

should be a major concern for all of us here in light of the responsibility of Congress to provide for our military.

I have a chart that helps explain where we are headed. Here we can see the research and development projections for the United States, China, and the European Union. It is not hard to see that China will soon outpace the United States.

This represents total research and development spending for the countries involved—not just in military R&D, but given the fact that a large percentage of research and development is spent on defense-related efforts, on military weaponry, it is a useful bellwether for understanding what the future holds in terms of Chinese and Russian military investment relative to our own. Clearly, we can see that China is on track to overtake the United States in this critical area in the next decade.

I should also point out that, according to one report, this isn't just because China is so committed to research and development; it is also because in recent years, due to austerity measures in our own country, U.S. investment in research and development is increasing at a historically low rate.

Why is this important? Well, it is important because China is using some of this R&D to make weapons that are designed to undermine interests of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region. One recent study made headlines just this week, highlighting that both China and Russia are developing high-speed, high-altitude weapons designed to penetrate traditional U.S. defensive systems, such as our ballistic missile defenses, to attack not only our allies but to potentially attack the mainland of the United States as well.

Reports continue to surface about Chinese cyber theft of top U.S. military and industry secrets. Once they have stolen our trade secrets, the Chinese military can create copycat or cloned weapons for their own use without having to invest the years and billions of dollars that we have to in this country for research and testing and development of those weapons. They can simply steal the blueprints and copy them, saving themselves a lot of money and a lot of time in producing those weapons.

So while nations like China are doing all they can to build their capabilities and research the next cutting-edge weapons, the U.S. military is extremely limited in the amount of money we are investing in our own future, instead having to spend that money to maintain the readiness of current forces. That is where the money has gone—to try to maintain the readiness of our current forces, not looking out to the next 5 and 10 years, to the growing threat of our adversaries having weapon systems that will have the capability not only to be used offensively but potentially to defeat American forces around the world.

We know we need a robust military budget in order to allow us to walk and

chew gum at the same time—to both maintain these world-class forces at high levels of readiness and ensure our troops have the cutting-edge weapons of tomorrow. Back in March, the Committee on Armed Services heard testimony by current Secretary of Defense Ash Carter. At the end of his prepared remarks, Secretary Carter made a point we all need to better understand. He said:

We don't have the luxury of just one opponent, or the choice between the current fight and future fights—we have to do both, and we have to have a budget that supports both.

He went on to explain that means being ready to fight the battles of today and train our current troops but also to develop the technologies and perfect the strategies to fight the wars of the future. And we know from Ronald Reagan's doctrine of peace through strength that military readiness is much more likely to make sure that we don't have to fight those battles because it deters the aggressive actions of our adversaries when America leads and when America is the strongest military in the world. But when our opponents see us pulling back, both in terms of our investment and in terms of American leadership, they are all too happy to fill the void left by that withdrawal.

Unfortunately, the Obama administration has apparently failed to see that national defense is the most critical function the Federal Government performs, and so every time we get into this discussion about how do we spend more money to keep the American people safe and secure, they want to enter into a discussion about how we can raise spending caps so we can spend more money on nondefense discretionary spending, and so it goes.

I believe that defense spending—making sure our men and women in uniform have the training and equipment they need for the current fight but also that we are preparing for the mid- and long-term so they will have the weapons and resources they need to fight the fights of the future—is job No. 1 for us here in the Congress.

It is not too late to eliminate some of these spending caps and to adequately fund the Department of Defense. I look forward to working with all of our colleagues to make sure we take care of job No. 1 before we then look to other priorities in our Federal budget.

We can't take for granted the fact that the U.S. military is the best in the world. We are the best in the world, but there is no certainty or guarantee that will always be the case, especially when our adversaries are making investments for the future and as America's leadership pulls back out of the world and allows others to fill that void. There are other nations at our heels spending a lot of money specifically to neutralize our military advantages and defeat us. The threat extends far beyond China. North Korea, for example, continues to threaten us and our allies with their nuclear weapons

and their missile tests. As I indicated earlier, Russia continues to make tremendous advancements in areas such as cyber and electronic warfare, working to render our most effective and advanced capabilities ineffective.

We don't have any time to waste, and we have to spend more time and more energy looking not just at the threats of today but those of tomorrow and beyond. Frankly, once the threat is upon us, it may be too late to do the sort of research and development and investment we need in order to be prepared.

