

team on the job and so do the American people. Senate Republicans are committed to making the Senate work again just as it has for every President up until now.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

The minority whip.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR
FISCAL YEAR 2025

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it has been my honor and one of the highlights of my Senate career to watch the restoration of democracy in the Baltic States: Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. I have said on the floor many times with real pride, my mother was born in Lithuania, and she was an immigrant to this country at the age of 2. And she never made it back to her home country where she was born, but I did, even to the town where she was baptized and raised before she came to the United States.

It has been quite a journey. In 1978 or 1979, I visited what was then the Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania. I am still struck by the images which were so common there: the gray Soviet approach to things both physical and otherwise and the belief that these poor people were under the subjugation of Moscow at a time when they deserved independence.

And then to have served in the House of Representatives and, again, in the Senate and to watch the evolution of Lithuania as well as Latvia and Estonia as democratic countries and the amazing development where they became part of NATO and part of the European Union and became Western-viewing nations and equal partners with other countries in Europe when it came to security and democracy—it is remarkable.

And yet I am not naive, I know these are smaller countries, and they will be easily overwhelmed by Russia if that were the Russian ambition.

So I have tried over the years to maintain the strong relationship between the Baltic States and NATO and also the strong relationship with the United States and these three Baltic nations.

One of the things I worked on for a number of years is known as the Baltic Security Initiative. It is an investment by the United States of several million dollars in the training of troops in the Baltic States so that they are prepared if they are brought into enemy conflict. It is a modest investment. They have shown their good faith on their side by maintaining strong support from NATO and contributions to it. But the Baltic Security Initiative is an incentive for them to continue along those lines.

As I have said, I am not naive about this situation. Being part of NATO means that our alliance will stand by them if they are ever invaded by another country. I hope that never happens, but if it does, it means that NATO is there. They cannot go it alone, but they have certainly shown they are prepared to do their part to demonstrate their commitment to democracy and the values the United States shares.

We are now considering the National Defense Authorization bill. It is an important piece of legislation, which we, every year, take seriously and pass, and I hope we do this time as well.

I have offered amendments that would strengthen our alliances in my bipartisan amendment to authorize the Baltic Security Initiative. Since I created the program by including it in the fiscal year 2021 appropriations bill, this initiative has provided millions of dollars in dedicated security assistance to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

These important NATO allies are on the frontlines against Russian aggression. They have a long history of experiencing Russian tyranny, and I firmly believe they have also been targets of Putin if they were not members of NATO. They are some of the top NATO members in terms of military expenditures and percentage of GDP, something President Trump has rightfully urged. I have visited bases in Lithuania where American and other NATO allies are working closely to deter Russian aggression.

Yet, despite the clear success of this program, we recently learned that the Trump administration announced last week that it intends to suspend the European security programs, including the Baltic Security Initiative. That would be music to the ears of Vladimir Putin, and it sends a dangerous signal as Putin continues to attack Ukraine despite assurances from President Trump that he wanted to end the war on Ukraine on his first day in office.

As I mentioned, I am the son of a Lithuanian immigrant. My mother's family knew she could depend on the United States and all it stood for when they gave up their home in Lithuania and came to this country.

We should not allow the President to unilaterally threaten our alliance that has been carefully threaded over decades and decades.

I am grateful to the senior Senator from Iowa, Senator GRASSLEY, for joining me on the amendment which I am going to offer on the Baltic Security Initiative. I urge my colleagues to join us.

I am reaching out to colleagues on both sides of the aisle and asking them to stand with me for the Baltics to make it clear to Putin this is not going to be easy picking for him in the future.

They are part of the NATO alliance and a worthy part as well. We should continue our support, and I hope the Baltic Security Initiative is an indication of that.

I urge colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join us in this bipartisan effort to support Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, first, I ask unanimous consent that the following Senators be permitted to speak prior to the scheduled rollcall vote: WICKER for up to 10 minutes, REED for up to 15 minutes, COTTON for up to 5 minutes, and TUBERVILLE for up to 10 minutes.

