

and they are not coming back anytime soon. In addition, five are cold-stacked or without a contract. That is a total of 12 rigs. Ironically, that is exactly the same number of deepwater permits the Interior Department has issued—a trickle compared to pre-BP levels.

Third, what minor credit I should give the Interior Department for this abysmal pace of permitting will be noted when I release my hold on the nomination of Dan Ashe. I am currently holding that nomination of a top-level Interior Department official. I said I would hold it until we got at least 15 deepwater exploratory permits. At the time I initiated that, there were zero. As I said, that is now finally up to 12. I said I would lift the hold when we got to 15. We are just three away. We will get there. I will lift the hold. But that is merely a trickle of what our pace needs to be.

Fourth, today I will be introducing an important piece of legislation. It is called the Agency Overreach Moratorium Act. We need a moratorium. We need a moratorium on regulatory overreach, agency overreach, as we see in the Interior Department, in EPA, in many other agencies. This legislation is intended to prevent Federal action that would unilaterally destroy jobs on Federal lands on the OCS. That is happening every day at the Interior Department. Instead of issuing permits to find American energy, they are issuing regulations, the most recent on a whole new category of contractors—completely unnecessary because they were already regulating the drillers. That is regulatory overreach, and that is job-killing action. My Agency Overreach Moratorium Act will lay out the real moratorium we need on job-killing action out of Washington, out of this administration, not on domestic energy production.

I thank all of my colleagues, and I hope we will all come together soon around a commonsense, proactive domestic energy policy. It needs to include a lot. I am a fervent believer in all of the above, but it certainly needs to start lifting the continuing de facto moratorium on U.S. energy production, on U.S. jobs, on good additional Federal revenue to the U.S. Treasury to lower our deficit if we are going to get on the right energy path.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. McCASKILL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

SYRIA

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Madam President, I rise to speak specifically about the alarming situation in Syria, where the

regime of Bashar al Asad is pursuing a barbaric campaign of indiscriminate repression against the Syrian people.

Over the past 2 weeks, the crackdown pursued by Asad has markedly escalated. There can no longer be any doubt about his intentions. As a report by a respected nongovernmental organization, the International Crisis Group, warned this week:

The regime's hope appears to be that a massive crackdown can bring the protestors to heel. . . . Such a course of action would entail loss of life on a massive scale and it could usher in a period of sectarian fighting with devastating consequences for Syria. It could destabilize its neighbors. And, ultimately, it is highly unlikely to work.

Madam President, in the city of Deraa, the Asad regime has deployed tanks against the civilian population. It has cut off phone lines, water, food, and electricity, and deployed snipers—according to human rights groups—who have been firing at anyone who ventures outdoors. That includes young people who are sent outdoors by their families to try to buy food.

In short, what we see in Deraa is a broad-based, indiscriminate assault by Asad's military forces against the people of his own country. The evidence is growing that international crimes are being perpetrated by Bashar Asad himself in the city of Deraa in Syria.

The attack on Deraa is just one part of a course of a broader crackdown by Syrian security forces across the country—a crackdown that has left several hundred people dead. Tanks and military forces have been reported being deployed in other cities in Syria. According to Human Rights Watch, the number of arbitrary detentions of civilians and enforced disappearances around the country has skyrocketed in recent days as the Asad regime has swept up not only demonstrators but women, minors, and family members of activists. Another Syrian human rights group has documented more than 500 arrests in Deraa alone since last week, and thousands more nationwide have also been detained or disappeared arbitrarily.

As the report by the International Crisis Group argued—the report I referenced before that came out earlier this week:

The regime is also fanning the flames of sectarianism, spreading rumors of impending acts targeting specific groups. Sectarian tendencies no doubt exist in parts of the country, but the authorities' tactics betray a determined and cynical attempt to exploit and exacerbate them.

What is most remarkable of all is that in the face of and despite these outrageous inhumane actions by the Asad regime, the people of Syria refuse to be silenced. They refuse to be intimidated. In the face of tanks and snipers, the people of Syria have continued to cry out and demonstrate for their fundamental human rights, and they have continued to do so peacefully. Moreover, despite the sectarian provocations by President Asad, the message of the protesters has remained

steadfastly one of Syrian national unity.

