

# BUSINESS MEETING

*Wednesday, March 24, 2021*

U.S. SENATE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:33 a.m., in Room SD-106, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Bob Menendez, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Menendez [presiding], Cardin, Shaheen, Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Booker, Schatz, Van Hollen, Risch, Johnson, Romney, Portman, Paul, and Barrasso.

## OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BOB MENENDEZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY

**The Chairman:** The business meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order. We have nine members. We need -- well, now have 10 members. We need 12 to vote. So we will start off, and then hopefully by the time we are finished with our remarks, there will be the ability to vote, and we will be looking to make a motion to vote en bloc, which we have talked to and have an agreement with the ranking member about.

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I am pleased that the committee has gathered today for our first legislative business meeting of the 117th Congress. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee must be in the lead as we respond to the unprecedented foreign policy crises of our time, restore America's role in the world, and reaffirm our core values of democracy and human rights. Today we take a first step on that agenda as we mark up 15 bipartisan bills and resolutions, including legislation reaffirming our alliances around the world, supporting democracy in Cuba and Venezuela, and addressing ongoing challenges in Syria, Ethiopia, and elsewhere. I plan to hold regular legislative business meetings and hope that each of you will join the ranking member and me as we create a robust, bipartisan agenda for the committee, and I look forward to working with each of you on your legislative priorities.

Before I speak briefly about the items on the agenda, there are two items that will no longer be considered today. I received a request to hold over S. 413, the China Censorship Act, and I will be holding over S. 814, the Ukraine Security and Partnership Act. Both are solid pieces of legislation. I commend Senators Merkley and Risch, respectively, on their work, and I look forward to taking up both bills after the recess. For members' awareness and maybe to call attention to

the rules, I opted to hold over the Ukraine bill despite my strong support and co-sponsorship. I did so in light of a late-breaking request yesterday evening to rewrite and submit a previously-filed first-degree amendment that would have been out of the rules. And the reason we have those rules is so that all members understand what they are voting on and have an opportunity to understand what amendments are coming their way so they can make an informed judgment on them.

I strongly support senators' rights to offer amendments, but it is also imperative that all of you have the time to consider amendments before you vote on them. So I plan to take up the Ukraine bill at the next business meeting in the near future, and senators will once again have an opportunity to submit amendments.

While we have a robust agenda today, I would like to comment on a few specific legislative items, starting with the Trans-Sahel bill, which I co-authored with the ranking member, and I thank him for his partnership on this critical piece of legislation. As we restore America's role in the world and protect our national security interests, we have to refocus on the Sahel, or we will be on the verge of losing the region to terrorism.

Last year, there was a 44-percent increase in violent attacks attributed to militant Islamist groups in the Sahel with a 57-percent increase in the deaths attributable to those attacks. That is why this bipartisan bill authorizes a new Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership to build capacity in the Sahel to combat terrorism and terrorist ideology. As we all learned on September 11th, we have to take on terrorism abroad so we do not have to fight it here at home.

I am also pleased that our agenda contains numerous resolutions reaffirming our democratic values and standing up for human rights around the world. As we will discuss shortly at our hearing, democracy is under threat in our own hemisphere, and that is why I worked with my friend and colleague, Senator Rubio, on a Venezuela resolution and two Cuba resolutions. In November of 2020, the world saw a renewed wave of activism in Cuba as a diverse group of artists from the San Isidro Movement sparked a wave of protests against restrictions on freedom of expression. Their efforts were built by more than 15 years of peaceful activism by Cuba's Ladies in White who had faced years of repression. Our two resolutions express our support for Cuban activists and human rights defenders and document the Cuban regime's persecution of civil society leaders. Senator Rubio and I also offered a resolution denouncing

the Maduro regime's fraudulent legislative elections in Venezuela, something that has been recognized as fraudulent internationally, expressing concerns about crimes against humanity, and calling for a renewed multilateral response to the Venezuela crisis.

Unfortunately, Latin America is not the only region in the world where democracy is under threat, and our agenda includes resolutions supporting democratic movements in Syria, Burma, and Ethiopia. I have also introduced other items on the agenda that provide hope for democratic progress and peace, including resolutions recognizing the 200th anniversary of the independence of Greece, and expressing support for the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. In a similar vein, I also note the resolution that Senator Risch and I co-sponsored on the importance of U.S. alliances and partnerships. Finally, as everyone is aware, Senator Risch and I are working together to write a bipartisan China bill with the goal of providing the text to everyone on the committee in the next few days. We intend to work with each of you to ensure that your China priorities are included in this text, which we will mark up the week of April 12th.

