

against Ukraine. It is not a mystery how these weapons made their way into terrorist hands.

So in the wake of an administration that squandered leverage over the world's most active state sponsor of terror, tied the hands of a sovereign democracy in the face of neo-Soviet imperialism, browbeat a close ally fighting to restore its security against savage terrorists, and met the looming aggression of our greatest strategic adversary with a toothless climate diplomacy, we have our work cut out for us.

Of course, an executive branch allergy to deterrence and the exercise of hard power is not our only challenge. Even after January 20, we will still have to contend here in the Senate with efforts to weaken America's commitments to our friends and constrain the authorities that keep our adversaries on their toes.

This week, we will deal with exhibit A: resolutions from the senior Senator from Vermont to ban lethal arms sales to Israel.

I could lay out yet again why Israel deserves the time, the space, and support to restore its security and why the aftermath of the deadliest slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust requires moral clarity, but instead I would like to take the case Senator SANDERS made in the pages of the Washington Post yesterday and respond to just a few of its most outrageous assertions.

Our colleague began by characterizing Israel's response to the horrors of October 7 as "all-out war against the Palestinian people." There is indeed a side in this conflict waging all-out war, but it is not the sovereign democracy that issues evacuation warnings before striking targets, knowing the terrorist combatants will escape along with civilians. No, the side waging all-out war is the one for whom civilian casualties are the end goal—the side that butchered, raped, and kidnapped Israeli civilians and continues to use Palestinian civilians as human shields; the side that pilfers humanitarian aid intended for its own citizens. Recognizing this distinction isn't just important to the discussion; it ought to be the price of admission.

Let's take another of our colleague's effort to blame Israel's war on an "extremist government." Well, I suspect that would be news to the large shares of Israeli citizens across the political spectrum who have called for even more extensive operations against Hamas and Hezbollah, to the opposition leader who criticized IDF retaliatory strikes against Iran as not sufficiently aggressive, or to diverse members who have served in Israeli's war cabinet and made consensus decisions about the conduct of a war thrust upon them by genocidal terrorists.

How about another of his claims—that Israel is "becoming a pariah nation condemned by governments around the world." This one has a shred—a shred—of truth to it, but the hounding condemnations of the Jewish State are hardly news.

Since 2015, the United Nations has adopted 156 resolutions condemning Israel. By comparison, the Iranian regime that chants for Israel's extermination has attracted similar condemnation 8 times—156 condemnations of Israel; 8 of Iran—while the Syrian regime responsible for slaughtering its own citizens received 11 condemnations. Some might suggest these figures say more about the U.N. and the scourge of anti-Semitism worldwide than about Israel.

Frankly, if Israel is becoming "a pariah nation" specifically since October 7, it is because this attack on Jews unleashed a new wave of emboldened anti-Semitism all across the West. And I worry that my colleague's misplaced criticism only provides cover for disgusting anti-Semitism right here in our own country, most visibly on university campuses.

Our colleague, for some reason, seems to take the U.N. very seriously. He points out that "U.N. bodies have called for an end to the arms shipment fueling the conflict." Could it be that the senior Senator from Vermont wants us to get serious about Iran's pipeline of support to terrorist proxies? Guess again.

But as long as we are discussing international organizations, the best way for the U.N. to prevent "fueling conflict" would be to stop putting genocidal terrorists on its payroll. As long as I have anything to say about it, not a single taxpayer dollar will foot UNRWA's bills.

Our colleague's case is a maze of internal contradictions. Reasonable people have no need to grapple with it point by point. Those who mourn senseless human suffering should have no trouble assigning blame to the terrorists who exploit civilians, schools, hospitals, and mosques as cover. Those who seek peace should know better than to pretend we can achieve it with such savages holding power.

This week, obviously I hope the Senate will reject the Senator's resolutions outright.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NDA

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I shouldn't need to tell anyone that the National Defense Authorization Act is one of the most important bills we consider each year. Issues may wax and wane in importance in Washington, but national security is—and must be—a perennial priority.

There is never a time when we can afford to put our national defense on the back burner or underfund our Nation's military. Unfortunately, that point

seems to be lost on the Democratic leader.