Tomorrow, Friday, it is expected that thousands of brave Syrians will once again take to the streets of their cities and towns in protest of the totalitarian dictatorship that currently controls their country. As they do so, I want them to know that the United States and the rest of the civilized world stands unequivocally on the side of the people of Syria in solidarity with them in their courageous struggle for their human rights. They should know also that we are increasingly confident that the people of Syria can and will prevail over the Asad regime.

There is much we in the United States can and must do to help the Syrian people in their fight for freedom. Last week, the Obama administration issued an Executive order authorizing targeted sanctions against individuals and organizations responsible for the human rights abuses in Syria. The administration used this newest authority to sanction three Syrian officials, including Maher al Asad, the brother of Bashar al Asad. This was a very important action, and I thank and commend the Obama administration for taking it.

There is, however, more that now can and must be done. To begin with, it is clear there are many more individuals in the Syrian Government than the three named so far who are responsible for the human rights abuses and worse that are taking place throughout Syria. It is urgent and essential that the Obama administration expand the sanctions to cover these additional Syrian officials.

Members of the Syrian security forces and government must understand they face a choice in the days ahead. If they stick with the Asad regime and participate in the barbaric crackdown against their fellow Syrians, their names are going to be made famous around the world, and they will be held accountable.

It is also critical that the United States impose sanctions on Bashar al Asad himself, for he is the head of the regime that is systematically carrying out large-scale human rights abuses. It is he who is directing his military forces to fire on his own people. Surely, it requires a willing suspension of disbelief to think the order to use military force against the Syrian people did not originate with the President of Syria himself—Bashar al Asad. He must be held accountable.

I respectfully urge President Obama to speak out as soon as possible, directly and personally, about what is happening in Syria. The moral authority of the President of the United States matters enormously at historic moments such as the one in Syria now. Unfortunately, there are still many in Syria and throughout the Middle East who believe the United States is hedging its bets in Syria. It is time to put those doubts to rest.

I have met over the last few weeks, as recently as yesterday, with Syrian

dissidents, and I have heard the same question from them again and again: Why has President Obama not spoken out personally about what is happening in Syria?

I say: The administration has made statements.

They say: We need to hear and see the President and hear his voice—President Obama—making clear his disdain and refusal to accept what is happening in Syria today.

So I respectfully urge the President to answer these appeals by Syrian freedom fighters for support of their cause. I hope the President can make clear once again, as he did so effectively in the cases of Egypt and Libya, that Bashar al Asad has lost the legitimacy to lead Syria, and it is time for Bashar to go.

The United States can also work with our allies and partners to increase international pressure on the Asad regime. Press reports indicate, I am pleased to note, that the European Union is preparing to put in place an arms embargo against Syria, and it is also considering targeted human rights sanctions against top Syrian officials. I fervently hope our European friends and allies take these and further steps to increase the pressure on the Asad regime.

I am especially encouraged that the French Foreign Minister this week correctly called for Bashar al-Asad to be sanctioned directly himself, to tie up his economic assets, to limit his mobility. In addition to our EU partners, I wish to say I believe Turkey can also play a unique leadership role in the days and weeks ahead to support a successful democratic transition in Syria.

No one has worked harder than Prime Minister Erdogan to encourage Bashar al-Asad to reform, to accept the legitimate demands of the Syrian people, and embrace democracy. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, Asad has ignored the wise counsel of the Turkish leader and refused to respond with action. I, therefore, hope President Obama will find a way to partner directly with Prime Minister Erdogan on developing a new strategy toward Syria, one that recognizes that despite our hopes and efforts, there will be no real progress as long as Bashar al-Asad remains in power in Damascus, a policy that aligns our two democracies—America and Turkey—unequivocally with the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people.

We should also work with our allies on the U.N. Human Rights Council to ensure that the investigative mission to Syria, which was agreed upon by the Council last week, is undertaken immediately. Every day matters. We should work to refer Asad's regime to the International Criminal Court—again, as we did in the case of Libya.