Let me close by noting again how pleased I am at the promising bipartisan effort that produced today's agenda. I look forward to considering and moving

similar lists to the 117th Congress. And with that, I recognize the distinguished ranking member, Senator Risch, for his remarks.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

**Senator Risch:** Well, thank you very much, Senator Menendez. First of all, let me say, and I certainly do not want to step on partisan toes here. I was disappointed that the S.814 Ukrainian Security Partnership Act is being held over. I understand that Senator Cruz has availed himself of traditions that we have of making some changes to this. This Nord Stream 2 issue we have dealt with over and over again, and I think we are all committed to try to get this thing done, and this would not be so bad if we were not facing a 2-week break here, so that is an issue. But nonetheless, I understand that the rules are such that this can be done, and it is what it is, I guess, at this point. I hope you would -- I understand you have recently written the Administration, you and Senator Shaheen. Myself and Senator Cruz did. The letters may have had a slightly different tone, but the objective was the same, and I hope we will all try to continue down that road because, again, time is running out. It is just flat running out on us, and this is something that that we have all worked so hard on.

So I also appreciate the work Senator Menendez and I did to introduce Senate Resolution 122, a resolution that reaffirms the Senate's support for U.S. defense treaty commitments to our allies in the Indo-Pacific and Europe. In today's challenging security environment, it is critical that the U.S. sustains its extended deterrence policies, and that both the U.S. and its allies make substantial contributions to addressing shared threats.

I want to thank Senator Cardin and seven other members of this committee for participating with me on Senate Res. 97. The conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region and elsewhere in the country is deeply concerning, and I know virtually everyone on this committee is on board with that. While Ethiopia's transition faces significant challenges, passing this resolution will send an important bipartisan signal to Ethiopia, our allies, and our own government that the withdrawal of Eritrean forces, the cessation of hostilities, and getting Ethiopia back on track to achieve a once-in-a-generation democratic transition are priorities for the U.S. Senate.

On Syria, I am happy to join Chairman Menendez in sponsoring Senate Res. 99, a resolution marking the 10th anniversary of the Syrian conflict. This resolution reaffirms our support for the Syrian people, emphasizes the policy of

the United States to seek a political solution to this prolonged, difficult conflict, and highlights the need for accountability for all of the crimes committed by Assad and his Russian and Iranian backers. Senate Resolution 120 is also on the agenda. This resolution emphasizes that we have a great opportunity as the U.S. hosts the Ninth Summit of the Americas to reaffirm our commitment to a region to be safe, democratic, and prosperous.

I am glad to join Senator -- excuse me -- Chairman Menendez in co-sponsoring Senate 615, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership Program Act. This bill will give Congress greater oversight of TSCTP programs. This is especially important given that a recent Department inspector general audit found potential waste due to poor management of these funds, and I could not have said it any better than Chairman Menendez did about the area and the problems that are occurring there. Senate Res. 22 highlights the progress Ecuador has made in promoting democratic values and improving economic and security conditions. Our two countries should take additional steps to deepen our economic relationship and tackle shared challenges, such as transnational crime and the regional instability provoked by the Maduro regime in Venezuela.



I also want to recognize the work our teams -- ours being both Republican and Senate teams, my staff, the chairman's staff -- in working on the China resolution. This has been a long time coming. Fortunately, there is a lot of work that has been done before we got here. I do wish, as I talked with the chairman about this, that we had more time to work on this. I think obviously we wind up dragging our feet around here a lot of times on things that we should not. On the other hand, it is important that we do get this right when we are doing something, particularly as big as China is. But there are urgent problems, and I want to do everything I can to assist in moving this forward. Any China legislation that passes out of this committee needs to be truly bipartisan, and we on this side are committed to that. That means it needs to include numerous ideas and proposals from both sides of the aisle. It needs to be strong, concrete, and actionable, and anything short of this will send the wrong message to our allies and our adversaries in the region.

Finally, it must address the full array of challenges China poses. Political influence in the United States is one of those challenges. We are all aware the Chinese Government seeks undue influence in our universities, wants to influence how our Government makes decisions, and has no qualms about

coercing our private sector. I am always amazed when I hear the statistics -- and these are very round numbers -- that we have about 300,000 Chinese students studying here in America at American universities, many of them taking graduate studies in programs that are very sensitive on national matters. The reverse of that is there are 12,000 American students studying in China compared to the 300,000 that are studying here.

