

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

IRAN

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I see another colleague on the floor, so I will make my comments brief.

We had a briefing this week in a room in the Capitol that the public is not allowed to enter; it is called the SCIF. It was a briefing that is given to Members of the Senate of top-secret, classified information. It related to the situation in which we now find ourselves in relation to Iran.

It was troubling to hear the comments being made by the leaders of the Trump administration—the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State, as well as military leaders and leaders in the intelligence community.

You see, what we are engaging in in the United States is a confrontation with Iran. We are moving toward that. It started with this President's insistence that the United States step away from a treaty entered into by the Obama administration to stop the development of nuclear weapons in Iran.

What President Obama succeeded in doing over many years of diplomatic effort was to come to the table with Iran—an enemy of the United States on many fronts—and to reach an agreement where there would be international inspectors with free access to Iran to make certain they did not develop nuclear weapons. We believed—the world believed that Iran with nuclear weapons would be a danger to the region, a danger to our ally Israel, and even a danger to the United States.

The coalition put together by President Obama was nothing short of remarkable. You wouldn't be surprised to learn the coalition included the United Kingdom, our traditional ally, but it also included Germany, France, the European Union, Russia, and China. Russia and China. All came to the table and agreed on it.

Did it work? International inspectors came and reported to Members of Congress over and over that there were no locked doors, no areas where access was denied, and that they could say with virtual certainty that Iran was living up to the terms of this agreement.

So what did this President, President Trump, decide to do? He canceled U.S. participation in the agreement. Why? Why would he believe that the development of nuclear weapons in Iran is in the best interest of anyone? Yet he did. He followed that with even more provocative efforts in relation to Iran when it came to categorizing the Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization—a step that moved even closer to provocation and confrontation. And then, of course, we decided to send our own military closer in to Iran itself. A carrier group was dispatched to that region.

What is behind all this? Why is it that we are escalating the situation

with Iran? The President has been equivocal in trying to explain it, but his National Security Advisor, John Bolton, has not. John Bolton is a hawk. His position and his posture when it comes to military confrontation was so controversial that in a previous administration, he was denied the position of Ambassador to the United Nations because of statements he had made. Now he is the top national security advisor to the President of the United States. He has written articles pleading for confrontation with Iran on a military basis.

Rumors fly out of the Pentagon—this morning's Washington Post suggestion that we are already sending 10,000 more military advisors into the region; a rumor 2 weeks ago that there was a contingency plan for 120,000 American troops. I might add that the Secretary of Defense, in my office this morning, denied both of these, but the fact is, more and more information is tumbling out about a confrontation with Iran.

I will tell you that some of us—a handful of us in the Senate—were here on the Senate floor when we debated and voted on a war in Iraq. It was 18 years ago. We were given information by the Bush administration and particularly Vice President Cheney about the danger of Iraq to the United States of America, to the point where a vote came to the floor, and the Senate approved an invasion of Iraq.

I remember that night. I remember it well. Twenty-three of us—one Republican and twenty-two Democrats—joined together in voting no. It may have been the most important and maybe the best vote I believe I ever cast as a Member of the Senate.

It was a foreign policy mistake to invade Iraq. What followed was a tragedy. We have spent billions and billions of American taxpayers' dollars in that country. We have lost over 4,000 American lives in Iraq, and over 30,000 or 40,000 came home with serious injuries, including my colleague in the Senate, Senator TAMMY DUCKWORTH. We have paid so dearly for that mistake.

The weapons of mass destruction we were sent in to destroy did not exist. What was told to the American people about the danger of Iraq was false—false. We are still there today, 18 years later, as we are in Afghanistan—the two longest wars in the history of the United States of America. Is there anyone who believed when we voted on the Senate floor that we were voting for the longest war in the history of the United States?

Now this administration, the Trump administration, is tempted to draw us into another war in the Middle East. The question is whether Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives will abide by the constitutional responsibility and demand that the American people, through our voices, have something to say about this decision.

If the American people are ready for a war in Iran, I would be shocked. As I

travel around the State of Illinois and other parts of this country, I find no sentiment for the United States to engage in another war at this moment in our history. I also find most people believing that the provocative and confrontational efforts of the Trump administration are drawing us nearer to that day.

So we leave now for a week. We will be back, but what will happen in the 7 or 8 days we are gone? I worry about that based on the briefings we have been given and the appetite of John Bolton and others in this administration to move us into war.

We should not invade Iran. We should not engage in another invasion in the Middle East. We should not subject America's young men and young women to the possibility of military service in another war that can go on indefinitely. There are better ways to deal with this. Let's rely on diplomacy and direct negotiation. Let's work with our allies to bring a peaceable result here and to stop activity which we know Iran is engaged in which is objectionable. It can be done short of invasion, short of military force, and short of war.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I give heartfelt thanks to my colleague from Illinois for bringing the experience of his service in the Senate and his deliberate study of the challenges of international affairs to bear on the gravity of the current situation where a policy has brought us to the brink of conflict and we have no confidence that there is wise judgment being exercised at this moment to ensure that there is not a war.

I thank him for sharing the journey that he has been a part of and that this Chamber has been part of and ringing the alarm bell that at this moment, we have two key foreign policy advisors—our Secretary of State and our National Security Advisor—who prefer weapons over agreements, who have driven a strategy of maximum pressure designed to make life extraordinarily difficult in Iran, to undo all the international work of the previous years to end the nuclear program in that country, and who are talking as if a conflict somewhere—maybe an Iranian militia in Iraq—should be a trigger to a massive war, which is why we are so worried about leaving this Chamber for even a day.

I thank him for raising his voice and sharing his experience.

TRIBUTE TO LOUIE RECKFORD

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I come to the floor because I am losing a key member of my foreign policy team who has wrestled with the issues of the Middle East and who has been engaged in the dialogue and conversation about a smart policy to end nuclear proliferation.