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

UKRAINE

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, now let me say that I come to the floor today to join with President Trump and with a bipartisan majority of my colleagues in the Senate in calling for another tougher round of sanctions against Russia and its war machine.

For the past 8 months, President Trump and President Zelenskyy have extended the hand of peace. Ukraine is committed to a cease-fire. President Trump has sat down personally with Vladimir Putin on U.S. soil. In response, President Putin has mocked the peace process by repeatedly escalating his attacks on the free people of Ukraine, and he is doing so even as we speak.

Over the weekend, Russia launched its largest aerial attack of the war. Putin rained over 800 Iranian-designed drones and missiles down on cities across Ukraine, including the capital Kyiv.

For the first time, Russia damaged Ukraine's main government building, where the Cabinet of Ministers meets. The burning building symbolizes Putin's ultimate prize: His dictatorship seeks to take down Ukraine's democratically elected government.

On Sunday, President Trump said he is ready to increase the economic pressure against Russia. I agree. So does commentator Mark Levin, an experienced political writer and analyst and a prominent advocate for President Trump and his agenda.

After the attack, Mr. Levin put it well when he said:

It's time to unleash an economic barrage against Putin and sell NATO what Ukraine needs to slam back.

I say: Amen. Do not tolerate Putin's lies and games any longer.

President Trump has given Vladimir Putin every chance to show who he is, and time and again, Putin has shown himself to be a war criminal. Economic and military punishment is all Putin understands, and it is all he deserves.

Here is a brief refresher. In February, Vladimir Putin marked the third anniversary of his invasion by launching what was then the largest drone strike of the war. The next month, Ukraine agreed to a cease-fire even though Ukraine is the one being invaded.

The episode previewed a pattern that has continued ever since: Ukraine

shows its intention for peace and security, and Putin always escalates his unprovoked attacks.

In March, Russia launched drones and ballistic missiles into a residential neighborhood in President Zelenskyy's hometown. Putin fired cluster munitions into the city, sending shrapnel—where did he send it? Into restaurants, homes, a children's playground. He killed 9 children in that strike. Once again, the world saw Vladimir Putin escalate, targeting a nonmilitary town because that is where President Zelenskyy is from—the actions of a war criminal who should be in prison.

In the following months of this year, Presidents Trump and Zelenskyy remained committed to peace. But then, in May, Putin launched 273 drones against Ukraine. It was a new record, but he broke that evil benchmark a few days later in the largest combined drone and missile attack of the war so far. He launched 367 aerial weapons against Ukraine. Once again, the world saw Putin escalate, proving to be a war criminal.

Amid the brutality, Vladimir Putin has played games with peace talks. We have all seen it. With one hand, he signals interest in negotiations; with another, he lobbs bombs and kills civilians.

In early July of this year, he once again upped the ante. He sent 728 drones and 13 missiles to Ukraine, making clear his evil intention. Once again, the world saw Putin escalate, proving to be, again, a war criminal.

At this point, I need to mention that those attacks are making little progress for the invading Russians. That is a strong testament to the will and resolve of the Ukrainian people and military, who are simply defending their own country, their own soil, and doing so admirably.

In the aftermath of this attack in July, President Trump made the correct assessment that Vladimir Putin “talks nice [and] then he bombs everybody.” Those are President Trump's words, and I congratulate him on that observation. The barrage prompted President Trump to work with NATO to supply Ukraine with more arms. He also gave Russia a deadline to pursue peace.

Just this weekend, the world saw the war criminal escalate again. He dropped more than 800 Russian drones onto civilians, neighborhoods, and government buildings. Vladimir Putin sent an unambiguous message: He is not interested in peace; he is interested in conquering Ukraine. And he won't stop there.

As if this weekend's attacks were not a clear enough sign of his intentions, Putin continued his brutality just this morning—just this morning, Mr. President. He launched a glide missile into a village, killing at least 24 Ukrainians who had lined up to receive their pension payments. Nearly two dozen more were wounded, and the statistics are still coming in.

