

have seen an unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by Russia, China flexing its power in the Indo-Pacific and beyond and increasingly threatening the Philippines and Taiwan, Iran continuing to foment terror in the Middle East, the worst terror attack in Israel's history, and the list goes on. And while the Biden administration cannot be held solely responsible for all of these events, the lack of clear American leadership under President Biden has undoubtedly contributed to the unrest that we have seen internationally.

The President often seems incapable of staking out a firm policy position. Again and again, he seems to want to have things both ways, whether he is ordering attacks on Iran-backed terrorists while simultaneously declaring his unwillingness to escalate or drawing redlines for Israel while proclaiming U.S. support or take the war in Ukraine, where President Biden has advocated for the United States providing defense assistance while simultaneously slow-walking approval for critical combat resources, which has unquestionably contributed to the present situation.

I don't know whether the President is trying to keep all his interest groups happy or is simply afraid to fully commit, but his indecisiveness telegraphs weakness to our enemies and allies alike, just as his disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan did or his policy toward Iran.

The Biden administration began relations with Iran on a note of appeasement with an attempt to reinstate the Obama administration's flawed nuclear deal and then followed that up by unfreezing \$6 billion in Iranian assets as part of a deal to free American prisoners. Thankfully, the administration ultimately refroze those funds in the wake of Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack, but unfreezing them in the first place was a serious mistake, as were things like the Biden administration's decision to restart funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, or UNRWA, despite long-held suspicions—since confirmed—that there were UNRWA staffers with ties to Islamist militant groups.

These types of decisions convey a message to our adversaries: a lack of firm resolve and a willingness to compromise and accommodate. And in the face of this kind of message, it is little wonder that terrorists throughout the Middle East have been emboldened and have been attacking not just our ally Israel but American assets and American soldiers in the region.

And I have to wonder whether bodies like the International Criminal Court, which recently attempted to put Israeli leaders in the same class as Hamas terrorists by unlawfully issuing warrants for their arrest, have also been emboldened by the Biden administration's waffling.

As China flexes its muscle, Iran continues its proxy war on Israel, and North Korean soldiers join Russia's

war on Ukraine, it is time for a return to clear American leadership on the world stage, and that doesn't mean an America that intervenes in every conflict or dictates terms to everyone. We neither can nor should attempt to become the world's policeman. But it does mean an America that speaks clearly and doesn't equivocate, that condemns evil and doesn't accommodate, and an America that projects and can deliver strength, the kind of strength that will make our adversaries think twice before tangling with us or our allies.

President Trump has made an excellent choice for Secretary of State with our colleague MARCO RUBIO. He is one of our strongest and clearest voices on national security. And between him and President Trump and other future members of the Trump administration, America's adversaries should be on notice. I think there has already been something of a shift in the air, and I am hopeful that in the weeks to come we will finally see movement on freeing the remaining Americans and other hostages who were captured by Hamas in its October 7, 2023, attack. It is incredible that these individuals are facing their second—second winter—in Gaza. And President Trump's statement Monday about his commitment to freeing these hostages immediately should be a warning to Hamas that the United States will no longer tolerate the captivity of her citizens.

The last few years have shown us what a world without clear American leadership looks like. I am confident that the next 4 years will show us what the world looks like with it.

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. MCCONNELL. 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

TRIBUTE TO GEORGE WILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, for just a few minutes, I would like to call our colleagues' attention to a rather rarified milestone in Washington and in our national political discourse—50 years of columns from George Will of the Washington Post.

Perhaps in some other biography of some other figure approaching George's intellectual stature, the eye might be drawn to the doctorate in political science. Among the credentials of some impressive journalists, you might notice above all a Pulitzer Prize. But in the story of George Will, the most remarkable thing is the consistent, unrelenting rhythm.

Twice a week for half a century, he has commanded a place in the most consequential conversations; twice a

week, inviting and sometimes insisting that the most powerful city in the most powerful Nation on Earth actually consider a well-reasoned argument.

Of course, George Will's columns are usually a great deal more than airtight, logical cases; they are full of historical trivia, sharp wit, delicious sarcasm, and more often than not, allusions to or outright lessons in America's pastime.

Like Buckley and Reagan, George Will quite evidently enjoys his vocation as a happy warrior. He clearly relishes every chance to gently remind readers that the answers to the biggest questions of the day so often lie in the wisdom and traditions of the past.

