

Assad is an agent of Iran, an ally of Russia, and a butcher whose hands are stained with so much innocent blood that the death toll defies precise counting.

The destination of this butcher's flight from Damascus over the weekend is telling. Fellow dictators still find a warm welcome in Putin's Moscow, and, I might add, so do unrepentant traitors like Edward Snowden.

It is quite clear that the recent lightning success of Syrian rebel groups is due, in part, to the distraction of the Assad regime's essential patrons. For more than a decade, assistance from Russia and Iran has shored up the twin pillars of Assad's rule: oppression and fear. But today, Russian attention and resources are tied up in a protracted war of aggression over in Ukraine, and Iran is busy propping up a network of terrorist proxies that Israel has dealt savage blows.

If you ask the Biden administration, this was all part of the plan. The President himself said as much yesterday. He noted that the Assad regime's strongest backers—Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah—are weaker today than they were 4 years ago, as if to suggest that it was his administration's policy that made these events possible. But my colleagues—and, for that matter, America's allies and partners—know a lot better than that. We know that, to the extent that our adversaries are weaker today than they were when the President took office, it is in spite of his chronic hesitation and half measures in the conduct of American foreign policy.

Ukraine has blunted Russian military power, in spite of this administration's unfounded fear of escalation and repeated withholding of lethal assistance. Israel has put Iran and its proxies on the back foot, in spite—in spite—of this administration's repeated efforts to dictate the terms of Israel's military operations and its ongoing freeze on the transfers of essential precision munitions.

If the Assad regime's brutality was an abiding concern for the President or if the ongoing plight of the Syrian people factored meaningfully into his administration's policy, then his National Security Advisor's description of the Middle East, last fall, as “quieter than it has been for decades” is even more incongruous than the horrors of October 7 already made it.

If the President now intends to claim credit for bringing a potential end to Syria's grinding civil war, it begs the question why, as Vice President, he agreed with President Obama's decision not to enforce his self-imposed redline on Assad's use of chemical weapons.

The last Democratic administration's approach to Syria helped Russia displace American influence and helped Iran turn it into its staging ground for its terrorist proxies' war on Israel. The current Democratic administration's scolding and hectoring of the Jewish

State has made defending against this war more difficult.

The Commander in Chief's record will speak for itself. History will reflect that, if this administration wanted to heed the urging of leaders of both parties in Congress and deliver the sort of lethal capabilities and permissions Ukraine needed to defend against Russian aggression at the speed of relevance, it was fully empowered to do so.

And had this President even once expressed a willingness to take a serious bipartisan approach to the Middle East's primary agents of chaos in Tehran—and its proxies and vassals from Yemen to Syria—it would have found willing partners on this side of the aisle. I made this much crystal clear from the first days of his administration.

At best, the Biden administration has been an impassive observer. At worst, it restrained America's friends from defending themselves and hampered the otherwise transformational success of Israel's operation against the enemies who actually started the war.

In spite of the administration's fixation on deescalation, Israel decimated Hezbollah, the crown jewel of Iran's terror web. While the administration obsessed over the illusion of returning to the stable status quo, Israel actually turned the tables on Iran and its proxies.

Today, there is no longer such a status quo in Syria. After years of war stoked by Russia and Iran, the prospects of a beleaguered Syrian people are certainly complicated and uncertain. But the fall of the Assad regime is an opportunity for our partners in the Middle East to chart a new future and to press the advantage earned by Israel's decisive operations and uproot Iran's remaining influence throughout the region.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, tomorrow the Senate Judiciary Committee will hold a hearing on President-elect Trump's planned mass deportation of undocumented immigrants in the United States.

Millions—some 13 million—of undocumented immigrants live in this country, and many have been here for a decade or longer. These immigrants have become our Nation's healthcare workers, teachers, farm workers, entrepreneurs, police—you name it. And many of them grew up alongside our own kids, with the same hopes and dreams of their first job, getting a driver's license, and a college acceptance letter.

Twelve years ago, in response to a bipartisan request from myself and the late Senator from Indiana, Richard Lugar, President Barack Obama established the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program, known as DACA. DACA was a program where, if

you were brought to this country under the age of 18 as a child and you had lived here, you had an opportunity to apply for a 2-year period of grace and not be fearful of deportation, through the DACA Program.