Just last week, Russia struck another hospital—this time in Donetsk—killing two people and damaging medical facilities.

I could go on with more examples, but it is worth stopping here to again make two points that former Secretary Mike Pompeo made in an interview just this morning with Brian Kilmeade on FOX News.

The first is that there is very little military objective to strikes like these. Twenty-four innocents killed is a tragedy, but it is not a resounding military success. That is because Putin is not and cannot make very many resounding military successes.

The second is that Putin clearly has no intention to stop. This morning, former Secretary Pompeo, a distinguished former member of President Trump's Cabinet, said:

Vladimir Putin has zero interest in any negotiated solution.

Zero interest.

He is going to stay at this until there is an enormous cost imposed on him.

I think that is what the President of the United States was saying just a day or so ago. In other words, there is no reason to believe that Putin wants anything less than to take the country of Ukraine successfully, and he will not stop until he is forced to stop.

The Kremlin is projecting confidence at home, but that confidence is a sham.

This morning, a Moscow newspaper was honest enough to say:

The Kremlin believes Russia is slowly but surely achieving its goals in Ukraine.

I disagree with that, by the way.

To continue the quote:

So Moscow doesn't intend—

Doesn't intend—

to stop or feel any desire for half-hearted solutions & half-baked compromises.

Could there be any doubt that this is a true statement? They have a fake confidence, but they have no intention of stopping.

Mr. Putin is regularly shutting down internet access for Russian citizens so they won't know what is going on in the war, so they won't know how slowly they are moving, allowing only approved sites that do not allow the truth to come through. This is Russian totalitarianism at its best—or worst.

Putin hopes to project enough confidence at home to sustain the war effort and wear Ukraine down. Abroad, he hopes to wait out the West with fake peace talks while he continues pummeling Ukraine with missiles and drones of death.

Where does Putin's rain of fire come from? It comes from Russia's war machine, which produces what seems to be an endless supply of deadly drones. But it does not have to be endless. Today, Russia barely has the economic capacity to continue bombarding Ukraine—barely.

But now at last, President Trump has indicated he is willing to cut off that capacity. Again, I say: Amen. We must be willing to cut it off. Again, a major-

ity—a huge bipartisan majority—of Senators have said this.

Russia's friends are only encouraging his villainy. China is buying and selling with Russia, enabling its war machine. North Korea sent its own troops to assist Russia's soldiers on the battlefield. Iran designs and supplies weapons. That is a troubling axis of aggressors.

In the face of such malicious collaboration, we must use every available tool to increase pressure on Putin's war machine. Extending the hand of peace has not worked with this dictator because this dictator is not interested in peace. He will respond only to strength. He will act only if his war machine begins running out of funds, and we can help accomplish that.

The U.S. Senate has shown broad support for increasing Russian sanctions. Eighty-four Senators have signed on to a tough sanctions bill that can help us bankrupt Putin's war machine.

I am ready to work with my colleagues and the President to put real cost on Putin for these war crimes. I congratulate the President of the United States for his strong statement this weekend. As Mark Levin said, let us “unleash an economic barrage against Putin.” Well said. Let's do it today.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CARIBBEAN MILITARY STRIKE

Mr. REED. Mr. President, last week, President Trump gave two orders to the U.S. military that were astonishing even by this administration's standards.

First, he ordered the Department of Defense to be renamed the Department of War, a political theater exercise designed to sound tough while distracting from the real issues facing the Nation. Second, he ordered a military strike on a speedboat operating in the Caribbean, reportedly killing 11 people on board.

In response to the attack, Venezuela has placed its military on high alert, and we are one miscalculation away from a shooting war no one in this Chamber has authorized.

Rather than rebranding itself, the Pentagon should be providing to Congress and the public answers. For example, the intelligence that justified that strike on the vessel, the legal authority the President relied upon, and an assurance that we are not drifting toward another undeclared war.

The Department of Defense was named as such after World War II for a reason. It was a deliberate statement from America's military that we are not a tool of conquest but a shield designed to deter aggression, defend the