

had agreements on some numbers for border security that are not being honored right now. It is like you negotiate to a point, and then one side says: Well, we are going to back up on that. Well, we will agree to this. And then they back up again.

The American people are not fooled. This is not an immigration issue any longer. It is clearly a national security issue. The President is right: Over 85 percent of the illegal drugs come into this country illegally across that border. Almost 100 percent of the fentanyl that comes into this country comes across that southern border of the United States illegally.

There is a second reason this is such an insidious thing to do right now with this continuing resolution. It is incredibly disappointing that this continuing resolution does nothing to address disaster relief funding for the people of Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Alabama, and California who have been devastated by historic wildfires and hurricanes.

The reason this is so critical right now is that this hits agriculture in these States in a way that is so insidious. The reason is that it hit at exactly the harvest time, when crops are being harvested or are potentially going to be harvested. It devastated entire regions of that portion of the United States.

In December and January, what farmers are typically doing is they have taken the money from the crops, paid back the planting loan from this year to the banks, and now in January will start negotiations for loans for next year for the planting season. What this continuing resolution does is kicks the can down the road until a theoretic date—somebody picked February 8 as an arbitrary date. This devastates farmers and smalltown bankers who are trying to fund next year's crop because they have no way of paying this year's.

I am absolutely convinced that President Trump wants to help these farmers and the people in California who have been devastated by these fires. He has said so repeatedly. In October, on a trip to Georgia and Florida, he saw the devastation from the hurricane and the tornadoes that came with it and all the damage that came from that event, and this is what the President said:

The farmers really got hurt, especially in Georgia. . . . But we're going to get it taken care of.

There is no question that the President of the United States wants to make good on that promise. The problem is, he is dealing with another party that is not being genuine in their effort to find a solution to this funding issue right now.

Democrats in the House want to clearly push this out into the new year for an obvious reason, and that is what we are pushed to tonight, tomorrow, and the next night. I fully believe the Senate should be back here the day after Christmas, frankly, to debate this, to get to a resolution, to some compromise, to get the benefits that

we have identified are necessary to protect this strategic industry of ours called agriculture.

I remember that during my career, we would work half a day on Christmas Eve. I remember that. It hasn't been that long ago. We might take Christmas Day off, and then the next day, most people in America are back to work if they are not taking vacation. But here in the Senate, right now, we won't be back until sometime in January, and we have given ourselves until February 8 to resolve this issue. That is unacceptable. I believe it is unacceptable to the President. It is certainly unacceptable to a person who comes from the real world as an outsider to this process.

Here is another derivative negative to kicking this can down the road: It not only affects the funding we are talking about this year; it also talks about the planning and budgeting for fiscal year 2020, which starts October 1, 2019. From January 8 until July 31, there are 19 weeks or 57 workdays—only 57, the way the Senate operates today. What that means is that the Senate and the House have to appropriate 12 appropriations bills—I believe before July 31—in order to fund the government before September 30 next year. Here is why: The August break is a work break, and people in the Senate and the House go home and work in their States during the month in August.

If that happens this year, then when we come back in September, we will have 12 working days in September. There is no way we are going to have any appropriations bills and the conferences necessary to get that done in September.

It is very clear that this continuing resolution is improper, it should not be done, and it puts the people who have been devastated at risk. And I think that right now, we need to be very serious about one thing, and that is, going forward, we need to find a way to create a politically neutral platform to fund this government on time every year without all this drama.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

#### SYRIA

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to speak briefly about the President's announcement today that he is going to be withdrawing 2,000 American troops from Syria.

Let me be clear. I thought this was a bad idea from the start, primarily because our troop presence in Syria is not authorized by Congress. We have had that debate in many forums here, but I believe this Congress has never authorized the U.S. military to engage in hostilities against ISIS. I think it is an extrapolation of the 2001 AUMF. It simply belies common sense. So we should never endorse military activity

overseas, no matter what we think about the merits, if it is not authorized by this body.

