

said is Russian support for the Taliban.”

The story later goes on to read: “Any involvement with the Taliban that resulted in the deaths of American troops would also be a huge escalation of Russia’s so-called hybrid war against the United States, a strategy of destabilizing adversaries through a combination of such tactics as cyberattacks . . . and covert and deniable military operations.”

We have learned in recent days that these reports have been circulating through the U.S. intelligence community since early 2019, but there was little to no action taken. The timeline regarding these events is of particular concern to me and, I know, to many Americans but especially to those who represent a State in which there is a direct connection.

In April of 2019, three U.S. marines were killed in a car bomb near Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan. There was speculation that this may have been a bounty attack that had been carried out by the Taliban for the Russians.

There has been further reporting on this—tracking the dollars—by the New York Times and maybe by a few other outlets, but I know the New York Times did.

One of the marines killed in that April 2019 attack was a Pennsylvanian. If there had been credible intelligence regarding the Russian plot and if that intelligence had been acted upon, one question I have is—and it is only a question; I don’t know the answer to this question, but I ask it—could the death of this young Pennsylvania marine and his brothers in arms have been averted?

That is a question. I don’t know the answer to it. I hope, in the coming days and weeks—and I hope not longer than weeks—we will have an answer to that question, among many, as it troubles so many Americans.

As of the close of last year, December of 2019, 294 servicemembers from Pennsylvania had been killed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—the third highest toll of any State. Our State has sacrificed a lot. If Russia had had any hand in contributing to these losses, to say that it is offensive, enraging, and deeply problematic is an understatement and warrants a close look not only at the U.S. engagement in Afghanistan but also at how we respond—how the United States of America responds—to Vladimir Putin’s efforts to disrupt U.S. efforts overseas and take American lives while doing it.

Accordingly, I have several questions about how the intelligence has been handled and what measures have been taken to hold Russia accountable for these horrific, incendiary, unlawful actions contrary to international law.

The administration must brief all Members of Congress immediately. I think Americans are offended when the administration briefs one side of the aisle. All Members of Congress should be briefed. Those briefings should occur

immediately and in close proximity to the reporting. The briefings should include when they received the intelligence—when the administration received it—when the President was briefed, and what actions were considered in response. I also call on the administration to report to Congress on a process for protecting our troops in moving forward.

You could be justifiably offended by inaction by the administration or for the knowledge that preceded that inaction, that they did nothing in response to it.

It is especially offensive now to a lot of Americans that this information now is in the public record and there seems to be no evidence of any kind of a response, any kind of an action.

So I think the administration should report to Congress not just on who knew what when, but also on what we do going forward.

The families of these fallen soldiers deserve answers. The American people, obviously, deserve answers as well.

We cannot let Russia and Vladimir Putin get away with this.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of South Carolina). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I want to thank all my colleagues and my partners, my partner Senator REED, for working so hard today to come to an agreement. It has been a tough day. We think we have created a package that is acceptable to everyone and we will be hotlining it tonight.

The Senate will come back into session at 10 a.m. tomorrow morning, and hopefully, we will be able to lock in our deal here.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in 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.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise to clarify a point concerning my amendment No. 2270 to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, S. 4049. This amendment would establish in law the position of the Special Envoy for Hostage Affairs at the State Department and provides that the Special Envoy shall have the rank and status of ambassador. Under article II of the Constitution, the

President’s power to appoint ambassadors is subject to the advice and consent of the Senate. Accordingly, it is my view that the appointment of the Special Envoy with the rank and status of ambassador, pursuant to this amendment, requires the advice and consent of the Senate.

FOURTH OF JULY

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about our Nation’s independence.

Some 244 years ago this Saturday, the Founding Fathers of this country voted to declare our independence from Great Britain.

All Americans know the basics of this story, but not everyone knows the story behind one of our Nation’s founding documents.

Thomas Jefferson was just 33 years old when the Second Continental Congress commissioned him to draft a declaration of independence. When he sat down in a rented room in the heat of the Philadelphia summer to write it, the American Revolution had already begun.

On one level, he was simply putting the reasons for independence into words. The first shot had been fired over a year earlier, after decades of increasingly tyrannical British abuses had culminated in open revolt in Massachusetts.

Even so, it was not yet clear whether the delegates from all 13 colonies would put their names to a formal document declaring our independence. They had to be persuaded.

After 17 days of writing and rewriting, struggling to find the right words, Jefferson presented his work to Benjamin Franklin and John Adams. He then submitted a draft to the Congress on July 1, which officially adopted it three days later.

Each year on the Fourth of July, we celebrate this moment—the moment that we declared our independence from the British Empire and began to see ourselves as our own nation.

I love Independence Day celebrations in Nebraska. Like many people, my family often spends the day enjoying the great outdoors before hosting friends and neighbors for a barbecue.

But the Fourth of July is about more than food and fireworks or parades and pancake feeds. It is an opportunity to reflect on the nearly two and a half centuries of our nation’s history and remember what it means to be an American.

To me, America is a nation based on an idea. It is the idea, as Jefferson wrote, that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Belief in this creed is what unites us as Americans. And while we may not always live up to this idea, we can never stop trying. We should count ourselves fortunate to live in the greatest nation on earth, where the notion