What the Asad regime is doing to the people of Syria looks every day more the mirror image of what the Qadhafi regime has done to the people of Libya. For its actions in the city of Deraa and

throughout the country, the Asad regime deserves to be investigated by the International Criminal Court.

I respectfully urge our own administration to use the diplomatic clout that we have at the United Nations to put what is happening in Syria on the agenda of the U.N. Security Council.

I have no illusions about the challenges and obstacles that exist at the Security Council at this time to taking action with regard to what is happening in Syria, but we must try. If the Security Council fails to take up what is happening in Syria, perhaps because of the opposition of the Russians and the Chinese, it does so at the expense of its own international credibility and legitimacy.

Finally, I hope President Obama will work together with our international allies to provide the Syrian people with the humanitarian assistance that they urgently need—food, water, and medical supplies—and to restore communications linkages that the Asad regime has cut among the freedom fighters in various communities in Syria. Asad has cut them in an effort to prevent news and information about what is happening in Syria also from reaching the outside world.

The situation in Syria is fast approaching the point of no return. The fact is, several hundred Syrians have been killed by Asad's security forces. This is a regime that I conclude is beyond self-correction. Bashar al-Asad is not a reformer. He is a corrupt dictator and an inhumane thug and his regime has long been one of the worst in the Middle East. It is time for him to go.

Let me conclude by adding that nearly a decade after the attacks of September 11, Americans and people throughout the world awoke Monday morning to a safer, better world with Osama bin Laden gone. It is fitting that Osama bin Laden has been killed just as Arab democracies across the Middle East and North Africa are being born, are coming to life. The peaceful, youth-driven democratic revolutions now taking place in Syria, Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya are the true repudiation of the extreme ideology that I will call bin Ladenism. To rid our world not only of bin Laden but of bin Ladenism, it is critical that we now do everything in our power to help the democratic forces in Syria and across the Middle East succeed, for it will ultimately be quite correctly and powerfully at the hands of his fellow Arabs and Muslims that the hateful and violent ideology of bin Laden and its manifestations of a different sort in dictatorships across the Middle East are finally discredited and abandoned on the ash heap of history where they belong.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

PROTECTING AMERICA'S WATERS

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, this month people all over the country will grab their tackle boxes and head off in pursuit of the elusive trout in mountain streams. Mothers and fathers will turn on their kitchen faucets and hand their children glasses of clean, pure drinking water that we have in this country. Farmers will irrigate their spring plantings in vegetables and grains with clear water from nearby streams.

All over the United States, Americans will take advantage of the simple but priceless natural resource of America's water. Thanks to the actions taken by the Obama administration last week, we can rest assured these vital resources are being protected by the full strength of the Clean Water Act.

Last week, the Obama administration released a guidance document on the jurisdictional waters of the United States. The document was a sensible response to the confusion left in the wake of recent Supreme Court rulings. The draft document that was released last week will help the Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the near term as they make decisions about whether projects will impact the waters of the United States and therefore require protective permits.

Eventually, this draft document will be replaced by formal regulations that will ensure the Clean Water Act continues to protect America's waters. For nearly 40 years, the Clean Water Act has safeguarded almost all of our Nation's waters. These safeguards protect our rivers, streams, and wetlands from pollution in accordance with Congress's intent that the landmark statute, "restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the nation's waters."

Nowhere in America is this more important—the enforcement of the Clean Water Act—than the Chesapeake watershed. We understand more than 100,000 rivers and streams come together to form North America's largest estuary, and they are all critical to the health of the Chesapeake Bay.

These streams and rivers, along with their associated wetlands, serve as a habitat for hundreds of species, buffers for slowing the flow of pollutants into the bay, and sponges that soak up and hold large amounts of floodwater and stormwater runoff.

Despite major steps forward that have resulted in a majority of the Nation's waters now being safe for fishing, swimming, and other uses, recent Supreme Court decisions have placed this progress at risk. The guidance developed by professional scientists and