But we have also seen over and over again that our relatively meager military presence in the Middle East has never been enough to change the political realities on the ground. The training mission was a disaster. The weapons we gave to the rebels ended up in the hands of the people we were fighting. Ultimately, we never had enough firepower there to be able to meaningfully change the balance of power.

But I will concede that the way the President went about making this decision makes our country an even bigger laughing stock than it already is in the region, and, frankly, that is pretty hard, because everybody is asking questions right now about why we pretended we were going to protect our Kurdish partners in the region if, on the eve of the Turkish offensive against the Kurds, we decide to pull out.

It makes absolutely no sense to pretend for literally months and months that we are going to be the bulwark to protect the Kurds against the Turks and then right on the precipice of the Turkish offensive, we leave. Why would anybody believe us in the future if we give them our word?

Again, I am speaking as someone who didn't support the intervention in the first place, but once you have made that commitment, why not follow through?

Second, why pull the rug out from under our diplomats in the region? It is very clear that neither Jim Jeffrey nor Brett McGurk knew anything about this. In fact, they were just making plans and suggestions weeks ago to increase our military involvement in the region, and now they are having to explain why 2,000 troops are leaving.

If you are going to make a decision like this, make sure the people who are working for you know about it.

Third, why announce this pullout without answering any questions about it or without announcing an alternative strategy? Total darkness from the President and his national security team. An announcement—a statement made on Twitter and no rollout of a plan for how the United States is going to continue to try to keep the peace.

So I agree with many of the criticisms that my Republican friends who have come down to the floor have complained about. This was done in a ham-handed manner that makes us weaker in the world. But forgive me if I have a few questions about why my Republican friends chose to speak up only now with questions about the President's Syria policy.

Where was this outrage when the President of the United States froze millions of dollars in humanitarian funding that could have saved lives on the ground in Syria? If they care so deeply about the future of Syria, why

weren't the Republicans lighting up social media and down on this floor complaining about the fact that the President refused to forward badly needed humanitarian dollars to the region.

Where was the outrage when the President effectively pulled the United States out of the peace process? Remember, the United States, under the Obama administration—whatever you think about Obama's strategy—was in the peace process, was a partner to try to figure out a way forward for Syria. Donald Trump, as has been his strategy internationally, pulled us out of that diplomatic conversation, left the diplomatic playing field to the Iranians, to the Russians, and to the Turks. Where was the outrage when the United States walked away from the negotiating table?

How about the shutdown of the refugee program? Once again, if your focus is on the cataclysm of humanitarian disaster on the ground in Syria, why weren't there all sorts of Members of the Republican Party coming down to the floor and complaining when the President decided to not allow any more Syrian refugees—those fleeing terror and torture—to come to the United States?

What about outrage over the fact that the President proposed cutting the State Department by 40 percent—the State Department that is going to be in the driver's seat when we eventually get to the point of putting Syria back together politically?

Why is there outrage only today? Well, here is the answer, I think, and it worries me. I think there is outrage today because many Members of the Republican Party still cling to this outdated, empirically disproved, fantastic notion that the American military can solve complicated, convoluted political problems in the Middle East.

We have amazing men and women in the Armed Forces, but there are limits to what they can do. And history—especially the history of the last 15 years—tells us that big U.S. military presence in the Middle East often creates as many problems as it solves.

The Republicans who are complaining about this make it sound as if we had a couple divisions in Syria. We didn't. We had 2,000 troops. We had 2,000 troops compared to the hundreds of thousands of troops fighting on behalf of the Syrian regime, the Iranian militias, the Kurdish forces, the rebel forces, the remnants of ISIS's forces. Two thousand troops isn't enough to bluff. It isn't enough to gain a negotiating foothold. It is, frankly, just enough to keep faking it in Syria—doing just enough militarily to say that we are doing something to be able to sleep at night while never actually doing anything sufficient to change the balance of power. That has been the story of both President Obama's and President Trump's policy in Syria. We do just enough to convince the rebels that they should keep going but never enough to actually tackle Bashar al-

Assad. All we have done is keep the civil war running and running and running.

