

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

UKRAINE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is ironic that the Senator from Ohio is presiding because I am going to speak about the situation in Ukraine.

For the record, the Senator from Ohio, Mr. PORTMAN, the current Presiding Officer, and I have now initiated a bipartisan caucus in the Senate concerned with the future of Ukraine, and my remarks will address that during the next minute or two.

We are approaching the 1-year anniversary of a dark chapter in modern history, the forcible Russian seizure of sovereign territory in Ukraine. Perhaps the world shouldn't have been surprised by Russian President Putin's brazen attack on well-established international norms. We have seen this movie before when it comes to Mr. Putin, in Georgia in 2008, using military force to seize the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

What we are facing in Ukraine is a threat to the foundation of European security agreements and norms of the last several decades. We are facing the use of military force by Putin to undermine a democratic sovereign nation's aspirations to join the international democratic community. These ugly threats and actions by Putin must not go unchallenged.

That is why this week I wrote a bipartisan letter, along with the Presiding Officer, Senator PORTMAN, as well as Senators BROWN, BARRASSO, BLUMENTHAL, and others to President Obama urging the United States and NATO to work together to ensure Ukraine has the defensive capabilities and equipment to halt and reverse further Russian aggression.

Thousands have been killed, thousands more displaced. A civilian airliner was shot down, murdering hundreds of innocent people, and nationalistic fervor and Soviet-style propaganda have been used to further rob the Russian and Ukrainian people of their own political freedoms.

Let's recall how we got to this awful situation. In March of last year, Russian President Putin used manipulation and military might to annex the sovereign region of Crimea—not because Ukraine was about to join NATO, not because Ukraine was about to join the European Union, not because Ukraine was about to cut economic or historical ties to Russia, even if it did sign an association agreement with the European Union, and not because Russian-speaking Ukrainians were in any danger.

No, Putin took this brazen and destabilizing action because he needed to rally nationalist sentiment in his own country for his own political survival—to protect his own kleptocracy. He did so because he needed a war to distract Russians from the frustrations they had over a weak national economy, do-

mestic political repression, the elimination of Russia's free press and civic organizations, and increasing Russian exasperation with the heavyhanded rule of Mr. Putin.

He did so because his ally and former Ukrainian President Yanukovich was democratically removed from office by a unanimous vote of the Ukrainian Parliament after he squandered negotiations for closer trade ties with the European Union and then presided over the murder of more than 100 of his own citizens. Apparently Putin did so because he felt aggrieved by the West.

Instead of inspiring his own people to share the many talents and accomplishments of the Russian nation as part of the larger global community, Putin has spread a message of victimhood and the West is really still the enemy.

What a waste. What an insult to the proud and talented Russian people. Putin's tactics are from the old Soviet playbook, tired and dated tactics of propaganda, military power, and domestic repression.

The resulting destruction and human misery in Ukraine has been significant and has been increasing by the day. Thirteen innocent Ukrainian citizens, including pensioners and little children, were killed in a horrific bus attack last month in Volnovakha.

The city of Mariupol recently came under shelling, killing 30 and injuring another 100 civilians—part of a likely attempt to militarily seize another strategic coastal area.

Ukrainian Government forces and civilians have come under mounting fire in the strategic city of Debaltseve, where residents are fleeing by the busload. Russian heavy weapons and military personnel continue to brazenly flow into eastern Ukraine, despite Putin's refusal to acknowledge the obvious. Nearly 750,000 Ukrainian citizens are now living as displaced persons within their own country because of this offensive action by the Russians.

The World Health Organization estimates that 5 million Ukrainians living in areas where the fighting is fiercest are in dire need of basic health care services. People trapped in the cities of Luhansk and Donetsk are essentially without any medical assistance. The Ukrainian officials say January was one of the bloodiest months in eastern Ukraine since the conflict started. All the while, Russia and its proxies in eastern Ukraine continue to balk at peace talks and even deny their military actions.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States and Europe have worked to strengthen ties with Russia, to help it become a partner in the global community. Of course, our interests didn't always overlap, and there were disagreements. That is the nature of any international relationship. But to whip up anti-Western propaganda on state-controlled media and insult Russian people—they deserve more.

