

of educational opportunities. I don't exaggerate when I say that because of this war, an entire generation of Syrians will be both displaced and disaffected in an already volatile region. Ignoring these children ensures decades of instability to come.

In Eastern Ghouta this past week, we saw the most recent example of the brutality of the Assad regime, aided and abetted by Russia and Iran. While only just now making headlines, Eastern Ghouta has been held under siege by the Syrian Government since 2013. This neighborhood, which had supposedly been designated as a deescalation zone, has been bombarded by Syrian Government forces armed with Russian weapons. In just a few days, 500 civilians have been killed, and that number is growing.

Years after the international community reached a consensus that Assad had lost his legitimacy as the leader of Syria, he not only remains in power but is more secure than ever. The United States has not only failed to exert moral leadership in the face of Syrian suffering but has also failed to show strategic leadership in the face of a tangible threat to U.S. national security.

I have long called on both the Obama and Trump administrations, warning that U.S. interests were not being represented in Syrian negotiations, but this has never been more clearly illustrated than in November of this past year, November of 2017, when a picture circulated of Presidents Ruhani, Putin, and Erdogan shaking hands in Russia after a round of negotiations to determine a potential resolution of the Syrian conflict.

I have to ask, is it now U.S. policy to let these three dictate policy in the Middle East—Ruhani, Putin, and Erdogan? The United States was not there, nor were our European allies. The United States is failing our own interests by ceding leadership in Syria to Iran and Russia, whose national security interests often directly contradict our own.

What do these bullying regimes want from Syria?

Let's start with Iran. Iran sees Syria as an investment in its political infrastructure and its campaign for regional hegemony. It is their "land bridge" from Tehran to Beirut, a weapons pipeline, a training camp for Hezbollah. It is a practice ground for a future war with Israel.

What about the Russians? The Russian Government, led by Mr. Putin, has made clear that they believe all Syrian territory must return to the Assad regime and to the Assad regime's control before political reforms can be considered. Putin seeks a solution that shows that he is the arbiter of events in the Middle East. Lately, foreign leaders—including Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel, President Ruhani, and King Salman of Saudi Arabia—fly to Moscow instead of Washington. They see a Russia that seeks to write the rules of

international order and an America that sits back, too enmeshed in our own political strife to lead.

This is not the America that I know and that most Americans know. The America I know does not believe that where you are born should dictate where you live or die or if you spend your childhood in a refugee camp. The America I know does not stand by while enemy nations threaten to expand their spheres of influence. The America I know sees the complexity of our own foreign involvements, understanding, for instance, that ISIS cannot be fully defeated without considering the context of the Syrian civil war. The America I know supports its allies, like Israel, that share a chaotic border with a nation at war with itself.

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy spoke at the Fort Worth, TX, Chamber of Commerce on the challenges posed by the Soviet regime.

He said:

This country, which desires only to be free, which desires to be secure, which desired to live at peace for 18 years under three different administrations, has borne more than its share of the burden, has stood watch for more than its number of years. I don't think we are fatigued or tired. We would like to live as we once lived. But history will not permit it. . . . The balance of power is still on the side of freedom. We are still the keystone in the arch of freedom, and I think we will continue to do as we have done in our past, our duty.

So said President Kennedy. He spoke to the paradox of our country then and now, what we continue to face. If we are to remain the keystone in the arch of freedom, we cannot become fatigued by the responsibility to fight tyranny.

These are the very issues that should receive public debate as part of the congressional consideration of a new authorization for the use of military force, known by the acronym AUMF. We undermine our own credibility when we continue to send our men and women into conflicts that Congress has not authorized. Secretary Tillerson, our Secretary of State, has indicated that he sees a need for a long-term U.S. military presence in Syria; yet many of us believe that there is no purely military solution to this conflict. Where is the strategy? we ask. I would like to see the administration put forward a plan that encompasses all components of this conflict—military, political, and humanitarian.

When we ask our men and women in uniform to put their lives on the line to protect our homeland and fight terrorism, we need to be willing to back them up by doing our jobs here in Washington. Just consider Pennsylvania. Pennsylvanians have made a substantial sacrifice in the past 17 years of war as 288 of our brave servicemembers have been killed in action in those 17 years and as almost 2,000 have been wounded in action in Afghanistan and Iraq.