So I am hopeful that the next Congress, working with the new administration, will be able to move the needle in the right direction. We certainly can't just cross our fingers and hope for the best. That is not fulfilling our responsibilities and doing our duty as Members of the Congress. If we want to maintain our position as the most capable military in the world, we have to continue to act, and act without delay.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

IRAN SANCTIONS EXTENSION BILL

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, the Senate will soon act on a measure, the Iran Sanctions Extension Act, that I have long advocated, and I am proud to be a main cosponsor of this measure. It is a critical step toward deterring and impeding support of Iran's development of conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

I am here to encourage my colleagues to support this 10-year reauthorization of the ISA, as it is known. We must act before it expires, before the end of the year. We really have no practical choice. The practical effect of the Iran nuclear agreement depends on our resolve and on our commitment to reliably and durably stop a nuclear-armed Iran by using sanctions and other means, if necessary. This measure should remove all doubt and dispel all question that we have that resolve and commitment to make sure the Iran nuclear commitment is enforced effectively. It must be enforced effectively not only for our own security but really the entire world's security. That is the reason I have championed efforts to stop a nuclear-armed Iran and make sure this agreement is both verifiable and enforceable.

I have long advocated for this renewal and most recently urged Leader MCCONNELL to prioritize passage of this measure in the waning days of this Congress. I was joined in this effort by Senators STABENOW, MERKLEY, WYDEN, KLOBUCHAR, HEINRICH, and SCHATZ. I thank Senator MCCONNELL for following through on this request and bringing this bill to the floor for a vote today.

This important bipartisan bill has already been approved by the House—in fact, overwhelmingly passed in November—and now the Senate must do the

same. It must leave no question or doubt that we have the resolve and commitment to continue bipartisan support for efforts to block a nuclear-armed Iran.

The ISA is essential to ensuring that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action continues to prevent Iran from realizing its nuclear ambitions. For the United States to maintain its unambiguous ability to immediately snap back sanctions in coming years, the ISA must be renewed—and I hope it will be by a strong and overwhelming bipartisan majority—or we will surrender this critical capability.

Reauthorization is a significant step that will send a strong signal to Iran that our Nation is fully and irrevocably committed to vigorously enforcing the nuclear agreement regardless of the administration and irrespective of the Congress. Future administrations need this ability to snap back existing sanctions—a step necessary for its enforcement, consistent with the agreement and anticipated by it. There is nothing inconsistent in what we do today with the agreement.

This strong message to Iran is that we are ready, willing, and able to hold Iran accountable. We can ill-afford to allow sanctions that deter and impede Iran's development of conventional weapons of mass destruction to expire, as they would expire at the end of the year. My hope is that as many as possible of my Senate colleagues will join in this effort today.

But holding Iran accountable will scarcely end here. We must confront Iran's maligned activities beyond its nuclear program, its continued pursuit of intercontinental missile development, its suppression of free speech and other vital civil liberties in its own country, and, of course, its sponsorship of terrorism around the world. We must fortify the security of our allies in the Middle East, most especially Israel, and our Nation. Our major strategic partner in that region is Israel. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the NDAA, which will provide additional missile defense capabilities to that great ally. And we must see what we do today in renewing the Iran sanctions agreement as part of an overall effort to secure the freedom and democracies that exist in that region insofar as they are always threatened and make sure we protect our Nation from a nuclear-armed Iran.

The Iran sanctions renewal sends a signal and a message, unmistakable to Iran and the world, that we are committed not just to the words of this agreement on paper but to the real enforcement of them and to making sure Iran is held accountable if it violates this agreement in the slightest way.

Madam President, 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. KIRK. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. KIRK. Madam President, on December 1, 2011, the Senate voted 100 to 0 to pass the Menendez-Kirk amendment to impose crippling sanctions on the Central Bank of Iran. As this chart shows, the Menendez-Kirk amendment decreased the value of Iran's currency by 73 percent the following year.

On November 30, 2012, the Senate passed the second Menendez-Kirk amendment by a 94 to 0 vote. This amendment cut off Iran's energy and shipping sectors from international markets. It also restricted Iran's ability to barter in gold and other precious metals. These Iran sanctions played an indispensable role in forcing Iran to the negotiating table, but the administration wasted our powerful economic leverage when it agreed to a bad deal with Iran.

Since this disastrous deal, Iran's behavior has worsened. Iran has taken more American hostages, including Baquer Namazi and Reza Shahini. Iran received over \$100 billion in sanctions relief and has increased support to terrorists groups, such as Hezbollah and Hamas. In fact, Iran announced the creation of its own foreign service to cause problems in Yemen, Iraq, and Iran and those places. Iran has conducted multiple missile tests on October 15, 2015; October 21, 2015; March 8 and 9, 2016; April 19, 2016; and July 11, 2016.