We know that the Chinese Government seeks to steal the best of American innovation. They always have. If we are going to invest more in R&D in the United States, we have to make sure we are protecting the results. This is the point. If we do not have anything strong and actionable on political influence, we are missing a big slice of the problem. I expect the final product to be -- and on that issue, the chairman and I had some discussions on that, yes, and I think we came up with some productive ideas to move forward. I expect the final product to be representative of both sides of the aisle. I will continue to work with Chairman Menendez towards this goal and hope we can reach agreement on all of these issues. With that, I will yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Senator Risch, and we do look forward to working together on a China bill. It is incredibly important for us to speak with

one voice as much as we can. Is there any member who wants to be recognized on any of the items on the agenda? Senator Coons, who recently came back from a mission to Ethiopia, which sounds like we have had some success. Senator Coons.

**Senator Coons:** Thank you. Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, I am so encouraged to hear your bipartisan work on the China bill and that we are considering more than a dozen pieces of legislation on a bipartisan basis, which I think is setting a very positive tone for this committee. For those watching, I will just comment that there are resolutions all across our agenda today that are designed to promote democracy and our core values in our relations towards Venezuela, Cuba, Syria, Burma, and as well, Ethiopia. And I want to thank Senator Cardin and Ranking Member Risch for your leadership on this resolution.

As was mentioned, I just returned from a weekend spent as President Biden's personal emissary meeting with Prime Minister Abiy and a whole range of senior Ethiopian officials and others in the international community, and I want to thank you for allowing changes to the resolution to recognize that trip, which I believe was constructive. I just want to note that there have already been

some positive public statements by Prime Minister Abiy in the last 24 hours recognizing the need for accountability for human rights violations, the first public acknowledgement of the presence Eritrean troops, and just within the last few hours, positive statements about the possible resolution of the border dispute with Sudan and the path forward on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. There are other issues that we must address -- full humanitarian access, the cessation of hostilities, the path towards free and fair elections -- and I look forward to working with each of you on these issues and hopefully to there being more progress. So thank you.

There are a number of other important items on today's agenda. I will just briefly thank Senator Portman for his partnership on the Tropical Forest and Coral Reef Conservation Restoration Act, and on a number of other items, like the anniversary of the U.S. African Development Foundation. Thank you for the opportunity to work with all of you on a bipartisan basis, and I am hopeful we can make progress in addressing the challenging situation in Tigray and Ethiopia. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Thank you for your good work, Senator Coons. Senator Portman. Senator Portman?

**Senator Portman:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and, to Senator Coons, thank you for your work for the Tropical Forest Act. That is in this package of bills, and I appreciate your including it, Mr. Chairman and the ranking member. This is legislation that is actually working to reduce CO<sub>2</sub>, to help developing countries, and with a great bang for the buck for the American taxpayer. About \$118 million of private sector funding has been leveraged through these debt-for-nature swaps, groups like the Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, World Wildlife Fund, and so on. The total amount is about 300 million bucks over the last 15 years, and it has saved, according to the analysis we have, about 67 million acres of tropical forests from being burned.

As you know, tropical forest burning is one of the major causes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In fact, after automobiles and other transportation and factories, it is probably number 3 or number 4, and this legislation, by saving about 67 million acres, has generated significant carbon dioxide sequestration. Sixty million metric tons is the estimate, the equivalent of taking about 11.8 million cars off the road. So to my way of thinking, this is a good way for us to proceed on issues like this. We have not lost a single American job through this legislation. In fact,

we have helped developing countries by improving their balance sheet through these debt-for-nature swaps, so I thank you very much for including it.

I will say the Administration is interested right now in agreements with two Latin American countries and one Southeast Asian country, so this is timely. We need to have the authorization, and I hope this can be an example for what we can do together on a bipartisan basis to focus on these issues. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Thank you. Thank you for your good work. Senator Paul?

**Senator Paul:** Thank you. I will oppose Senate Bill 615 to establish an interagency program in North Africa and West Africa. The bill states rather blandly and without proof that it is in our national security interest to be involved in Africa to the extent that we will be appropriating resources, we will be checking violent extremism. We will even be monitoring media. We have trouble even monitoring violent extremism and media in own country, much less in Africa. It also says we are going to enhance border security. It seems like we have got our own border problems we might want to pay attention to before we decide that we are going to take care of the border problems in Africa.

I think it is an open-ended question, though, whether or not this involvement and this degree of involvement in Africa is in our national security interest. I think this is an unproven assertion. I think the burden should be, on those who want to get more involved in Africa, to prove, one, that it works -- our involvement in the past -- and, two, that the violent extremists there are a threat to our U.S. national security. Others might argue that our involvement in Africa actually becomes a tripwire to expanding war and to expanding involvement in these areas.