More than 830,000 young people came forward to sign up for DACA, all of whom were brought here as children, some as young as a few months old, and they became known as the Dreamers.

The DREAM Act, the legislation which would have made this law and made it unnecessary for an Executive order, was a bill I introduced 23 years ago. You have to be patient in the U.S. Senate, but 23 years is a long, long time—long for me to sponsor but even longer for those affected by it.

These young Dreamers, part of our country, with DACA and otherwise, earned \$27.9 billion and contributed \$2.1 billion to Social Security and Medicare in the year 2022. They are a big part of America and a big part of our economy.

One of those DACA recipients I am going to highlight today. This gentleman's name is Foday Turay. He is currently a prosecutor, a husband, and a father; and he is going to testify before our Judiciary Committee tomorrow.

Foday is the 148th Dreamer whose story I have shared on the Senate floor. He came to the United States from Sierra Leone when he was 7 years old, after his grandmother became ill and died.

Foday didn't know he was undocumented until much later in life. He decided to apply for a driver's license, and they said: You are not a citizen; you can't apply. He was devastated. He had dreamed of going to law school and becoming an attorney. And now everything seemed utterly impossible because of his citizenship status.

But Foday never wavered in his faith and hope to make it in America. He said the day DACA was announced was the best day of his life.

Thanks to Barack Obama's DACA, Foday attended college and then Penn State Dickinson Law School, where he received his Juris Doctorate degree.

He works full time as a prosecutor for the district attorney's office in Philadelphia. He protects his community from violent crimes, and he helps crime victims navigate a complex legal system.

Growing up in the United States since he was 7 years old, Foday has put down deep roots. He met and married his wife, who is a U.S. citizen. And he is a proud homeowner and father to a beautiful 18-month-old baby boy.

DACA allowed Foday to pursue his dreams of becoming a lawyer, husband, father, but his life is still in limbo.

Why? Consider what happened to DACA the last time President-elect Trump was in office. In 2017, President Trump shut down the program. Thankfully, the Supreme Court blocked his effort, but he also encouraged MAGA Republicans to file lawsuits against DACA, endangering the program's future.

I was listening closely—as many Americans were—yesterday to the interview of President-elect Trump on “Meet the Press.” President-elect Trump stated in an interview yesterday that he now wants to “work something out” to protect Dreamers. My ears perked up. After 23 years, I am ready. Then, he went on to say that Democrats have made it a very, very difficult thing to do.

I just want to say to President-elect Trump—and I have said it to his face, and I will say it again: Anytime, anywhere, let’s sit down; let’s start talking about these hundreds of thousands of young people who are doing their best to lead a good life and to help America, who just want a chance for a future.

I am ready and willing to negotiate in good faith with my Republican colleagues in the Senate, too, and the President-elect to finally provide Dreamers with a pathway to citizenship, which they deserve.

But there is reason to be skeptical, if not cynical. Last term, President-elect Trump walked away from four different bipartisan compromises with Democrats to solve the DACA crisis. Democrats were willing to provide billions of dollars at one point for President Trump’s unpopular border wall in exchange for a bipartisan Dream Act. But we just couldn’t seem to reach a positive answer.

I am not giving up on this quest, because I am not going to give up on these DACA students.

Madam President, you know them, too. You have met them in your State. We all have. They are wonderful people, waiting patiently, hoping the day will come when they get a chance to prove their commitment to this country.

Just this year, President-elect Trump demanded congressional Republicans to reject a border deal that was bipartisan. And I thought it was a good bill. When the bill finally came to a vote, the vast majority of Republicans voted against it.

So President Trump has in his power the ability to bring around many Republicans on the issue of immigration. I hope DACA and the Dreamers become the exception to some of the rhetoric we have heard.

The President-elect has pledged to pursue mass deportation on day one. He has threatened to use the military for that purpose. He has announced the appointment of some hardliners in his Cabinet.

We can all agree that any undocumented immigrant found guilty of a serious crime should not be allowed to stay here. I am a Democrat, and I just said that. And I think I speak for my caucus. Virtually all of them agree with what I just said. If you are a danger to this country, we don’t want you here, and we don’t want you to find entry into our country to lay some claim to citizenship. That is very basic.