The West didn't lock up Western opposition leaders whose only so-called crime was to disagree with Putin. The West didn't shut down all the independent media in Russia to deny the Russian people a free flow of ideas. The West didn't shut down Russian groups whose sole purpose was to ensure fair elections. The West didn't conduct a Russian Presidential election in 2012 that was loaded with fraud and irregularity. The West didn't create a system of corruption around Putin that enriches a lucky few oligarchs and tarnishes Russia's economy and international reputation. The West certainly didn't focus on creating false enemies, both domestic and international, to distract from the real work of diversifying Russia's economy.

Let me be clear. The West did not cause the protests in Ukraine, in the Kiev, Maidan Square. The protesters were Ukrainians fed up with endless corruption and political malfeasance. I met with several of those leaders in Ukraine, and I can assure everyone they were Ukrainian patriots, not Western proxies.

While I have been giving the speech, my friend and colleague Senator MCCAIN has come to the floor, with whom I visited Ukraine several months ago. He was there during the Maidan demonstrations and has firsthand knowledge of how this was a home-grown effort to bring real change to Ukraine. I am glad to see him on the floor at this moment.

New York Times columnist and Pulitzer Prize winner Tom Friedman called what is happening in Ukraine under Putin "the ugliest geopolitical mugging happening in the world today."

Perhaps you have seen the recent excellent episode of the PBS "Frontline" documentary entitled "Putin's Way." It meticulously laid out the web of corruption and destruction around Putin's rise to power. It showed how each contrived crisis at home has been used to consolidate Putin's grip on power, and it left little doubt the lengths Putin will go to to protect the web of corruption that is ensuring his future. What a waste.

I commend the President for working with our European allies to impose severe economic sanctions on Russia for its actions in Ukraine. These sanctions have some impact. In fact, Russia's credit rating is now reduced to junk bond status. But Putin and his proxies have only doubled down, launching new offensives in eastern Ukraine, leading to more death and human misery.

I have concluded, and I believe the Senator reached a similar conclusion because of a letter we cowrote this week, that the United States has to do more to protect the Ukrainian people. I know it is a debating point with some of our European allies as to whether we are escalating the conflict. But to leave Ukraine poorly prepared to defend its own territory—to leave the civilians in Ukraine so open to the aggression of the Russian invaders—is

wrong. We can provide lethal defensive weapons to help the Ukrainians defend their own homeland, their own country, from this Russian invasion. I think we should, and I encourage the administration to move forward. I have reached the conclusion we eventually have to deal with this bully with force. Force must be met with force. We must give the Ukrainian people the means to defend themselves and to build a modern democratic nation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona is recognized.

REMEMBERING KAYLA JEAN MUELLER

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I rise today to mourn the tragic death of 26-year-old humanitarian aid worker Kayla Jean Mueller of Prescott, AZ, who had been held by ISIL terrorists in Syria since August of 2013.

I am heartbroken for the Mueller family at the loss of their beautiful, beloved Kayla. The thoughts and prayers of the people of her home State of Arizona, our country, and the civilized world are with the Mueller family at this terrible hour.

I want to take the time today to share a bit of Kayla's story. This wonderful young woman represented the best of us. She had a remarkable impact on the lives of so many people who never had the honor of meeting her, and her story will forever be an inspiration to us.

Kayla attended high school at Tri-City College Prep in Prescott, AZ, where she was recognized as a National Young Leader and received the President's Award For Academic Excellence in 2007, the Yavapai County Community Foundation Youth Philanthropist of the Year Award in 2005, and the Gold Presidential Volunteer Award in 2007 for her volunteer efforts with Youth Count, AmeriCorps, America's Promise, Open Inn for troubled youth, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and other organizations.

After graduating from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff in 2009, Kayla committed her life to helping people in need around the world—first in India, then Israel, the Palestinian territories, and back home in Prescott where she volunteered at an HIV-AIDS clinic, and a women's shelter. But it was the conflict in Syria that drew Kayla's greatest interest and, again, sparked her desire to help those in need. In a YouTube video she made in October 2011, as the Syrian civil war was just beginning, Kayla said:

I am in solidarity with the Syrian people. I reject the brutality and killing that the Syrian authorities are committing against the Syrian people. Because silence is participation in this crime, I declare my participation in the Syrian sit-in on YouTube.

In December 2012, Kayla traveled to the Turkish-Syrian border where she worked for months helping the thousands of Syrian refugees whose lives

were torn apart by the humanitarian catastrophe created by Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian civil war.

