

personnel. They sent resources. But a year after that flood, in July—to the same date in July—we had another round of flooding, and many of those same homes and businesses and farms were impacted.

The last time Congress passed a comprehensive disaster aid package was December of 2022. Since then, we have had more than 50 climate disasters around our country that each caused more than \$1 billion in damages—a total of \$155 billion in damages and rising. We know that that number is only going to grow when we have the final losses from Hurricane Milton and Hurricane Helene, and they are continuing to be calculated. This is an environmental and an economic disaster.

These disasters have impacted communities from Vermont to North Carolina, to Minnesota, to Texas and Hawaii, and more than 40 States and Territories total.

As we all know, extreme weather does not discriminate based on State lines or political preferences. In a crisis, we are all neighbors in need.

Since Congress last passed a comprehensive disaster aid bill—this is just to give a sense of how repetitive this is and how what had been an outlier event is now becoming a common event in different places around our country—these are disasters that have happened: Flooding in North Dakota between April and May of 2023. Flooding near West Point and the Hudson Valley area of New York in 2023. Hurricane Helene caused damage across Georgia and South Carolina in September of 2024. Flooding in 2023 in Central California, with enormous damage in the Central Valley. Hurricane Milton slammed Florida in October of 2024. Southeastern Iowa saw devastating tornadoes in 2024. Tornadoes and severe storms hit Nebraska in April and June of this year. And 110 tornadoes ripped across Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Illinois, and Kentucky in May, killing 16. And more than 40 tornadoes caused damage across Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee in March of 2023.

These events are all too common, and they are going to accelerate, not diminish. So we do need to fund FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund, and we need to do that for the benefit of all Americans. We need to provide those farmers and producers and ranchers with dedicated recovery assistance to help them with their losses so they can farm and ranch again. We need to get our communities the flexible funding—and I emphasize "flexible"—and locally driven funding—that they need through programs like the community development block grant disaster recovery funding, something that Senator SCHATZ from Hawaii has been leading on.

We need to rebuild our infrastructure. We have to reimburse our States, whose budgets have been hammered, and reimburse our communities that have spent big to get folks back on safe roads. We need to fix our wastewater

and drinking water systems for the health and well-being of our citizens. And we have to help those small businesses.

That aid has to come sooner rather than later. The delay has already been really brutal on their ability to keep the lights on. The longer we wait to help disaster victims, the more disaster victims we will have. The list of needs will only grow. Delay hurts. It doesn't help.

That is why I am asking my colleagues in the Senate and in the House to act now and act quickly for Vermont and for every State hit by a disaster since we last passed a disaster bill so many storms ago. We cannot wait.

As I said, we have common ground in our common crisis. We must send a disaster bill to President Biden's desk.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

FOREIGN POLICY

Mrs. CAPITO. Madam President, today, I rise to really talk about a source of great concern for me and, I think, the American people, and that is the dangerous world that President Biden and his administration are leaving behind. We see a world engulfed in the flames of war in Europe and the Middle East and teetering on the brink in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Our adversaries are testing us as Americans—our resolve—in ways that we haven't seen in decades. That instability puts us, I believe—the American people—at risk.

We see that, I believe, President Biden has been a weak Commander in Chief who has sort of slept through this whole global order and led us into some chaos. Joe Biden may be temporarily tasked with steering the ship of state through these crises, but Joe Biden did not inherit this world; he has created it.

Joe Biden's foreign policy? Well, he really doesn't have one that is consistent that I can see, aside from some flip-flops, some half-measures, and weak conciliations in place of strong deterrence—strong deterrence; whereas, as we look at the incoming President, President-elect Donald Trump, we see someone who has led and will lead with strength, someone who defeated the ISIS caliphate, who paved the way to peace in the Middle East with the Abraham Accords, exerted a maximum-pressure campaign on Iran, and got tough on China. And he is still talking in the same voice that he had, 4 years now later.

President Biden's weakness has fueled violence and aggression the globe hasn't experienced in decades.

On January 20, President-elect Trump is set to take the oath of office and once again assume the mantle of Commander in Chief. The task ahead of him and for all of us is monumental. Joe Biden is leaving us a messy world here, and it is up to the incoming administration and this Congress to be able to clean it up.