We owe it to these men and women to have a robust, bipartisan debate about this strategy and a vote on an AUMF.

We should also vote on legislation to cut off financing for ISIS or any other terrorist organization in the world. I have a bipartisan bill, the Stop Terrorists Operational Resources and Money Act, the so-called STORM Act, with Senator ISAKSON. I have a bill, as well, with Senator RUBIO, the Preventing Destabilization of Iraq and Syria Act, to promote humanitarian aid and sanction the Russian and Iranian actors who are destabilizing this region—all of the components of a comprehensive strategy.

Let's have a serious debate on this critical national security issue. We are not always faced with situations in which our moral obligation and our strategic priorities lead to the same conclusion, but this is one of those rare moments.

May it be said of us years from now, just as President Kennedy said, that we do our duty to continue to be the keystone in the arch of freedom, including helping the Syrian people, especially her children, be free of Assad's brutality and bombing.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nomination, Executive Calendar No. 397.

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

The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Jeffrey Gerrish, of Maryland, to be a Deputy United States Trade Representative (Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Industrial Competitiveness), with the rank of Ambassador.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nomination be printed in the RECORD.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Gerrish nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

#### NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY'S FOUNDERS DAY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it is my privilege to highlight the 50th anniversary of the founding of Northern Kentucky University, NKU. I am proud to join with NKU's more than 14,000 students, its faculty and staff, and its supporters in marking the history of the institution.

As northern Kentucky was previously the only region in the State without a traditional public university, many students lacked the opportunity to attend a local 4-year institution of higher education that students in other regions of Kentucky enjoyed. In response, a bipartisan group of State legislators from the region worked with Kentucky Governor Louie B. Nunn to establish a new school in 1968. Originally named Northern Kentucky State College, the school proved to be an attractive option for local students from the region. Less than a decade later, as the campus continued to expand its programs and services to accommodate a growing student population, the school became a university, changing its name to Northern Kentucky University, NKU. Since that time, NKU has continued to thrive, adding more undergraduate, graduate, and even doctoral programs, which have attracted a broader base of students to the university. These advancements, coupled with the region's population growth and economic development, have been an immense benefit to Northern Kentucky.

NKU has also expanded athletic opportunities for its students and has built a number of strong teams. Having dominated NCAA Division II play with two women's basketball national championships and one men's soccer national championship, the Norse recently transitioned into NCAA Division I. With this new reclassification, the Norse teams have continued to excel. Winning the Horizon League tournament last year, the men's basketball team earned their first trip to the NCAA Division I tournament. This year, the team's hard work earned their title as the Horizon League's regular season champions. In addition, the Norse have many other impressive teams and dedicated fans.

On its golden anniversary, NKU has so much to be proud of. Under the leadership of Interim President Gerard St. Amand, the school continues to grow in both size and prominence. It has matured into a comprehensive university that delivers innovative, student-centered education and engages in impactful scholarly and creative endeavors, all of which empower its graduates to have fulfilling careers and meaningful lives.

With successful alumni who have entered a wide range of careers, from government leaders to entrepreneurs, to

artists, and to coaches, NKU has helped more than 60,000 students achieve their dreams. For a half century, NKU has had a tremendous impact on the economic, civic, and social vitality of the region, and all Kentuckians are benefiting from having such an outstanding higher education institution in our Commonwealth. I would like to congratulate the entire Northern Kentucky University community on reaching this Founders Day milestone, and I urge my Senate colleagues to join me in recognizing its accomplishments.

#### ARMS SALES NOTIFICATION

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, section 36(b) of the Arms Export Control Act requires that Congress receive prior notification of certain proposed arms sales as defined by that statute. Upon such notification, the Congress has 30 calendar days during which the sale may be reviewed. The provision stipulates that, in the Senate, the notification of proposed sales shall be sent to the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

In keeping with the committee's intention to see that relevant information is available to the full Senate, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record the notifications which have been received. If the cover letter references a classified annex, then such annex is available to all Senators in the office of the Foreign Relations Committee, room SD-423.

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

DEFENSE SECURITY  
COOPERATION AGENCY,  
Arlington, VA.

