

“promise fatigue” that we have here—or continuing to call itself a developing country, when it is not, or continuing its attempts to dominate the South China Sea with the militarization of that important strategic sea lane, or continuation of intellectual property theft, or all the challenges that we have with China. The idea that we are going to have strategic patience, I think, sends a signal to the Chinese that we don’t take these issues urgently, and that is the wrong message. These are urgent issues.

In my discussions during the confirmation process and in hearings with now-Secretary of Defense Austin and Secretary of State Blinken, I sensed they had a sense of urgency. As a matter of fact, they both acknowledged that the previous administration—the Trump administration’s national security strategy, national defense strategy that says we need to turn to great power competition, with China as the pacing threat for the United States, they agreed with.

Even in General Austin’s—now-Secretary Austin’s—confirmation hearing, one of my colleagues, Senator BLACKBURN, actually said this term, “strategic patience,” doesn’t seem to be the right term and pressed him on it.

So here is some continued advice. In the Senate’s role, in terms of our constitutional role of advice and consent, words matter, especially from the White House podium. We need a strong, bipartisan, and lasting China policy from the United States of America. This is the biggest geostrategic issue we will be facing as a country for the next 50 to 100 years, but it is also a challenge that is here and now, a challenge that needs immediate action. So here is my advice: Ditch the “strategic patience” phrase.

The vast majority of the Senators in this body, Democrats and Republicans, want to know the Biden administration is focused on this challenge now. It is a serious challenge that China poses to the United States now, and “strategic patience” sends the wrong message to the Senate, to the American people, and to China’s leadership. So they need to do better.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, let me express my gratitude to the Senator from Alaska for his words. I could not have said it better than he did, and I am grateful to him for coming and articulating that important message so clearly and emphatically.

Chris Wray, the FBI Director, is a pretty laid-back guy. As a matter of fact, I frequently tell people he reminds me of the typical G-man—you know, not a lot of emotion, not a lot of animation. But the FBI Director, who I think is doing an outstanding job and has been doing an outstanding job, gets positively animated when it comes to China and the threats presented there. Of course, the FBI is principally in

charge of the counterintelligence mission against foreign countries like China that try to steal our intellectual property, spy on our country using a number unconventional means. I just want to say to our friend from Alaska: Thank you for making that point. It is really, really important.

NOMINATION OF ANTONY JOHN BLINKEN

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, yesterday afternoon we confirmed another one of President Biden’s Cabinet nominees. Antony Blinken has led an impressive career in the public sector and is well versed in both the vast responsibilities of the State Department, as well as the diplomatic challenges we will face in the months and years ahead, the most important of which is China, but it is not China alone.

While Mr. Blinken and I have policy differences—some of them very serious—I have confidence in his ability to represent our Nation on the global stage. It is important for a new President, whether they be a Republican or a Democrat, to have qualified, Senate-confirmed officials in their Cabinet without delay.

Over the past week, we have worked to confirm nominees for some of the most critical Federal Departments and Agencies. The Secretaries of State, Defense, Treasury, as well as the Director of National Intelligence, have each been confirmed by the Senate with broad bipartisan support. And we will continue to process more of the President’s nominees in the days ahead.

Four years ago, our Democratic colleagues approached President Trump’s nominees with a grab bag of antics, including everything from intentional delays to brazen theatrics. In most cases, this behavior wasn’t a reflection on the nominee or their qualifications, but of our colleagues’ antipathy toward President Trump.

Clearly we are adopting a different approach, and I hope it is one that will deescalate these battles and one that will serve the national interest rather than harm it.

Throughout my time in the Senate, I have tried to evaluate nominees based on their qualifications, their integrity, and their ability to carry out the responsibilities for the job they have been nominated for, and I will continue to either support or oppose nominees based on those merits and those criteria, not based on the party of the President.

NEW START

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, we know it has been the tradition of the Senate to prioritize nominees for national security positions, and there has never been a more critical time to ensure that President Biden is surrounded by an experienced and capable team. From the threats posed by an increasingly hostile Iran to those by an

unpredictable North Korea, there are many, many challenges on the horizon.

