a temporary extension.

As has been done time and time again, keeping the government open will require bipartisanship. Keeping the government open will mean no poison pills or reckless partisan posturing. And keeping the government open will mean tuning out the bully tactics of the hard right.

Sadly, our House Republican counterparts are not off to a promising start. Last week, House Republicans released, without even consulting the Democratic leaders of the House and Senate or the President, a 6-month CR that is transparently unserious and seemingly designed for scoring political points instead of avoiding a shutdown. In fact, it is so unserious that the White House has already issued a veto threat.

It is a shame that the House of Representatives is once again wasting time catering to the hard right instead of doing the hard work of responsible, bipartisan governance. Speaker JOHN-SON'S slapdash continuing resolution isn't a serious effort to fund our government. If House Republicans were serious, they would sit down and craft a bill in a bipartisan fashion—consulting with me, the House Democratic leader, and the White House—and they would craft a bill that, in a bipartisan fashion, would actually achieve our common goal of funding the government.

If House Republicans were serious, they would not kick the can down the road for half a year, jeopardizing our military readiness and troop pay and interrupting critical domestic investments. If House Republicans were serious, they would work across the aisle to craft a CR that does not allow a lapse of critical healthcare programs like community health centers. They would work with the Senate to make sure we extend vital programs that protect our border and our economy, like E-Verify and H-2B visas.

If House Republicans were serious, they would work with Democrats to avoid the farm bill expiration in December and prevent the horrible dairy cliff that would so hurt our farmers. If the funding provided by the farm bill expires before we act, thousands of dairy farmers could be very seriously