The concern I have about this bill is that we presume that we have solutions to a complex, interrelated series of regional conflicts and long-held rivalries, some of which go back decades and longer. With this bill, we are formally committing to solve these complicated problems in North and West Africa, but have not really demonstrated that we know the answers or understand the nature of what is happening there. While there are Boko Haram, and ISIS sympathizers, and splinter fighter groups who pose regional threats, you also have disputes over land and water. You have farmers and livestock herders clashing. Two years ago, we lost four soldiers in Niger who were chasing a goat herder. Was that a vital interest in Niger that sent these brave

young men to their deaths? Should anybody ask these questions, why we were chasing this goat herder? Was this goat herder a threat to our national security?

You have transitional governments that come and go. You have pockets of ungoverned territories surrounded by more stable territory. You have armed counterterrorism groups acting in self-defense. Can we presume to know who the good guys are and who the bad guys are in these religious disputes and territorial disputes? The French have been there. The Europeans have been there. Now we are there.

The complicated warfare -- the complicated clan warfare of Somalia is often the norm in Africa. In Somalia, you have Al-Shabaab, but you also have factions like Puntland, Jubaland, the Galmudug, The Popular Resistance Movement, and the transitional Federal government that control different parts of the country, assert different levels of autonomy, but also come from overlapping tribes, clans, and sub-clans, such as Hawiye, Rahanweyn, Habar Gidir. Some of the factions consist of only one tribe, and other factions are made up of many tribes and clans. Can we really presume to know who is best to rule Somalia and that we have the answers for Somalia? You would think after the



disaster that was Mogadishu, the United States would have learned its lesson there, too, but, no, we are still there with U.S. soldiers 20 years later.

This bill does not specifically apply to Somalia, but it is the same sort of story throughout Africa -- messy wars, messy clan warfare, messy tribes -- where I do not know that we can really presume to know what is best. I think we are kidding ourselves that the United States presumes to know which faction supports the ideals of a western republic. To reduce these complicated histories in the region to a matter of eliminating terrorism oversimplifies the nature of the problems there, but it also obscures the fact that many of these groups pose no immediate threat to Americans here at home.

We have a significant military presence in Africa. A recent report says we have 6,000 troops in Africa. No one has given an authorization for the use of force, and I do appreciate that an amendment I offered will be included in this to make clear that this bill does not authorize the use of force. However, there are a whole lot of references to their military, our military, and support, and you can see how it quickly morphs into any Administration that wants to use military force will point to this as support for whatever they choose to do.

I think we need to go further in trying to not eliminate or dumb this down to two solutions: that we have to fight everywhere or otherwise terrorists will overrun us. I think it is a false choice. It is a justification for perpetual war. It is precisely that mindset that keeps us bogged down in Afghanistan. I mean, this talks about, you know, making sure girls get an education and things like this, admirable qualities, but are we really going to send our soldiers into every country in the world to make sure that girls get an education? Is it feasible? Is it possible? Is it something we should be asking our soldiers to do? I think it is time that we understand that the idea that we can eradicate an ideology or pacify a populace full of discontent is foolhardy and naive at best. Thank you.

**The Chairman:** I thank the senator. I am glad he recognized that we included his amendment that makes it clear that nothing in this legislation is to be considered an authorization for the use of military force, and I know that you focused most of your comments in the context of potential military operations. That is not the purpose. The purpose of this is actually to create a framework and a partnership that avoids conflict. But let us be, you know, blunt. Seven thousand people were killed by terrorists in the Sahel last year alone. More than 2 million people have been internally displaced. Another 800,000 are refugees in

neighboring countries. It may seem a long, far place away, but the reality is, is that these types of challenges unabated will ultimately end up as real national interests and security questions for the United States.

So what Senator Risch and I have done, and this is building also on Congressman McCaul, which passed this legislation -- we passed this legislation in the last Congress -- are doing is to create a framework where, between our efforts on USAID, and diplomacy, and democracy, and governance issues, and health issues, that we can hopefully avoid the conflict so none of our sons and daughters have to go. I appreciate the Senator's real concern in that regard, and I would just simply say that this is -- I see the legislation as avoiding that possibility.

**Senator Paul:** Could I ask one quick question?

**The Chairman:** Sure.

**Senator Paul:** You know, in Morocco, they have had the dispute forever from the territory that is not Morocco, is Morocco. We have now recognized that as being part of Morocco. That is in North and West Africa. Are we going to, you know, presume to know the answers of their border disputes, you know, if we are going to be involved with borders disputes in that area?