But the last time the President-elect was in office, it wasn’t just criminals

who were deported. We saw parents separated from their children, causing permanent trauma. Amazingly, sadly, some of those kids have never been reunited with their families.

We saw meatpacking plants and other workplaces raided. This was a raid not targeted to criminals or even those without citizenship status. At some of these raids, we saw U.S. citizens detained for hours.

We saw Dreamers like Foday deported, immigrants who were pillars of their community.

So once again I come to the floor and say: Would America really be better off with an outstanding public servant like Foday gone from this country? I think not.

Would our county be better if we lost farmworkers who have contributed to America for decades or if the military was used to round up hard-working immigrants with no serious criminal backgrounds? The answer is, over and over again, a resounding no.

Most Americans agree. Nearly 65 percent of Americans, regardless of party, support a pathway to citizenship for longtime undocumented immigrants. And a majority oppose the use of military to conduct mass deportations.

At tomorrow’s hearing, we will examine the need to protect taxpaying, hard-working Americans like Foday, and we will discuss the cruelty and chaos that will inevitably result in mass deportation without some thought.

Immigrants like Foday deserve stability and certainty, not fear. I stand ready to work on a bipartisan basis to protect families like Foday’s and provide them with the security that they deserve.

I am not sure if you were in the Senate when we considered comprehensive immigration reform. It was a bipartisan effort. We brought it to the floor, and the bill passed with 68 votes. And what it basically said, if you are undocumented in America, we want to hold you accountable. You have got to come forward and identify yourself, where you live, where you work to our government so that there is a record of who you are and where you are.

As I said earlier, if you have a serious crime that you committed or committed once you are here, you are ineligible, as far as I am concerned. If you are a danger to this country, we don’t want you; and you should know better than to try to become a citizen of America.

But the vast overwhelming majority of people we are talking about don’t have criminal records. They go about their lives every day, and we don’t know the difference. They are the same people who are in the nursing home taking care of your mom. They are at the daycare center taking care of baby boys and baby girls every single day. We see them at banks. We see them at grocery stores. They are everywhere. They sit next to us in church, and they are undocumented.

Should they be deported from the United States simply because of this? I think not. I think the reality is that they can make a great contribution to this country. I think the starting point for our conversation on this subject should be that comprehensive immigration bill that we passed on the floor.

I stand ready to work with President Trump and any Member of either party who in good faith wants to solve this problem.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WELCH). The Senator from Montana.

FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I am going to start by saying that, being 68 years of age, I oftentimes do things that may not be the smartest, and one of the things I did yesterday was play basketball due to the influence of my bald-headed chief of staff Dylan Laslovich and my legislative director Justin Folsom, who I have no comments for, quite frankly.

(Laughter.)

So if I shed a tear while I am up here today, it won’t be because I am emotional; it will be because my back is killing me right now.

(Laughter.)

Look, I have seen a number of these exit speeches. To be honest with you, they remind me of a bit of an obituary. And the truth is, this is the end of this moment in time, this last 18 years that I have spent in the U.S. Senate, but the truth is, there have been other periods of time very similar to that throughout my life.

When I went to school and high school and college, for example, it was about an 18-year period. When that time period was over with, we moved on. My wife Sharla and I cut meat for almost exactly 18 years on the farm—a custom butcher shop. When we shut that down when I got in the State legislature, that period of time in our lives was over. And now my time in the Senate is over.

By the way, every one of those time periods was wrapped around by my family and I—Sharla and I in particular—doing production agriculture on the family farm.

Now I will tell you that I expected to serve 12 years in this body when I got here. I jumped in feet first, but I realized in short order that this is a seniority-driven body and that the longer you are here, the more ability you have to get done for your State and your country, and I very much appreciate the time that Montanans have allowed me to serve as their representative in the U.S. Senate.

In the end, I was able to chair two major committees that have an incredibly large—in fact, the biggest—impact on our U.S. budget: the Senate Appropriations Defense Subcommittee and the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee. These are the two largest Agencies from a funding standpoint in the U.S. Senate. In those committees in the U.S. Senate, as a whole, I have