Let's look at China. Over the last 4 years, China has aggressively expanded its military capabilities, including a massive increase in conventional and nuclear weapons. In 2020, the Defense Intelligence Agency assessed that China had about 200 nuclear weapons, which would reach about 400 by the year 2030. Those were the projections. Now, 4 years later, what do we see? The same Agency counts about 500 nuclear weapons in China and predicts that it will be more than 1,000 by 2030.

Chinese military spending has surged, with 2024 being the third year in a row where its military saw a growth of more than 7 percent. At the same time, President Biden's Department of Defense requested four consecutive military budgets that actually cut defense if you look at it in light of inflation. While China continues to build the biggest navy in the world, Biden's defense budget called for us to shrink our Navy from 296 ships in 2024 to 294 ships in 2030. China knows these investments have consequences. President Xi knows that our failure to invest weakens America's ability to protect and to project power abroad.

During its unprecedented buildup, China increased its assertiveness in the South China Sea and escalated its incursions into Taiwan's airspace. China's cyber capabilities are also emboldened. We see this regularly. Attacks like Volt Typhoon or Salt Typhoon reveal a brazen attempt, an intention to burrow deep into our critical infrastructure and threaten the American people. Yet the Biden administration has appeared more focused on seeking meetings and chasing down diplomacy with China.

China recognizes hard power, and rebuilding ours will be a day-one project for the Trump administration.

Let's pivot to the Middle East and our adversary Iran, which has also seized on the openings from President Biden's leadership. Under Joe Biden, Iran has been able to supercharge its support for terrorist proxy groups by increasing its lucrative oil exports without consequence. Under Biden's watch, Iran has used these billions of dollars to arm Hezbollah, to ship advanced weapons like ballistic missiles to the Houthis, who are attacking our American ships. And we see these attacks orchestrated across the region. Let me repeat: Iran-sponsored attacks on our own American forces. Our troops have faced hundreds of assaults on the ground and on the sea. Iran-backed aggression has killed U.S. servicemembers in Jordan and in the Red Sea. And let's not forget that there are still American hostages remaining held in Gaza, thanks to Iran's support of Hamas.

All this should be completely unacceptable.

What is more, Iran is closer to a nuclear weapon today than it was under President Trump. In 2020, Iran's so-called breakout time to produce enough fuel for a nuclear weapon was 3 months. Now it is under a week.

When Israel was thrust into war for its survival—not of its own choosing—Joe Biden publicly questioned Israel's actions. He delayed critical arms shipments and damaged one of our most vital alliances. President Biden should know that U.S. support for Israel is a valuable deterrent. This undermining of the U.S.-Israel relationship would never take place under President Trump. He understood that peace through strength and our alliance with Israel is unshakeable; it is not a conditional agreement.

Finally, as we stand here today, there is still a large-scale ground war in Europe perpetrated by Russia and Vladimir Putin. When Donald Trump assumes office, the war will be entering its third year, with an appalling toll in lives and suffering. More than 1 million Ukrainians and Russians have been either killed or wounded.

Most recently, Putin has ramped up arms production, used a new ballistic missile capability, and deployed—incredibly, in my view—North Korean troops for his offensive maneuvers.

Donald Trump represents the off-ramp that the world needs, because looking to current American leadership, it is no wonder this conflict has escalated. This bloody war—especially with Iran and North Korea as Russian partners—is a stark reminder of what happens when America is perceived as weak.

President Biden's foreign policy missteps, such as lifting sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline, emboldened Vladimir Putin. And his suggestion that a “minor incursion” into Ukraine would receive a muted response—well, that certainly did not deter this catastrophic invasion.

Then the Biden administration failed to push the whole of Europe to invest adequately in its own military and industrial capacity.

For those of us who support military assistance for Ukraine, this administration has made it unnecessarily difficult for them to actually win this war. By slow-walking payments and stalling authorities—many of which they eventually agreed to, sometimes years later—the Biden administration failed to give full support to a sovereign nation who was unlawfully invaded.

Donald Trump understands that Nord Stream 2 was a threat, and he sanctioned it. Donald Trump understood and understands that sticks work as well as carrots to boost Europe's defense spending and munitions production. He used that leverage, and we saw their investments go up.

President Trump and his Cabinet will get to work on day one to push our NATO allies to meet their commitments and bring peace to the European continent where they live.