In his own reflections on 50 years at the Post, George remarked that the great luxury of a columnist is assuming that the mental pantries of one's readers are well stocked with baseline knowledge. Well, the mental pantries of George's loyal readers, in fact, overflow—in no small part thanks to his consistent deposits of earnest produce.

As always, we look forward to reading what he has to say next.

ISRAEL

Mr. President, on an entirely different matter, it has been a week since Israel and Hezbollah agreed to a cease-fire. War is hell, and I hope sincerely that this marks a durable end to the immediate conflict. But hope is not a strategy, and I know better than to expect honest dealings from hardened terrorists. It would be naive enough a year and a half ago to believe that Iran and its proxies had suddenly decided to accept Israel's right to exist. But in light of the horrors of October 7 and the sustained campaign of terror since then, it is more likely that Iran and its proxies mean to alleviate the pressure of Israel's successful operations and give Hezbollah—the A-team of international terrorism and the vanguard of Iran's axis of anti-Semitic violence—simply a chance to catch its breath.

In the weeks and months to come, the strength of this cease-fire will be tested repeatedly. Will it prevent Iran from resupplying and regenerating Hezbollah's capacity to wage terror? Will it enable Lebanon's political leaders to chart a new path out of Hezbollah's stranglehold of their country? Will it allow residents of northern Israel to feel safe enough to return home?

It is important to remember why Israel faced this terror in the first place: Despite chapter 7 U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding compliance, the cease-fire agreement that ended hostilities in 2006 was never enforced.

Even with Lebanese Armed Forces and U.N. peacekeepers on the ground, Hezbollah rearmed and Iranian influence reached deeper into Lebanon. Such a tragic farce must not be allowed to repeat itself.

This cease-fire is not a solution. If regional powers want peace, they need to act.

First, Israel's neighbors must decide whether they want to be peaceful and sovereign countries or vassals of Iran and legitimate targets at war. This applies to Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon's fractured governments.

The United States, for its part, must ensure Israel has the freedom to maneuver to target and destroy Iran's military and logistical lifelines, and America should move quickly to restore Israel's munitions stockpiles. As I expect the incoming administration already knows, this means removing restrictions on the sale of needed weapons like 2,000-pound smart bombs.

But there is a broader, more fundamental lesson I hope we will take away from Israel's stunningly successful campaign against Hezbollah. It is about the credibility of threats. It was Israel's bold and decisive operations, not the overly cautious calls for restraint from Washington, that made a cessation of hostilities possible. The Jewish State has left Iran with no reason to doubt Israel's capacity and its willingness to protect its citizens and restore its sovereignty by force.

America ought to apply this lesson to our own approach to the Iran-backed groups that continue to attack American forces across the region—and to Ukraine as well. Too many in Washington still believe that the path to peace lies in restraining our friends.

The evidence of coordination between our adversaries—China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea—is incontrovertible. It is high time that America's support for our friends carried real weight.

TRIBUTE TO MITT ROMNEY

Mr. President, on one final matter, at the end of the year, the Senate will bid farewell to a number of distinguished colleagues who are starting well-deserved next chapters. In the coming weeks, I will single out a few of them for particular praise.

It seems fitting to begin with someone whose retirement is a departure not just from the Senate but from a long and honorable career on the national political stage.

On the bingo cards of American politics, the Governor of Massachusetts-Senator from Utah combination isn't known to hit very often, but MITT ROMNEY's repeated successes in public office are a testament to the transcendent appeal of his character.

As it turns out, uncompromising honesty, earnest humility, and evident devotion to faith and family are as compelling in Cedar City as they are in Concord. Of course, a certain telegenic quality—dare I say a Presidential aura—doesn't hurt either.

By the time our friend assumed the title of "junior Senator from Utah," his approach to life in the public eye combined the polished instincts of a professional who had played to win at the highest level and the independence and self-assurance that come only from unshakable convictions.

For MITT, the Senate was not a waiting room or a stepping stone; it was

the capstone to a life in public service. With the wisdom to discern where to devote his attention, he has managed to cram more into 6 years than many colleagues fit into 12 or 18. He made himself a linchpin for bipartisan negotiations and wound up at the center of the effort that delivered major infrastructure legislation. He poured himself into worthy fights on behalf of his constituents, navigating everything from Tribal politics to State Department bureaucracy with characteristic diplomacy. He called the Senate's attention more closely to the state of America's competition with China and the worthy demands of American global leadership. He has met moments of enormous gravity with careful contemplation and the utmost grace.