In June of 2015, Senator MENENDEZ and I introduced S. 1682, a bill to renew the Iran Sanctions Act of 1996 for 10 more years. I am glad to see the Senate is again taking up a similar bill based on legislation by Congressman ED ROYCE that passed the House by 419 to 1.

I urge my colleagues to support the Iran sanctions bill with overwhelming numbers. President Obama should immediately sign the Iran Sanctions Extension Act into law.

I urge the next President to join with the Congress to do much more. Our children should never be asked to clean up a nuclear war in the Persian Gulf. Iran, which is the biggest sponsor of world terrorism, should not have nuclear weapons.

I thank the Presiding Officer and yield back my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, I rise to express my support for legislation that the Senate is considering today that will extend the Iran Sanctions Act for 10 years before it expires in just 30 days.

I will be voting for this bill later today, and I am proud to have cosponsored similar legislation earlier this year. The Iran Sanctions Act, or ISA, is an important aspect of U.S. sanctions on Iran.

The ISA was enacted in 1996 to tighten sanctions on Iran in response to its

growing nuclear program and support for terrorist organizations, such as Hamas and Hezbollah. The ISA provides the legislative authority for many of the sanctions on Iran that were lifted but may be reimplemented if Iran violates the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA. These include sanctions on foreign investment in Iran's oil and gas fields, sales of gasoline to Iran, and transportation of Iranian crude oil. Even though these sanctions were suspended by the JCPOA, we need this legal framework to address any Iranian violations of the deal so that sanctions can be rapidly put back in place if necessary.

Additionally, this framework maintains some sanctions that were not lifted under the JCPOA. The ISA still requires the United States to sanction entities that assist Iran with acquiring or developing weapons of mass destruction—that provide “destabilizing numbers and types” of advanced conventional weapons or participate in uranium mining ventures with Iran.

These provisions remain in place, and it is absolutely critical that Congress not allow them to expire at the end of the year.

I believe the Iran Sanctions Act has been effective and must be renewed. Tough sanctions were absolutely critical to bringing Iran to the negotiating table—sanctions such as those in the ISA and the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010, which I voted for as a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

The JCPOA is the result of these and other tough multilateral sanctions put in place through cooperation with international partners, but it is essential that the deal is strictly enforced.

Earlier this year, I led a letter to President Obama, along with 14 of my colleagues, to express our concern about the lack of technical details published by the International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, in reports on Iran's compliance with the JCPOA.

While the IAEA is the watchdog responsible for monitoring Iran's compliance with the JCPOA, it is up to the United States and other parties of the JCPOA to respond to any violations.

To ensure strict compliance, the IAEA should also publish technical details, including the total quantity of low-enriched uranium in Iran and the amount produced in Natanz, specifics on Iran's centrifuge research and development, and progress made on converting Iran's nuclear facilities. These details will provide independent experts and Members of Congress conducting oversight of the JCPOA the opportunity to renew the data behind the IAEA's analysis.

Iran opposes what we are doing here today, and they will say that renewing the Iran Sanctions Act is a violation of the JCPOA. Well, let me say, that is simply not true. Reauthorization of the Iran Sanctions Act in no way violates the JCPOA. The Iran Sanctions Act has

been the law of the land since 1996. It was in place when the JCPOA was adopted, and it remains in effect today.

With our vote today, Congress will make clear that the United States will not hesitate to maintain sanctions on Iran and those that seek to provide the world's largest State sponsor of terrorism with weapons of mass destruction. We stand ready to impose rapid and strict punishments for any violation of the JCPOA. This sanctions regime is how we hold Iran accountable, strengthen our security, and deter Iranian hostility towards our allies, especially the State of Israel, which Iran has singled out as a target for destruction.

Diplomacy is always our preferred course of action, but it does not work in a vacuum. It only works if it is backed up with credible deterrence.

Today we show that the United States will continue our leadership against Iranian aggression—work that must continue in the years ahead.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, continued implementation of the Iran nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA, is our best shot at stopping Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. And so far at least, that agreement has been working.

The Iranians are fulfilling their JCPOA commitments. And so we must also maintain our commitment both to the letter and to the spirit of this historic agreement. Assuming Iran continues to comply, the agreement can and should last for many years. I know many have noted President-Elect Trump's negative comments about renegotiating its terms or even scrapping it outright. I suspect—at least I hope—that once he learns more about the actual national security consequences of scrapping the agreement—of which we were all reminded yesterday by CIA Director John Brennan—he may reconsider.