Hon. BOB CORKER,  
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations,  
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Pursuant to the reporting requirements of Section 36(b)(1) of the Arms Export Control Act, as amended, we are forwarding herewith Transmittal No. 17-79, concerning the Navy's proposed Letter(s) of Offer and Acceptance to the Government of Japan for defense articles and services estimated to cost \$45 million. After this letter is delivered to your office, we plan to issue a news release to notify the public of this proposed sale.

Sincerely,

GREGORY M. KAUSNER,  
(For Charles W. Hooper, Lieutenant  
General, USA, Director).

Enclosures.

TRANSMITTAL NO. 17-79

*Notice of Proposed Issuance of Letter of Offer Pursuant to Section 36(b)(1) of the Arms Export Control Act, as amended*

(i) Prospective Purchaser: Government of Japan.

(ii) Total Estimated Value:  
Major Defense Equipment\* \$40 million.  
Other \$5 million.  
Total \$45 million.

(iii) Description and Quantity or Quantities of Articles or Services under Consideration for Purchase:

Major Defense Equipment (MDE):  
Twenty-four (24) MK 15 Phalanx Close-in Weapon System (CIWS) Block IB Baseline 1 to MK 15 Phalanx Block IB Baseline 2 Conversion Kits.

Non-MDE: Also included is support equipment, spare parts, publications, software and associated support, and logistical support services, and other related elements of logistical and program support.

(iv) Military Department: Navy (JA-P-NBE).

(v) Prior Related Cases, if any: None.

(vi) Sales Commission, Fee, etc., Paid, Offered, or Agreed to be Paid: None.

(vii) Sensitivity of Technology Contained in the Defense Article or Defense Services Proposed to be Sold: See Attached Annex.

(viii) Date Report Delivered to Congress: March 2, 2018.

\*As defined in Section 47(6) of the Arms Export Control Act.

#### POLICY JUSTIFICATION

Japan—MK 15 Phalanx Close-in Weapon System (CIWS) Block IB Baseline 2 Conversion Kits

The Government of Japan has requested to buy twenty-four (24) MK 15 Phalanx Close-in Weapon System (CIWS) Block IB Baseline 1 to MK 15 Phalanx Block IB Baseline 2 conversion kits. Also included is support equipment, spare parts, publications, software and associated support, and logistical support services, and other related elements of logistical and program support. The estimated total case value is \$45 million.

This proposed sale will contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States by improving the security of a major ally that has been, and continues to be, a force for political stability and economic progress in the Asia-Pacific region.

The proposed sale will improve Japan's capability in current and future defensive efforts. Japan will use the enhanced capability as a deterrent to regional threats and to strengthen homeland defense.

The proposed sale of this equipment and support will not alter the basic military balance in the region.

The principal contractor will be Raytheon Missile Systems, Tucson, AZ. There are no known offset agreements proposed in connection with this potential sale.

Implementation of this proposed sale will not require the permanent assignment of additional U.S. Government or contractor representatives in Japan.

There will be no adverse impact on U.S. defense readiness as a result of this proposed sale.

TRANSMITTAL NO. 17-79

*Notice of Proposed Issuance of Letter of Offer Pursuant to Section 36(b)(1) of the Arms Export Control Act*

Annex Item No. vii

(vii) Sensitivity of Technology:

1. The CIWS Block IB Baseline 2 represents an increase in threat acquisition and firepower accuracy over previous Block 1 Baseline configurations. The Baseline 2 variant includes a radar improvement upgrade and an electro-optical sensor to improve weapon system performance against low-observable, sea-skimming threats, and provides improved capability to concentrate hard-kill ordnance in a tighter pattern on the threat. The CIWS mount and spare hardware are UNCLASSIFIED. The radar improvement/upgrade is the most sensitive portion of the Baseline 2 configuration.

2. The CIWS Block IB Baseline 2 systems and upgrade kits will result in the transfer of a highly accurate close-in engagement technology and ship self-defense capability. The equipment, hardware, and the majority of documentation are UNCLASSIFIED. The embedded software and operational performance are classified CONFIDENTIAL. The seeker/electro-optical control section and the target detector are UNCLASSIFIED, but