

Sharla and I join all Montanans in sending our thoughts and prayers to these men and women as they complete their mission.

As Montana's only member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, I look forward to working to serve them as honored veterans when they all come home.

I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DURBIN). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, a few days ago, we all counted down the final seconds of 2008. In Israel they had something else to count all through last year. From January until December of 2008, a terrorist group launched more than 3,262 rockets and mortar shells into Israeli cities. These were deliberate acts of violence, provocation, and murder. The group responsible was Hamas. Hamas is a terrorist organization founded on one principal goal: destroying the state of Israel. Its charter says there is no value to international conferences, political initiatives, or dialogue. It says there is only one approach to the political situation in the Middle East, and that is jihad.

So it was no surprise when the terrorist group Hamas staged an illegal coup against the forces of President Mahmoud Abbas, the legitimate President of the Palestinian people. It was no surprise that Hamas rejected Egyptian and Arabian calls for an extension of the cease-fire Egypt had negotiated.

It was no surprise that when Israel voluntarily and unilaterally dismantled settlements and withdrew from Gaza in 2005 that Hamas saw this not as an opportunity to build peace but to instigate war, to continue to terrorize and kill Israelis in their places of worship, their schools, and their homes.

Since that year, Hamas terrorists have used Gaza to fire more than 6,300 mortars and rockets into Israel, reaching major cities, and pushing ever closer to the capital.

No country would be expected to sit on its hands and simply allow its citizens to endure these kinds of vicious attacks without taking action to stop the responsible party. If I am sitting in New Jersey, and rockets are landing around my house, near my children, and near our schools, my No. 1 goal, my immediate goal, is to stop the rockets. So in December of 2008, Israel sent its military to Gaza to achieve a direct goal: stop the rockets.

And now we all hope strongly that this goal can be achieved as quickly as possible. But we recognize it must be pursued if Israel is to have the sovereign right to protect itself and its citizens. Israel's acts to stop the Hamas rocket attacks are a response to the daily risk of death faced by the 900,000 Israeli citizens who live within

rocket range. These innocent civilians have been forced to live constantly under the threat of mass casualties. No nation—no nation—should have to wait for the death toll to rise enough before it can act. No nation needs to wait until enough schoolchildren have fallen victim to a rocket attack before it stops rockets from falling on its cities. The launching of rockets and mortar fire is an invasion of Israel's sovereign territory. It is no different from dropping bombs out of airplanes. It is no different from any other act of war. There is no question that Israel has a right and an obligation to defend its people.

We mourn the loss of all innocent life, and the death of Palestinian civilians as a result of this conflict is tragic. There are a great many Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank who completely reject the Hamas ideology. They want to live in peace and build the Palestinian state for themselves and for their children. They are, however, Hamas hostages. Hamas has hijacked Gaza, not to build a state in which you can live in peace and prosperity but to use it as a base to launch attacks against innocent civilians in Israel.

Let us remember it was Hamas that chose to end the cease-fire, Hamas that chose to fire a continuous barrage of rockets. To date, it is Hamas that deliberately uses civilians as human shields and launches its attacks from heavily populated civilian areas, putting them at risk. It is Hamas that has spent its money on rockets rather than on food for the hungry. It is Hamas that would rather focus on the rhetoric that calls for the destruction of the State of Israel than on relief for its own people.

Israel and the United States have proven their commitment to helping innocent civilians in Gaza. In stark contrast to the terrorist group of Hamas, Israel has taken significant steps to prevent civilian casualties. They give warnings of impending attacks, they drop leaflets, and make phone calls to targeted areas to warn the citizens they are in danger, even if that means losing the element of surprise and putting the lives of their own soldiers at risk.

Israel and the United States have actively provided humanitarian assistance to Gaza. Since December 26, 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid have been delivered to Gaza in coordination with Israel, the Palestinian Authority, international organizations, and various other donors.

The United States Government, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, is continuing to deliver humanitarian supplies to the people of Gaza. The United States has provided medical and food supplies to health care facilities. We support the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other nongovernmental organizations as they continue their relief efforts.

We all want peace in Gaza and hope it can come very soon. But peace cannot be achieved so long as Hamas continues its missile attacks. If a just and lasting cease-fire is to occur, it is incumbent upon Hamas to immediately and permanently halt all attacks against the Israeli people.

I rise today to express unwavering commitment to the welfare, security, and survival of the state of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. That is what the resolution before us affirms. As the resolution states, the ultimate goal of the United States is a "sustainable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that will allow for a viable and independent Palestinian state, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel." This will not be possible as long as Israeli civilians are under threat from rockets. As this resolution correctly lays out, Hamas must end the rocket and mortar attacks against Israel, recognize Israel's right to exist, renounce violence, and agree to accept previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinians.

Today, the Senate must stand in support of the state of Israel, stand in support of its right to defend itself against terrorists, stand in support of its right to exist. Having said all of this, of course, we urge Israel as it defends its sovereignty and its people to use every option it can to limit the loss of innocent lives. So let us vote for a resolution that demonstrates our commitment to one of the strongest allies the United States of America has in the world, and let us do all we can to make it a peaceful 2009.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TESTER.) The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECESS FOR JOINT SESSION OF THE TWO HOUSES

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:46 p.m., recessed subject to the call of the Chair, to reassemble in the Hall of the House of Representatives for a joint session, and at 2:30 p.m. reassembled in the Senate Chamber when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. NELSON of Nebraska).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip is recognized.

SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, I would like to speak to two subjects. The first deals with a resolution the Senate unanimously adopted this morning.