The bottom line is this: There is a mess, and there is a mess to be cleaned up by the incoming President. America may not be at war, but this instability certainly threatens our national peace

and prosperity. I would go even further and say that it really weighs heavily on the American public.

To put it simply, failing to deter conflict makes it more likely that some of our young Americans, young West Virginians, will one day have to fight, and that again underscores the philosophy and the underpinnings that weakness can be very dangerous. My State of West Virginia is very proud that our West Virginians disproportionately, throughout our history, have answered the call to serve, but their service is not something that we take for granted.

I believe that President Trump and his team are ready to get back to the peace-through-strength philosophy. They will restore our deterrence—the deterrence that ensures we don't have to send our men and women into harm's way. Deterrence is much cheaper in many, many ways—many different ways—than war. The good news is, we don't have to wait long because January is coming, and that will be the time when we get to work.

Congress must take up the NDAA immediately—it has been floundering; the leader has refused to bring it up for at least 6 months—so that we can then put our critical national defense policies in place as this next administration takes office—something that we should have done, as I said, many months earlier.

As for the Executive, I am confident President-elect Trump has the record and resolve to clean up the mess, and I look forward to working with my colleagues and the President to secure our country's rightful, respected, and pre-eminent role on the world stage.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. YOUNG. Madam President, if you conduct a quick survey of global events over the past 4 years, it is impossible—impossible—to argue that the world is more secure today than it was when the Biden administration began.

Events began to spiral downward in the summer of 2021 when the Taliban retook control of Afghanistan. The Biden administration's botched withdrawal cost the lives of 13—13—brave, patriotic American servicemembers. It left American citizens behind, and it left Afghans desperately clinging to the sides of aircraft departing Kabul.

We shouldn't forget this. It conveyed a message of American weakness to the world, a message that was heard loud and clear in places like Moscow, Tehran, and Beijing.

Just 6 months after the debacle in Afghanistan, Russian tanks rolled across the Ukrainian border. Vladimir Putin launched the largest conflict in Europe since World War II. The United States has stood with the Ukrainian people rhetorically. We provided some critical assistance to ensure Ukraine did not lose against the Russian onslaught.

But I have to say, it has not put Ukrainians in a position to win. The Biden administration has too often slow-walked deliveries of weapons or they have imposed other restrictions on the Ukrainian forces. This foot-dragging, this obstructionism, this bureaucratic lethargy, this timidity has undermined our ability to convincingly deter Putin's ambitions or deter a broadening conflict.

So here we are today. The war drags on with no strategy and no defined end goal for American support of Ukraine. Of course, the American people are understandably exasperated by this development. Meanwhile, additional conflicts developed in other regions, as if that wasn't enough.

Determined to revive the Iran nuclear deal, the Biden administration repeated the mistakes of the Obama years. They loosened sanctions on the Iranian regime, and the results predictably have been nothing short of disasters.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas, the Iran-backed terror group controlling Gaza, carried out the worst attacks against the Jewish people since the Holocaust. Iran-backed Hezbollah has attacked Israel from the north and forced the evacuation of Israeli civilians.

And in recent months, President Biden has sadly undone much of the good will he initially created when he stood with Israel after October 7. In the process, President Biden has caved to misguided or hostile voices from within his own administration who demand that Israel defend itself with one arm tied behind its back.

For 4 years, the Biden team has failed to formulate a strategy for restoring deterrence and stopping Iran's campaign of terror and chaos, leaving our ally Israel and the entire Middle East less safe and rolling back the diplomatic progress of the Abraham Accords of the Trump years.

Across the Pacific, the Chinese Communist Party continues to build up its military, threaten Taiwan, wage economic warfare against our businesses and our supply chains, pursue economic coercion against American partners and allies, and undermine security and stability in the broader Indo-Pacific.

Other than that, things are placid.

We saw these developments play out most visibly when China launched a surveillance balloon over North America last year. It traveled over the United States. Here again, President Biden failed to provide answers to the American people about that situation or to restore deterrence so that the Chinese Communist Party understands it cannot spy on our schools, on our military bases, on our homes, on our farms, on the American people. Today, our strategic competition with China continues on as it must, with the CCP's global power and influence largely unchecked over the past 4 years.

Whether it be in Afghanistan, the Middle East, or the Indo-Pacific, the