It has been 5 months—5 months—since the Senate Armed Services Committee passed the fiscal year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act—5 months.

We are almost 2 months into the new fiscal year, and yet once again this week, the NDAA will not be on the floor here in the Senate.

Delays to the National Defense Authorization Act are always problematic. As I said, there is no time at which we can afford to put our national security on the back burner. But delays are especially problematic at a time when our military preparedness is lagging—and America's adversaries are flexing their muscle.

In July of this year, the bipartisan Commission on the National Defense Strategy published its final report. And I just want to read a couple of lines from that report. This is from the report summary:

The Commission finds that the U.S. military lacks both the capabilities and the capacity required to be confident it can deter and prevail in combat.

Let me just repeat that. Think about that for a moment.

The Commission finds that the U.S. military lacks both the capabilities and the capacity required to be confident it can deter and prevail in combat.

That is a pretty damning statement. Elsewhere, the commission notes:

The Commission finds that, in many ways, China is outpacing the United States and has largely negated the U.S. military advantage in the Western Pacific through two decades of focused military investment. Without significant change by the United States, the balance of power will continue to shift in China's favor.

"Without significant change by the United States, the balance of power will continue to shift in China's favor."

And from the Strategic Posture Commission report in 2023:

Today the United States is on the cusp of having not one, but two nuclear peer adversaries, each with ambitions to change the international status quo, by force, if necessary: a situation which the United States did not anticipate and for which it is not prepared.

"[A] situation which the United States did not anticipate and for which it is not prepared." In other words, we have work to do—a lot of work to do.

And that work is being inhibited by the Democrat leader's decision not to prioritize the National Defense Authorization Act and defense spending bills.

And needless to say, while the Democrat leader delays, the world isn't getting any safer. China, which has grown increasingly aggressive in the Pacific, is investing heavily in its military—and is outpacing our military in modern capabilities like hypersonic missiles.

This past week alone, China unveiled a new stealth fighter jet, along with other advanced technologies.

Russia, meanwhile, continues its war of aggression in Ukraine—most recently with a massive missile attack

this weekend on Ukrainian infrastructure.

Meanwhile, in the Middle East, Hamas continues to hold hostages it seized in its attack on October 7 of last year, including Americans.

And Iran-backed proxies continue to menace both Israel and U.S. assets in the region. Iran has spent decades—decades—fomenting unrest in the Middle East, and the news that it intends to increase its military budget by a staggering 200 percent next year suggests the country has no plans to abandon its destabilizing activities.

I could go on. Each day's news is a reminder that we live in an increasingly dangerous world—and that while we never invite conflict, we have to be prepared for it.

The Democratic leader may have chosen to spend his time this year on show votes and Biden nominees. But next year, control of the Senate will be different. And I will tell my colleagues right now that in the 119th Congress, neither the NDAA nor military preparedness will be put on the back burner. Under Republican governance, providing for our Nation's defense and supporting our men and women in uniform will not only continue to be one of Congress's most important obligations, it will be treated as such.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. HELMY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to enter into a colloquy with the Senator from Alabama.

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

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. HELMY. Mr. President, our nation's youth are facing an unprecedented mental health crisis, and we need to take immediate action to address the root causes and ensure adequate access to care. I stand here today with my friend and colleague, Senator KATIE BRITT, to implore continued action to solve this crisis.

This issue is one that is personal for me, as it is for Senator BRITT. We both have young children, and so we see what they and their peers experience firsthand. There is no issue more urgent, more critical to our Nation's future than the health and safety of our next generation.

The challenges are well-known; and, frankly, the data is shocking. Over the past decade, cases of severe depression among young adults have nearly doubled. In the 2010s, suicidal behaviors among high school students increased by more than 40 percent. And since 2017, the number of youth hospitalized for anxiety has increased by 50 percent; the proportion hospitalized for self-harm has nearly doubled.

I repeat: The proportion hospitalized for self-harm has nearly doubled.

Youth and young adults ages 10 to 24 account for 15 percent of all suicides—an increase of over 50 percent since 2000. It is the second leading cause of death among our young people.