According to her family, Kayla found this work heartbreaking but compelling. She was extremely devoted to the people of Syria and their struggle. Kayla explained to her family her call to service this way. She said:

I find God in the suffering eyes reflected in mine. If this is how you are revealed to me, this is how I will forever seek you. I will always seek God. Some people find God in church. Some people find God in nature. Some people find God in love; I find God in suffering. I've known for some time what my life's work is, using my hands as tools to relieve suffering.

When Kayla traveled back home to visit her family in Arizona in May of 2013, she spoke about her experiences at the Prescott Kiwanis Club where her father was a member. After recalling helping a Syrian man, whose wife had been murdered, to reunite with a 6-year-old relative he was desperately searching for after their refugee camp was bombed, Kayla said:

This story is not rare in Syria. This is the reality for Syrians two and a half years on. When Syrians hear I'm an American, they ask, "Where is the world?" All I can do is cry with them, because I don't know.

After spending time with the refugees, Kayla told the Kiwanis Club she was totally drawn in, and that she "can't do enough" to help. She recalled stories of children being hurt by unexploded bombs, women forced into early marriages, elementary schools targeted for bombing by the Syrian regime, and people living in caves to escape the bombing.

Kayla went on. She said:

Syrians are dying by the thousands, and they're fighting just to talk about the rights we have. . . . For as long as I live, I will not let this suffering be normal. [I will not let this be] something we just accept. It's important to stop and realize what we have, why we have it and how privileged we are. And from that place, start caring and get a lot done.

She described part of her work helping the Syrian children in the refugee camps—including drawing, painting, and playing with the children, many of whom were badly scarred physically and psychologically by the war.

She said:

We give and get joy from playing with these children. Half the 1.5 million refugees the U.N. has registered are children. In the chaos of waking up in the middle of the night and being shelled, we're hearing of more children being separated from their families by accident.

Asked by Kiwanis members what her recommendations for addressing the conflict were, Kayla said, "A no-fly zone over refugee camps would be number one."

Kayla also believed if the terrible reality of the conflict were better known to Americans, our Nation would be more heavily engaged. "The people of the United States would see that something needs to be done," she said.

Today the Mueller family released a letter written to them by Kayla in the

spring of 2014. I want to read a bit of it to give a sense of this young woman, her deep faith in God, her profound love for her family, and her remarkable strength in the face of grave danger.

She wrote: I remember mom always telling me that all in all, in the end the only one you really have is God. I have come to a place in experience where, in every sense of the word, I have surrendered myself to our Creator because literally there was no one else. By God and by your prayers, I have felt tenderly cradled in free fall. I have been shown in darkness and light and have learned that even in prison one can be free. I am grateful. I have to see that there is good in every situation; sometimes we just have to look for it. I pray each day that, if nothing else, you have felt a certain closeness and surrender to God as well and have formed a bond of love and support amongst one another. I miss you all as if it had been a decade of forced separation.

Kayla closed with these words: The thought of your pain is the source of my own. Simultaneously, the hope of our reunion is the source of my strength. Please be patient. Give your pain to God. I know you would want me to remain strong. That is exactly what I am doing. Do not fear for me; continue to pray, as will I. By God's will we will be together soon. All my everything, Kayla.

In a statement today, the Mueller family reflected on Kayla's life and their commitment to work every day to honor her legacy:

Kayla was a compassionate and devoted humanitarian. She dedicated the whole of her young life to helping those in need of freedom, justice and peace. Kayla was drawn to help those displaced by the Syrian civil war. She first traveled to Turkey in December 2012 to provide humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees. She told us of the great joy she took in helping Syrian children and their families. We are so proud of the person Kayla was and the work she did while she was here with us. She lived with purpose and we will work every day to honor her legacy. Our hearts are breaking for our only daughter, but we will continue on in peace, dignity and love for her.

On behalf of the people of Arizona and the Congress of the United States, I express our deepest condolences to Kayla's parents, Marsha and Carl Mueller, her loving family, and many friends. Our thoughts and prayers are with you. Kayla devoted her young life to helping people in need around the world, to healing the sick, and bringing light to some of the darkest and most desperate places on Earth. She will never be forgotten.

I ask unanimous consent that the letter written by Kayla during her imprisonment to her family be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Everyone, if you are receiving this letter it means I am still detained but my cell mates (starting from 11/2/2014) have been released. I have asked them to contact you + send you this letter. It's hard to know what to say.