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Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Our Father in Heaven, You are our shield and deliverer. You, O God, are our light and salvation. So we refuse to be afraid. Continue to be the strength of our lives, as we remember the many times You have protected and preserved America in the past.

Lord, inspire our lawmakers with Your presence so that the words of their mouths and the meditations of their hearts will be acceptable to You. Help them to remember that You are an ever-present help for turbulent times, eager to empower those who depend upon Your might.

We pray in Your strong Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). The majority leader is recognized.

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Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, as I have discussed several times, the Strengthening America's Security in the Middle East Act is a consequential legislative package that would strengthen vital partnerships and reaffirm our active role in matters of global concern. I am proud to support it. I

was also proud to lay down an amendment yesterday that would allow the Senate to speak equally forcefully on critical subjects in American foreign policy.

The United States is engaged in Syria and Afghanistan for one simple reason: because our enemies are engaged there. Real dangers to us and to our allies still remain in both of these nations. So we must continue to confront them there. Fortunately, we are not alone. We are joined in the counter-ISIS coalition by 78 other partners, and in both Syria and Afghanistan, local fighters are bearing the brunt—the brunt—of the work.

But American leadership is absolutely essential, and that is what this amendment is all about. My amendment is not partisan. It expresses views and concerns from Senators on both sides of the aisle, and it certainly isn't political. I intended it as an opportunity for the Senate to debate and vote on some of the more consequential matters of the day, and I expected this institution to rise to the occasion.

I was a Senator on September 11, 2001. I don't want America to ever live through another day like that—none of us do.

I have also been here in the Senate for the 17 years since—17 years of American engagement in worldwide efforts to combat terrorism. It hasn't been easy navigating American interests through this complicated and troubled region. It hasn't been easy adapting to an entirely new way of warfare against enemies that have proven adaptive themselves.

It is understandable that as we get further from September 11, many would grow tired of our military efforts a long way from home, but as decisions from the Obama administration have made painfully clear, leaving too abruptly carries its own grave risks.

Had President Obama known that ISIS would emerge in the wake of his withdrawal from Iraq and flourish in

the chaos of the Syrian civil war, I suspect he might have done things differently. Perhaps he would not have abandoned Iraq so precipitously, ignored the growing terror threats in Syria, or allowed Assad to steamroll over his now-infamous "red line."

We can't undo this unfortunate history, but we certainly cannot afford to repeat it. So it has been a welcome contrast to see the Trump administration make huge progress reinvigorating our fight against al-Qaida in Afghanistan and ISIS in Syria. Unshackling our military has led to progress on the ground, greater pressure placed on the terrorists, and new opportunities for diplomatic and political solutions that have opened up as a result of the pressure that we have applied.

So what we must remember is how hard won these gains have been. Our response to this progress must not be to take our foot off the gas pedal but rather to keep up those strategies that are clearly working.

Our partnership with Iraqi security forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces have stripped ISIS of much territory in those two nations, but we have not yet defeated ISIS. We have not yet defeated al-Qaida in Afghanistan. Civil wars continue to rage in both Syria and Afghanistan. There are still cauldrons—cauldrons—of sectarianism, extremism, and terror.

President Trump is right that this cannot be America's fight alone. The threats that ISIS and al-Qaida pose are global. That is why many countries are with us in this fight. There is more that those partners can and should do to keep up direct pressure on terrorists and on outside actors who interfere with diplomatic efforts to resolve these wars.

Putin's Russia and the ayatollahs in Tehran need to pay a real price for their attempts to back butchers—like the Assad regime, Hezbollah, and the Taliban.

We also need to understand that if we withdraw too soon—too soon—we will

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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