We can point to numerous stressors feeding this crisis. And I have discussed on this floor with great honor before, social media lands at the very top of that list. Social media has altered not only the way our young people interact but the very way in which they see themselves and even the way their brains develop.

Senator BRITT understands this issue and has been a leading voice in this Chamber and throughout Congress. I turn to her and thank her for her leadership.

Mrs. BRITT. Senator HELMY, thank you so much for your leadership on this important issue from day one.

Mr. President, you, yourself, have led on this issue significantly.

I think it is important for our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to come together and understand just how pressing America's mental health crisis really is.

I was honored when Senator HELMY came to me right after being sworn in and told me that he wanted to work together on mental health issues and social media. And that is what we are doing here today.

And all of the statistics that Senator HELMY mentioned are not only horrifying but really challenging to even wrap our head around.

The word "crisis" doesn't even begin to capture what we are up against. And while we should always be wary of pointing to just one culprit, there is one that stands out amongst the rest; and that is social media.

As a mom of two teenagers, I see firsthand—and I hear from other moms—about the effects of social media on our country's children. And at the same time, those incredibly distressing trends that Senator HELMY detailed took place, social media usage became pervasive among America's kids. And the numbers back it up.

So if you look, 54 percent of teenagers said it would be hard to give up social media. Half of all teens say that they are addicted to their phones.

That was in a 2016 survey. I can't imagine what it would say today.

And 35 percent say that they are almost constantly on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, or Facebook.

And for those of you who can't see, we are getting some shaking heads from our pages down front.

Almost all of American teens have access to a smartphone. This near-constant use of social media platforms has consequences.

The U.S. Surgeon General wrote, this summer, that 3 hours of social media is 2 times the risk of anxiety and depression amongst our young people.

The average American teenager spends nearly 5 hours a day on social media, and it is clearly having an impact. The Department of Health and Human Services studies show almost half of adolescents say that social media makes them feel worse about their bodies.

Internal research on Instagram conducted itself showed that a third of

teenage girls who use the app report that it "made them feel worse," and they found themselves "unable to stop."

And results of studies like the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System and the National Institute on Drug Abuse's Monitoring the Future survey shows teens and tweens today get less sleep, less exercise, and less in-person time with their peers than previous generations.

It is long past time to do something about this crisis. And I would like to hand it back to Senator HELMY to talk about how this body is getting to work.

Mr. HELMY. Thank you, my friend.

The Senate, as divided as it may seem, can and has acted decisively. We have all witnessed this with the Kids Online Safety Act, led by my friends and Senators BLUMENTHAL, BLACKBURN, MARKEY, and CASSIDY, which sailed through the Senate unanimously. The bill protects both youth currently impacted by social media but also seeks to address the root causes of the danger: the addictive design of the algorithm. This decisive action shows me that this body can and will do big things together to protect our young people. This is proof that there is that hope.

And I now turn back to my colleague Senator BRITT for her leadership on yet another bipartisan bill that I hope will also pass through this Chamber.

Mrs. BRITT. Yes. And, listen, I am so glad that you brought this up before we moved to the next one. The Kids Online Safety and Privacy Act, I think, really represents the best among us. It was a true bipartisan product. It showed progress on the issue. I am proud to have been a cosponsor and working alongside the Senators that you mentioned, their leadership—BLACKBURN, BLUMENTHAL, CASSIDY, MARKEY—who were willing to step up and truly say: Look, here is a path forward, and let's build consensus and move it.

So thank you for the effort, all of them, that they put into this legislation. I wasn't surprised, like you, that it passed the Senate in overwhelming fashion because this is not a red or a blue issue. This is an American issue. And that is exactly how this must be tackled. And it is clear that this body understands that.

And I am looking forward to continuing to build more momentum, taking more steps on a bipartisan basis to move that ball even further down the field.

Senator HELMY, you are a parent, just like I am. We are raising kids in this environment. We are seeing how social media affects them. And it is really a struggle that I think unifies us in an unprecedented way.

I was proud to work along with Senator BRIAN SCHATZ and TED CRUZ and CHRIS MURPHY as we also reflected on this problem as parents.

That is why our bipartisan group introduced the Kids Off Social Media Act. It would prevent kids under 13 from