We know Iran is a state sponsor of terrorism, that it destabilizes the region and violates the human rights of its people. That is why Western policymakers agreed to separate out and try to secure agreement on this one discrete issue. They knew an Iran with a nuclear weapon would be especially dangerous—to us, to Israel, and to the region.

In fact, it is important to keep in mind that this whole process began in the Bush administration, with a Republican President who was—in the wake of the Iraq War—willing to engage Iran diplomatically. The Bush administration laid the foundation for what eventually became the Iran Nuclear Agreement—sanctions relief in return for strict limits on Iran's nuclear program.

In June 2008, President Bush's National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice signed a memorandum with the P5+1, which said that, in return for Iran doing key things to limit its nu-

clear program, the U.S. was ready to recognize Iran's right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes; treat Iran's nuclear program like any nonnuclear weapons state party to the nonproliferation treaty, if international confidence in the peaceful nature of its program could be restored; provide technical and financial aid for peaceful nuclear energy; and work with Iran on confidence-building measures, begin to normalize trade and economic relations, and allow for civil aviation cooperation.

All of this should sound familiar because it was effectively the early outline of the Iran Nuclear Agreement.

As you know, the scope of the sanctions relief provided to Iran under the JCPOA is explicitly limited to nuclear-related sanctions. The United States continues to enforce vigorously a variety of nonnuclear sanctions against Iran, including for ballistic missile violations, human rights abuses, and acts of state-supported terrorism. Our primary trade embargo against Iran remains largely intact. Thus, our ability to maintain sanctions pressure on Iran has been preserved, even as we secured an agreement to prevent a state sponsor of terrorism from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

Today we are debating a simple 10-year extension of the Iran Sanctions Act. Strictly speaking, extension of the act is not legally necessary to continue to enforce our existing sanctions against Iran. As administration officials have testified before the Banking Committee and elsewhere, the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and other authorities provide all of the tools that we would need in order to keep the pressure on Iran—or even to ratchet up the pressure incrementally, if warranted.

But I believe that extending it today is important for two reasons. First, it is a signal of our resolve to keep the heat on Iran and its leaders and to ensure that, if they stray from the agreement through any significant violations, together with our partners in Europe, we would respond forcefully—including if necessary by immediately snapback sanctions on Iran. And second, today's action will make even clearer that we will continue to enforce the nonnuclear sanctions on Iran related to terrorism and ballistic missiles and human rights violations.

As we consider extension of the Iran Sanctions Act today, I hope that we will keep in mind what is truly necessary in order to maintain our current sanctions architecture. The JCPOA was a groundbreaking agreement designed to prevent Iran from obtaining a weapon of mass destruction—but it is also a relatively new and somewhat fragile agreement. We should be very careful, going forward, not to violate the terms of the JCPOA by simply imposing under another guise the old sanctions that were waived or suspended under the nuclear agreement. If that were to happen, our success in

preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon could be unwound in a matter of weeks—or even days. And then we would be isolated internationally, instead of Iran being isolated as the outlier by the international community, as it was under the JCPOA.

Our debate today sends an important signal to Iran: We resolve to continue our fight against terrorism worldwide, to counter Iran's moves to further destabilize the Middle East region, and to impose consequences for the grave human rights abuses that, sadly, continue in Iran to this day. Of course, in addition to renewing these sanctions and maintaining tough JCPOA oversight, Congress must also continue to support robust military and other aid to regional partners like Israel. We should focus both on ensuring strict implementation of the agreement and on the most effective ways to pressure Iran's leaders to change their destabilizing behaviors in the region.

There is no question of our willingness to maintain our current Iran sanctions architecture. We can and we will continue to vigorously enforce nonnuclear sanctions against Iran. And I believe we presently have all of the tools we need to do so. I urge my colleagues to support this measure.

Mr. PETERS. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

21ST CENTURY CURES BILL

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, I come today to the Senate floor to offer congratulations to the U.S. House of Representatives because last night, in an overwhelming vote, they passed what Senate Majority Leader MITCH MCCONNELL has described as the single most important piece of legislation the Congress is likely to enact this year.

I am referring to the 21st Century Cures Act, combined with the mental health bill, which is the most significant set of reforms of major mental health programs in 10 years. The Cures package is the result of bipartisan work over the last 2 years. Its purpose is to move cures and treatments through the expensive development process and the extensive regulatory process and into the medicine cabinets and doctors' offices of America more rapidly and safely at the same time. That also helps to lower costs, and we hear a great deal of talk about the affordability of prescription medicines. If it takes more than 10 or 15 years and more than \$1 billion to develop a drug, such as a treatment for Alzheimer's, that all adds to the final cost. We would like to lower that cost and speed that time up as long as we continue to do it safely.