I have really terrible news for you all. Assad is going to win this war. He was always going to win this war because the folks who were on his side had much bigger equities—Russia and Iran—than the folks who were on the side of the rebels. Now, that really stinks, that Bashar al-Assad is going to win, but you have to make policy based on the real world, not on some world that you imagine.

These neoconservatives are still—even after 4,000 Americans were killed in Iraq and 30,000 were wounded, they are still clinging to this notion that a couple thousand U.S. troops are going to be able to solve the problems in Syria. Listen. I get it. Restraint in the face of evil is really hard stuff. But hubris in the face of evil is worse.

So what should we be doing? I won't spend too much time on this, but we should get out of the civil war. We should admit that we have just prolonged it instead of trying to end it. We should keep working with our partners and keep using airpower to keep ISIS on the run. We should rescue Syrians with a generous refugee program, both helping our partners in the Middle East rescue Syrians and bringing them to the United States when they pass our vetting program.

We should stop angering our allies all over the world, but particularly in that region, and get back into the diplomatic game.

Finally, we should stop believing that our only leverage in negotiations in Syria or anywhere else in the world is military force. Put up a promise of massive investment in Syria after a peace deal is signed—likely, frankly, costing a fraction of what we spent in Iraq—and you will discover that you quickly get a seat at that table again.

But it is time that we give up on this notion that these brave, capable American soldiers can fix these complicated, tribal, political, economic, and religious problems in the Middle East. They are brave, and they are capable, but there are things they can do, and there are things they can't do. Every time we put our troops in situations where they are doomed to fail, when we are not prepared to give them the resources to succeed, as was always the case in Syria—spare me this notion that 2,000 American troops were going to be able to fix Syria—every time we put them in situations where they can't win, we undermine American influence, and we undermine the power of our military.

I don't agree with how the President did this. Once you have made that commitment, boy, it doesn't make a lot of sense to pull the rug out from under our partners right as the tough stuff starts to come. I don't agree that he didn't do it in consultation with anybody in this place or anybody on his national security team. I think that his announcement today is ham-handed

and embarrassing, but his instincts aren't entirely wrong on the question of what American troops can and can't do in the Middle East.

I can't believe I am saying this. I think the President may have learned more than many of my friends in the Senate have.

I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina is recognized.

Mr. GRAHAM. I ask unanimous consent to be recognized along with my colleague from New Hampshire, Senator SHAHEEN, to enter into a colloquy.

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

The Senator from New Hampshire.

## SYRIA

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I am in distress to be on the floor of the Senate today with my colleague, Senator GRAHAM, to express our deep and profound disappointment in President Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from northeast Syria.

We had the opportunity to visit Syria this summer, and we saw what a difference our troops had made there in the fight against ISIS in stabilizing Syria along the northern Turkish border. We saw the response from the Syrians we talked to, both the Kurds and Arabs, as we drove along the road. We saw children and people in the area flashing a victory sign at our troops, and you can see from this map the land that is controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces, our partners in Syria, so this is the United States and Syrian Democratic Forces.

We have a significant piece of Syria that is now peaceful and stabilized and ISIS has been thrown out of that part of Syria, but the President's decision—which was announced by a tweet—is dangerous, premature, and wholly inconsistent with the facts on the ground in Syria and our own military's advice.

I was listening to Senator RUBIO earlier today talking about what is the plan? What is the plan if we withdraw? Well, I will tell you what the plan is. There is no plan. There is no follow-on to what we are going to do if we withdraw from Syria. What we know is, the work of our combined joint task force, Operation Inherent Resolve, and its partner forces, the Syrian Democratic Forces, is truly remarkable. Again, we can see it. We can see it in this brown section of the country where we have control and there is peace and stability.

Senator GRAHAM and I, when we visited this summer, we went to Manbij, which was controlled by ISIS for 3 years. We walked through the market in Manbij without any body armor, with no guards. We talked to people in that community about what life was like under ISIS.

I talked to one woman who told me she did not go out of her house the entire time ISIS controlled Manbij, for 3 years. She went out of her house once to visit the doctor.