One of the first the administration must confront is the expiration of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, also known as New START. This is the only remaining bilateral strategic arms agreement between the United States and Russia, which are the world’s most powerful nuclear states, and it is set to expire in a matter of days.

Last fall, the Trump administration advocated for a 1-year extension of New START, with the condition that both countries would cap nuclear weapons—nuclear warheads during that period.

Unsurprisingly, Russia preferred a clean, 5-year extension with no warhead limitations. President Putin delayed the final stages of talks in the hopes that the potential Biden administration would strike a deal more favorable to Russia. And it appears now, at least as things stand today, that President Putin has hedged his bets correctly.

Following a call yesterday between President Biden and President Putin, the White House announced that the United States and Russia are set to extend New START for 5 years, with no conditions attached. This was President Biden’s first major foreign policy test, and, unfortunately, he played right into Russia’s hand.

For starters, it is no secret that New START was deeply flawed from the beginning. And it is no secret that Russia cheats, which is why verification is so essential.

The counting mechanisms in New START don’t effectively keep our countries on a level playing field, which is the primary goal of any arms treaty because it promotes mutual deterrents. The treaty limits the number of bombers each nation could possess but places no limit on the number of warheads each bomber can support. Making matters worse, the limits only apply to strategic, not tactical, nuclear weapons. Russia has taken advantage of this loophole in New START, amassing some 2,000 tactical nuclear weapons compared to only 500 for the United States.

Russia’s nuclear doctrine signals its increasing willingness to use those tactical nuclear weapons in a conflict, particularly in Europe, as it warily eyes NATO. Another 5 years under New START will allow Russia to continue growing its arsenal of tactical weapons and cement its advantage over the United States, perhaps permanently.

Once that happens, the likelihood of Russia deploying and ultimately using these weapons goes higher. These treaties ought to make the world safer, not a more dangerous place due to imbalances, the potential for mistakes, or miscalculation.

Beyond sheer numbers, there is also the question of trust or, I should say, of verification, because it is hardly controversial to say Russia isn’t the most trustworthy partner. Last fall,

the Kremlin attempted to poison a Putin opponent using a nerve agent. Russia has launched massive cyber attacks against private companies and government agencies here in the United States, the latest being the SolarWinds hack. And last year, it attempted to steal coronavirus vaccine data from the United States and some of our closest allies.

In short, Russia does not play by the rules, and New START does little to prevent further cheating. By granting Putin's request for a clean 5-year extension of New START, the Biden administration will not only be rewarding Russia for its hostile actions against the United States and our allies but also enabling Russia and other nuclear states to continue growing their stockpiles while the United States plays by outdated rules: no cap on nuclear warheads, no enhanced verification measures—in short, no need for assurances for Russia to follow the rules laid out in New START.

The expected treaty extension by the Biden administration wouldn't address any of those blinking red lights. The biggest failure of a clean, 5-year extension, though, is relinquishing the leverage we currently have to take a more comprehensive approach to nuclear disarmament.

As I said, the United States and Russia are the most powerful nuclear states in the world, but together we account for only two of the five nuclear armed states recognized by the non-proliferation treaty. Two of the other countries, the United Kingdom and France—both of whom provide regular information about the size and makeup of their nuclear arsenal—are not a problem.

The fifth and final power is China, one of the world's biggest secret keepers. It is a police state and opaque, as we learned once again when it came to the virus from Wuhan Province.

As if we needed a reminder of the critical information China withheld from the rest of the world, all we need to do is look at the COVID-19 pandemic. The first cases of COVID-19 appeared in China as early as November of 2019, and the Communist Party of China willfully withheld the information from the rest of the world, and it sought to downplay the potential impact of the virus. China repeatedly silenced the brave men and women of its own country who tried to sound the alarm, and, as a result, countries around the world were ill-prepared for these critical early stages of the fight against COVID-19. Now, more than 2.1 million people have died from this virus, including more than 420,000 Americans.