The past 6 years will not be remembered as the Senate's quietest. Observers might have wondered what more a distinguished public servant like MITT ROMNEY had to prove in coming to Washington and putting up with the demands of this body. But that would be a misunderstanding of the way our friend has ordered his life. It wasn't about what he had left to prove but what he had left to give.

With that outlook, MITT has been able to put even the most consequential business of public life in perspective. He reminds young visitors to the Capitol that the true currency of life is the people you love and spend your time with.

He is quick to explain that his life isn't defined by the outcome of elections and that his deepest meaning comes from his faith and his relationship with his family. It doesn't take much to recognize how earnestly he means that. For one thing, we know that joining the Senate was, at best, a distant second on the list of MITT's most significant events of the year 2019, behind celebrating 50 years of marriage to his sweetheart Ann. When you factor in the birthdays of 25 grandchildren and counting, even the most significant career milestone is bound to fall off the list.

Frankly, if I were on MITT's Senate staff, I wouldn't worry too much about lining up my next job. A full-time grandpa to a brood as big as the Romneys is bound to need some extra hands for scheduling and advance work.

MITT and Ann's partnership is one for the history books. It is a reminder that when you spend your life with the right people, success in business or politics is just icing on the cake, and when you ground yourself in firm beliefs, the winds of politics are easier to weather.

As a particular moving hymn in MITT's church instructs, "Do what is right; let the consequence follow. Battle for freedom in spirit and might; and with stout hearts look ye forth till tomorrow. God will protect you; then do what is right."

So, MITT, I want to thank you for devoting yourself to service and letting the consequence follow. May God protect you and your family as you write the next chapter.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). The Senator from Utah.

FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Mr. ROMNEY. Mr. President, I rise today to first thank the leader for those generous comments and to mark for my colleagues the departure soon from my service here in the Senate.

During my life, I have rarely been truly alone—maybe taking tests at school or running cross country or on my uncle's tractor, cultivating corn. But I am impressed with people who have achieved great things largely on their own: Washington commanding the Continental Army, Lincoln guiding the Civil War, Edison in his laboratory. Not me. I have consistently been surrounded by others—usually smarter, often more experienced, always becoming friends.

In business, I chose partners with skills that exceeded mine, the proof of which has been their stunning success after I left. As Governor, my team helped craft the health plan that insured nearly every citizen in Massachusetts. My wingman, Bob White, counseled me in business, the Olympics, and politics. My counselor, Beth Myers, advised and managed multiple campaigns and administrations. Spencer Zwick financed and helped guide almost every one of my endeavors. My Senate chiefs of staff, Matt Waldrip and Liz Johnson, built and brilliantly led an exceptional team and, with our policy directors, Chris Barkley and Stephen Newton, crafted and negotiated more legislation that became law than could possibly have been expected for a freshman Senator.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the names of my excellent current and former staff members be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Scott Albrecht, Jennifer Andelin, Victoria Anderson, Matt Anderson, Audrey Arbogast, Chris Barkley, Kelsey Berg, Chandler Beutler, Alex Christiansen, Jessica Christopher, Clay Crozier, Maggie Frankel, Angalene Gallaway, Adam Gardiner, Sharon Garn, Celeste Gold, Mandee Grant, Miriam Harmer, Scott Hatfield, Kevin Henwood, Emma Huish, Liz Johnson, Audra Kinney, Brianna Manzelli, Chris Marroletti, Dilan Maxfield, Trent McFadyen, Barry McLerran, Stephen Morris, Arielle Mueller, Tanne Murdock, Stephen Newton, Arjun Nijhawan, Samantha Onofry, Linda Patino, Jessica Pavel, Mollie Petersen, Elijah Philpot, Travis Porter, John Poulson, Megan Reiss, Scott Richardson, Meg Roberts, David Roberts, Jane Sandberg, Spencer Seal, Meagan Shepherd, Zack Shepherd, Derek Shumway, Grace Simmons, Cade Slaughter, Brennan Stokes, Sarah Stone, Kylie Tanner, Maurice Tolbert, Kathleen Traficant, Alex Vargo, Matt Waldrip, Henrie Walton, Paige Waltz, Isabel Williams, Kent Wilson, Kyle Wilson, Emily Wilson, Emily Wiscombe, Alex Yost, and Elizabeth Young.

Mr. ROMNEY. So my life's work has been a group affair. At its center, is my wife Ann. She is my most trusted adviser, my indefatigable ally, the love of