**The Chairman:** I do not think that that is the purpose of the legislation, to be defining border disputes. The previous Administration, as you rightly recognize what is, in some minds, the disputed area in Morocco as part of the Kingdom of Morocco, and it made that decision. So my perspective is just simply that what we are trying to do is create a framework and a strategy that hopefully avoids what the gentleman is concerned about so that we do not have military operations. Senator Risch.

**Senator Risch:** Well, Mr. Chairman, first of all, Senator Paul, I think, states in very colorful language what the situation is in many parts of Africa, and it is difficult, to say the least. It certainly creates challenges that are stunning. The Moroccan Western Sahara issue certainly is a poster child for that, having gone on for as long as it has gone on, since independence. It is not the intent of this legislation to drag us into that particular dispute and for the many, many other disputes, tribal disputes, as the senator described.

Having said that, I think we all know with the size of the globe as it is today, which is shrinking dramatically, things that happen other places spill over quickly to involve us or our allies. The result is this legislation, which, as the chairman correctly states, is designed to set a framework to, as much as anything,

monitor very closely what is happening, and determine what our national security interests are, if any, in any of these disputes. So in that regard, I think it is a step forward in that direction. In addition to that, this is a part of the world where our allies are stepping up when they should. And in the Sahel, France has been notoriously active in that regard for a lot of colonial, long-term, historical reasons, and more power to them. I mean, I do not -- we certainly want to encourage them to continue to do that.

But in any event, I think this is a good piece of legislation that sets up a framework, and I would not subscribe to anything that would drag us into conflicts that we do not have any business being in. So with that, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Thank you. Is there -- excuse me. Is there any other member who wishes to address any of the resolutions on the agenda?

[No response.]

**The Chairman:** If not, I would ask that we now consider the 15 bills and resolutions on the agenda en bloc, as amended by the following noticed amendments: S. 615, as amended by the manager's amendment; S. 335; S. Resolution 22; S. Res. 37, as amended by the preamble and resolving clause

amendments; S. Res. 44; S. Res. 81; S. Res. 120, as amended by the manager's preamble amendment; S. Res 34; S. Res. 117, as amended by the substitute amendment and the manager's preamble amendment; S. Res. 35, as amended by the manager's preamble and manager's substitute amendments; S. Res. 36, as amended by the preamble and substitute amendments; S. Res. 99; S. Res. 97, as amended by the title amendment, the manager's preamble, and manager's resolving clause amendments; S. Res. 114; S. Res. 122, as amended by the manager's preamble amendment and manager's resolving clause amendment.

**Senator Risch:** Mr. Chairman?

**The Chairman:** Senator Risch.

**Senator Risch:** I am not objecting, but I would request that -- I have some requests from members as far as being able to get on the record as a no vote on individual items on that.

**The Chairman:** And we will observe those, yes.

**Senator Risch:** Thank you.

**The Chairman:** Is there a motion to move it en bloc?

**Senator Kaine:** So move.

**The Chairman:** So moved by Senator Kaine. Is there a second?

**Senator Coons:** Second.

**The Chairman:** Moved by Senator Coons.

All those in favor will say aye.

(A chorus of ayes.)

**The Chairman:** All those opposed will say nay.

(No response.)

**The Chairman:** The ayes have it and --

**Senator Paul:** -- 615.

**The Chairman:** And we will have -- I am sorry --

**Senator Paul:** Will you record me as a "no" on 615?

**The Chairman:** Yes, Senator Paul will be recorded as a "no" on S. Res.  
615.

**Senator Risch:** Mr. Chairman, Senator Rounds has requested to be  
recorded as voting "no" on Senate Res. 97, please.

**The Chairman:** Senator Rounds will so be recorded. Is there any other  
requests? Senator Barrasso?

**Senator Barrasso:** Mr. Chairman, please to be recorded as a "no" on S. 335,  
Tropical Forest and Coral Reef.

**The Chairman:** Senator Barrasso will be so recorded. Is there any other requests?

[No response.]

**The Chairman:** If not --

**Senator Paul:** Can you record me as a "no" on 335 as well?

**The Chairman:** And Senator Paul will also be a "no" on 335.

With that, I believe that our business for the business meeting is finished.

With the thanks of the chair, this meeting is adjourned, and we will then move towards the hearing on democracy in Latin America.

**[Whereupon, at 10:01 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]**