It is impossible to gauge how many of those lives could have been saved by earlier intervention, but this should serve as a cautionary tale when it comes to managing threats from China. We cannot allow China to continue sitting on the sidelines while the four other nuclear states play by the rules

as we hope they will. The administration must push to get China to the negotiating table—at the negotiating table.

The thick cloak of secrecy surrounding the Chinese Communist Party has made it nearly impossible to verify information about the breadth and the depth of China's nuclear capabilities. What we do know is that China continues to pursue a nuclear triad, and experts estimate China to have about 300 nuclear weapons.

Assuming that figure is correct, it puts China slightly ahead of France and the United Kingdom in terms of raw numbers. That would make China the third most powerful nuclear state in the world, and we have every reason to believe that the size of its arsenal will continue to grow.

In May of 2019, then-Director for the Defense Intelligence Agency, GEN Robert Ashley, said China is likely to at least double the size of its nuclear stockpile over the next decade. He referred to this effort as “the most rapid expansion and diversification of its nuclear arsenal in China's history.”

Despite this already large and constantly growing nuclear threat, there are virtually no measures in place to hold China accountable or to bring them to the table. A simple extension of the New START leaves in place a framework in which the Russians cheat, the Chinese are not at the table, and the United States is playing by the rules of a bygone era.

This must change. It must change. If you think about the fact that since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear weapons have not been used on this planet, it is a result of tough negotiations and a system of mutual deterrence because we know, were nuclear weapons to be used, that it could result in the extermination of the planet.

So that is why deterrence is so important. That is why reciprocity and transparency are so important. The Cold War-era approach to nuclear disarmament does not make sense in the modern world. Rather than enter a 5-year extension of New START, the administration should use its leverage to convene multilateral talks. America should invite the other nuclear non-proliferation treaty states—Russia, China, France, and the UK—to the negotiating table and encourage multilateral talks aimed at limiting the growth of nuclear arsenals globally.

There is far too much at stake to merely cave in to the demands of President Putin in Moscow and cave in as well to the recalcitrance of Beijing to come to the table. The administration must pursue a multilateral, comprehensive approach. It is the only practical and workable solution to the vast nuclear threats posed by both China and Russia.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

48TH ANNUAL MARCH FOR LIFE

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, this week is the 48th annual March for Life. It is an event when thousands of Americans come together to advocate for the value and protection of unborn human life.

They will be coming together this year differently than they have for almost 50 years, but for almost 50 years, millions of people have marched to Capitol Hill to try to build a culture wherein every human life is valued and every human life is protected. That includes tireless women and men and children from my home State of Missouri who come to Washington, both individually and along with the Missouri Life Caravan, every year. It will be the first year in a long time I haven't spoken to that group in person, but as they meet virtually, their cause is still as resonant as it is in person.

I know that Missourians will continue to advocate for life. They will continue to remember the unborn and those whom we have lost from abortion. This year's theme of the march is “Together Strong: Life Unites!” It is a pretty hard theme to argue with no matter how you feel about this particular topic. “Unity” doesn't mean believing the same thing about everything, but it does mean agreeing about one very important thing in terms of this event, and that important thing, of course, is the value and protection of life.

This belief in life cuts across religion. It cuts across party lines. It cuts across geographic boundaries. People and organizations from all religious backgrounds—and even those who have no religious affiliations—are part of the pro-life movement, and they oppose abortion in almost all cases. Polling shows that more than a third of Democrats in America support protections for life, and there are groups dedicated to showing that pro-life is not a partisan issue. Frankly, that is a move in the right direction to where you don't feel like you are included in one party or excluded from one party because of your view on this issue.

Last year's Geneva Consensus Declaration brought together more than 30 countries to promote women's health and strengthen the family, including the preservation of human life. We need to do everything we can to save the lives of babies and of mothers. Maternity mortality is a big problem in our country and around the world. It has become a focus of the Congress in recent years and needs to continue to be. Even though the issue of life so often is polarized in the U.S. Congress, I am still encouraged that we see a powerful commitment, over and over,